

ENTRAP



Viola Grace

Aster Hathaway has a talent for tracking, and being tracked. With a link to her favourite Relay bound by blood, she can always be found. Aster is on assignment to find an abduction arena and rescue the Alliance personnel within. By using herself as bait she only needs to survive the attentions of two tiger shifters in rut. What could possibly go wrong?

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ENTRAP
A TERRAN TIMES NOVELLA

BY

VIOLA GRACE

CHAPTER ONE

Aster Hathaway was getting frustrated. All attempts to deal with the headman of the village were being met by delaying tactics. *What is he waiting for?*

"So, as you see, the sanitary conditions can stand to be improved."

He was blathering on and leading her further from her shuttle. Her nerves were vibrating on alert, something was about to happen and she had to let it. The raiders were getting better at hiding the stolen personnel and this was the only way to get a tracker inside. Her cover as a member of the negotiation-and-assistance team was boring, but she had to maintain it to make herself a tempting target.

"Yes, I can see that, but you have not mentioned what you would like the Alliance to do for you? This village seems remote, even for a low-tech world, your people are nervous about something and there are no children. Why am I here?"

Headman Masi paled and in an instant, he struck out at her. She let herself be dropped and moaned in a heap. The sudden rush of feet made her flinch, but she kept as still as possible as hands raised her to her feet.

Phase one of the sting is complete. Tracking enabled.

From across the star system, a voice acknowledged. *Message received, keep yourself alive, Aster.*

Will try. She cut communication as masculine hands on either side of her held her arms and dragged her along, her boots leaving trails in the sand. When the sand turned to metal, she concentrated on her breathing. She was being transported and it wasn't an atmospheric craft that she was on. There was spaceflight in her future.

"Did you run the scans, Masi?" The voice was low, harsh and businesslike.

"I did, Lord Thura. She is exactly what you asked for. She is different from the others though, smarter. She knew that our village was not correct. Watch her."

Aster was being strapped into a cold capsule. She fought when they put the monitors on her, knowing that the electronics would register her as awake. Her eyes opened in time to see a selection of Nordians. Their heavily scaled skin gleamed dark green in the light, the yellow of their eyes examined every inch of her and one of their

number strapped her down.

"What is the fuss about these creatures?"

The face that belonged to the voice of Lord Thura spoke with a disdainful sneer in her direction, "They can mate with a wide variety of warm-blooded species. Sometimes without any alteration to their physiology. It doesn't matter. Ready for take off."

The cold pod snapped shut and Aster was left in the dark, the chill spilled over her and everything went dark.

Her mind woke an instant before her body did, struggling to fight its way out of the sleep. Her heart did not want to pick up the pace.

"Come on, wake up." A hard hand slapped her face, claws grazing her cheek.

She tried to grab at the hand, but her arms were tied down. She glared at her captor. "What?"

He snorted and unstrapped her hands, hauling her unceremoniously from the pod. "We thought you were dead and we would have to find another."

She fought to keep her feet on the ground, but he was moving so quickly, she stumbled and went flat on the deck.

"Pathetic soft thing." He snarled, but lifted her by snaking one arm around her waist and pulling upward. She was held against his side like a sack

of potatoes.

Scents assailed her the moment that the shuttle door slid open. It was hot, there was sand, wood, fire and a heavy atmosphere that was thick with traces of jungle in it. Her mind reached out and touched those around her as lightly as she could. There were fourteen hundred people here, six hundred captured, eight hundred free. The rest of the area was populated by jungle creatures large and small. There was no city within her radius.

He hauled her through what seemed from her limited vantage point to be a market. The smells of animal and other waste mixed into the ground with fruits and meats. *Ick.*

Her carrier was approaching something noisy. People were cheering, others howling in fury and Lord Thura was getting closer to whatever it was.

He stopped in front of two sets of horribly knobby-clawed feet. "I have the present for the twins."

A harsh cackle came from one set of the feet's owners. A hand grabbed a fist full of her braids and hauled her head upward. "They might like this one. The last one was unsuitable. They discarded it after only a few days."

A snarling chicken had hold of her hair and she couldn't help but wish that she had a camera. She had never conceived of a race that looked more like a cartoon character than this one.

"This one should work a little better. It's fairly close to their physiology and their own government has been trying to get more of this species. It should work well." Lord Thura hoisted her upward and walked past the guards, taking her toward the tang of a medical facility. The floor went from dirt to metal to a slick tile as he proceeded.

"She's here for jabs and specs. She is for the Kalordans."

"Do you want her delivered, Lord Thura?"

"Not to me. Have her locked into their quarters." He dropped her unceremoniously on the floor and walked away.

Grunting, she rolled to her back and looked up at the medical staff. "Where am I?"

"That is not your concern. Get on the table." The doctor was wearing a Nyal-styled work suit. His red eyes gave away his race more clearly than anything else.

A male tech removed her boots and then strapped her legs down. Her wrists were fastened to the table next, leading her to think that it would be a quiet electronic scan. When he cut her suit off her, it was obvious that it would be more invasive.

"What are you going to do?"

The doctor was preparing some instruments and looked up, his eyes now an unremarkable brown, bleeding into flaring red when he looked

at her. "I am preparing an SRT for you as well as the standard battery of tests and inoculations."

She groaned. A sexual reflex test was far worse than being strapped naked to an exam table. Having a computer-induced orgasm was not her idea of public behaviour and there was an audience forming for this performance. A recorder swung into position to see what was going to happen.

"All activities are recorded and sold for the profit of the organizers."

"Like Thura?" The camera was one thing, but the audience gathering inside the door was skeeving her out.

"Lord Thura, yes." The doctor aligned the device and pressed a few switches.

The first touch of the mechanical tease was exploration. A few more light touches had her clit swelling lightly, eager for more. When the machine probed inside her, her thighs flexed in an effort to break the bonds. A light murmur broke through and she realized that some of her audience were betting on her responses.

Well, she may as well put on a show. She fought her responses, using the pain of her wrists and ankles to distract her. As a consequence, her body was pushed higher than it had ever gone when she or a lover had touched her.

Flames burned her flesh, her breasts ached,

sweat broke out and she heard herself moaning constantly as the digital stimulator pushed her to the edge. A harsh scream rent the air and she pushed herself off the table, the pulse deep inside her manifesting into a twisting, writhing expression of her orgasm.

The SRT kept her on the edge until she blacked out. When she came back to herself seconds later, applause filled the medical facility. The doctor's eyes were burning red now and the bit of Nyal physiology suddenly snapped into focus for her. He was aroused.

A flurry of jabs brought her inoculations up to date, the hypo spray hissed as each contact shot a series of serums into her body. She was too tired to do more than flinch.

"That brings her up to local standards. She should rest before she is brought to them though." The doctor was muttering under his breath.

One of the spectators separated himself from the waning crowd. "I know that you want to keep her with you after that display, doc, but it isn't going to happen. They are heading for the arena now and we promised them this lovely morsel if they are victorious again."

The doctor frowned. "They must care for her adapting physiology. Too much stress will knock her out again. That, added to Lord Thura saying that she wasn't coming out of cold sleep easily

makes her delicate for a few days. Their use of her may cause damage if they are not careful."

The man laughed. "I will warn them, but I can't guarantee that they will listen."

She was being looked over and it made her uncomfortable. There was calculation in their eyes and it seemed to revolve around her odds for survival.

"Give her something to wear."

The tech that strapped her down brought out a wrap. It was a simple piece of cloth, but it would cover her from breast to knees. She took it the instant she was loose.

Covered, she asked, "Why have I been taken?"

The doctor smiled. "We have two Kalorda fighters and they both entered rut at the same time. None of our local women were suitable, so we had to look for a proper match. That would be you."

The surly man didn't give him any time to continue talking. He latched a collar on her, snapped on a leash and tugged her out of the medical area. He was not inclined to talk, so she looked around the arena village. The few women that she saw were kept close to the men who held their leashes. Some of the women didn't seem upset, but there were enough dejected faces to fill her with a simmering anger.

Aster was pissed and being tied to a man who

was yanking her along wasn't helping her mood. There were a few men in the crowd also wearing collars, wandering freely, some with women, most without. They seemed resigned to their presence on this world, a rather sad state of affairs. It just made her angrier.

Heads started to turn as she was led off the public pathways and into the fighter quarters.

"Welcome to your new home or at least until your men lose three bouts. After that, you will be up for anyone to take." Her handler tugged her along with a snort.

The fighter quarters were tidy for the most part. Some doors were unlocked and others bore security marks all over them. A few even had guards posted outside.

Aster was hauled to one of the guarded rooms. Her handler led her to the wall and attached her to it via manacles and cuffs set into the stone.

"The boys are out fighting, we will have them returned to you as soon as they are finished." He chuckled. "I hope for your sake that they shift before they take you."

She didn't try to lunge for him. She simply waited until he left and started exploring with her gaze. The trackers would be on her trail already. She had left a blazing path through the stars, her mind still linked to one of the relays when they put her to sleep. It would only take days to launch

a rescue, so she only had to hold on until then.

There were two beds, a bathroom, an occasional table between the beds and a small rug. It was sparse but comfortable.

Her limbs ached from the discomfort of being pressed against the cold stone, but she forgot all of it when the door opened and two guards with exposed weapons prodded two large white tigers into the room.

She suddenly remembered what she was dealing with. "Oh hell. Kalordans. Damn it. Nice kitties."

CHAPTER TWO

Blood spattered the white and black hides of the beasts. They walked up to her and started sniffing her from ankles to neck.

When one of them placed a paw on the wall next to her head and licked her neck, she shuddered. The wild scent of beast was overlaid on a male musk that shook her. When the other beast mimicked his companion, she writhed as they combined to create a perfect, seductive scent.

That was fast. The dry voice in her mind was not her own.

What was fast?

You falling for the Kalordans. You know what your reaction to them means, don't you?

No, what?

You are screwed. Laughter faded from her mind and she scowled at the animals who were licking her.

Tal's sense of humour was suspect at the best of times, but her position as relay was giving them

an opportunity that the Alliance never had before. Aster and Natalia were the only blood relations that the Alliance had taken as Volunteers from Terra. Their lifelong connection gave them an undetectable link and made them a horribly effective team.

Aster shivered as one of the tigers used his teeth to tug away the wrap she was wearing, bringing her mind back to the matter at hand. The air was warm, but their noses were cold.

"You know, guys, this would not be nearly as creepy if you were bipedal."

The large cats communicated silently, tails lashing. One shifted into a man who dwarfed her as he moved to stand in front of her. "We apologize. You smell...wonderful." He bent his head and sniffed her neck and shoulders before he straightened.

Dark blond hair slithered over his shoulders, hiding the piercing blue of his eyes. She took in the strong jaw line with a long, thin scar marking the left side, the wide flare of a nose and arched brows shades darker than his hair. She deliberately did not let her gaze dip below the wide, muscled expanse of his chest.

"What are your names?"

He tilted his head curiously. "You are very calm for a captured woman strapped to a wall."

"I am in shock. Will probably wake screaming

tomorrow. Your names?" The other tiger had resumed sniffing her, but was now localizing his concentration between her thighs. The rough purr that started tested her concentration. The vibrations were stroking flesh still sensitive from the SRT.

The man laughed, "I am Vhol Drkar. My companion is Rassiv Mordn. They promised us a woman similar to the one that was recently brought to our home world, but I never thought they would capture a Terran. For that I am sorry."

The purring was heavier now, the heavy throbbing was bringing hot, slick moisture to her thighs. She squirmed, her hands clenching and thighs trembling as she tried to close her legs despite the cuffs. "Why is he doing that?"

Vhol scented the air and grinned. "I believe the answer would be obvious. He wants you, but if you are not aroused when we take you, injury might result. For a Kalordan trapped in rut, this is as much foreplay as you can expect."

"Why hasn't he shifted forms?" The cat was scraping the insides of her thighs with his tongue. The rough texture was a sensation she had never imagined before.

"He will not try and mate with you in that shape. Once he shifts, his urges will take over—even I won't be able to keep him from you."

"Why are you so calm?"

"I lessened my tension before our fight. I won't be eager as he is for another ten minutes or so."

She tugged at the bindings as the cat started working on her breasts, "Is there a reason for me still being stuck to the wall?"

"It is easier for us if you are not fighting." Vhol trailed his fingers down her arm, across her shoulder and up to the twisted mass of her hair. His fingers were darker than the light mocha of her own skin by several shades. The contrast was startling.

"I have no intention of fighting. I am much more the wait-and-see kind of woman." The rough touch of the tongue on the underside of her breasts brought her up on her toes. She gritted her teeth in her efforts to carry on the conversation. "I am not suited to the jungle here. I would be dead in short order if I tried to escape. I am not so foolish."

Vhol gave her a searching look, "No, you are not. Amazing. The other women they have brought us were either panicking at the sight of our feline forms or writhing mindlessly at our scent. Yet, here you are carrying on a conversation. Yes, you are distracted, but you are making sense."

Uh-oh. He knew she was not the average-kidnapping victim. Meeting his gaze, she breathed a little easier, as long as they satisfied themselves,

they would leave her be. She could tell.

Rassiv's massive head returned to the joint of her thighs, the long tongue parting her folds and lapping at her juices. The rough scrape of his tongue on her clit shook her body in a keening sharp orgasm, leaving her limp in the embrace of the metal cuffs. The cat in front of her was suddenly a man and a flick of his thumb opened the manacles that held her.

She caught a glimpse of dark hair, sensual lips and eyes a slightly darker shade than Vhol's before she was taken to one of the beds and placed into a kneeling position. Juice was flowing from her with every touch of his fingers against the folds he was parting and exploring. Two and then three fingers entered her in a hard rhythm before they withdrew and hands gripped her hips.

The prod and slide of his cock sent her mind into a spin. One hand smoothed down her spine in an endless, soothing repetition that moved her to his beat.

Aster concentrated, pressing her fingers into the bedding as she rocked back against Rassiv, the slow stroke of his erection within her stretching, pressing and making her body his to claim. He altered his thrusts, leaning and shifting until the flared head of his cock rubbed against her g-spot with every slide into her and again on the backstroke.

A low moan started to spill out of her in an endless wave and the enticing musk of her partner filled her lungs and sent her over into a gasping shriek of release, falling endlessly into the fire of the nerves in her channel. She heard him groan and he tightened his grip on her hips, pulling her to him with a hard smack of flesh on flesh. His fingers spasmed as a grunt broke from his throat.

The moment that his orgasm finished, his weight came down on her spine, bearing her into the bedding. He was breathing heavily, his sweat slicked her back as he breathed in the scent of their coupling.

Aster simply relaxed, letting the fluttering caress of her body around his member continue without tensing to stop it. She could feel a responding jerk inside her and sighed lightly, her body sated.

Rassiv was nuzzling at her neck under her collar.

She leaned into him, swallowing a few times before speaking, "Nice to meet you, Rassiv."

He pulled away from her for a moment before he let out a laugh. "Nice to meet you as well, beauty. What is your name?"

"Aster."

"Pleased to meet you, Aster." The note in his voice started a bloom of warmth in her cheeks.

The trail of kisses and licks down her spine

made her shiver with the chill of drying sweat on her body, even though it was warm in the room.

When his sated cock slipped free of her body, she almost moaned at the loss of heat inside her. His body temperature could double as a furnace.

"Sorry, beauty, but if Vhol has to wait much longer, he will bite his way through his mattress."

Limp, she turned her head to look across at the other bed where the other Kalordan was waiting for her attentions, his dick sticking out like an iron spike.

"Come to me, beauty." The husky tone belied the blazing hunger in his eyes. If she didn't come to him, he would come and get her.

Rassiv helped her sit up, held her as she stood until she steadied. The air in the room was thick with the pheromones that the men were putting out. Vhol held his hand out and pulled her to him as he sat on the edge of his bed.

"Back up and lean against the wall." Her husky voice made her blush, but she waited until he had done as she said before moving to straddle him.

Rassiv's body had left hers feeling aching and empty, she filled herself as quickly as she could, making Vhol arch up and gasp as she slid him in to the hilt. Her knees were on the bedding and she placed her arms on his shoulders, then she started to move.

The slide and drag of his glans inside her made

her bite her lip, but she was far from an orgasm. Vhol sat up and held her hips for a moment before sliding his hands up her back, dragging his nails down in a slow motion. The pricking pain made her arch her back and the thrust of her breasts toward him was the invitation he was waiting for.

Sharp teeth, a rough tongue, lips tugged at her flesh, each drag of suction seeming to be tugging at her clit from within. She ground her hips on the down stroke and slammed against him.

He continued tonguing and gently clawing her until she came apart in his arms. At that moment, he bit down on her shoulder, sinking sharp teeth into her as he growled his own release.

Gasping, she stayed astride him while pulses inside her and the teeth still in her shoulder told her of his continuing reaction.

When he released her and licked at the small wounds he had left, she shuddered. "Come on, beauty. As much as I love our scent on you, we all need a shower. We still wear the blood of the arena."

He lifted her as he stood, swayed for a moment and walked with him still inside her to the bathroom. Rassiv came with them, his erection vividly alive and interested.

The lav had the necessary accoutrements of a sink and toilet-style device, but the shower was utilitarian in the extreme. They simply walked

over a ridged tile shelf and they were in the half of the chamber that was the shower. Vhol let her slide from him, his semi-erect cock leaving her reluctantly.

She was looking at Rassiv's face. It didn't resemble Vhol's at all. "Are you two related?"

They shook their heads. Vhol answered, "No. We have been friends since childhood and left our colony to try to find a mate. We were trapped and brought here while working for a foreign government."

She blinked. They didn't look like the ambassador type. "What were you doing?"

"It doesn't matter now. It was months ago and worlds away." Rassiv turned the water on and she was soon standing between two naked men who had enough blood across their backs to turn the water pink.

"Are you injured?" She hadn't seen their backs when they were bipedal—the tigers hadn't seemed hurt though.

Vhol laughed. "Not us. Our opponents. Thura spoke to us before the battle and told us what our prize would be. It wasn't a very long fight."

Hands touched her back and she jumped. Rassiv was gently soaping her spine and buttocks.

"Sorry. Didn't mean to startle you, but Vhol left a few scratches that should be cleaned."

Vhol blushed. "I do apologize. It has been a

while since I have had a willing woman.”

Rassiv chuckled. “Don’t let his calm demeanour fool you. He is in the same condition that I am. He just masturbates more than I do.”

She fought a giggle that rolled to a halt as Vhol cupped her breasts with soapy hands. “Thankfully, she is here now, so that won’t be necessary.”

Her gulp of trepidation was audible even with the water coursing down on them. Her itinerary had been set.

CHAPTER THREE

Rassiv stopped Vhol before he tried to do more than help her with her hygiene. “Not on unsound footing, Vhol. She doesn’t need a concussion and you don’t need an injury. We fight in two days.”

“Fine, no sex in the shower. I get to have her first once we return to the beds then.”

“Whoa. Wait a second. I appreciate the biological imperative at work here, but I am not designed for non-stop sex. I need some recovery time in between or the friction will inflame me until you can’t even get inside.” Aster tried to appeal to their practicality. It was the wrong tactic.

“You were very tight.” Vhol’s eyes were glowing and Rassiv moved close to her, his erection a heated bar against her spine.

Rassiv ran his hand down her back to her buttocks, sliding his fingers through the part of her ass, moving toward her wet slit.

Aster flinched as he caressed her rosebud and

she lifted her ass to his touch. He paused and repeated the touch. Her body eased itself toward his fingers ever so slightly, but he was watching every move.

She knew that her slight motion had caught possibilities in his mind the second that he pressed into her with two fingertips. Vhol was watching, but couldn't see what was going on.

Rassiv enjoyed his discovery as he slid two fingers in past the knuckle and she gripped him tightly. "Aster?"

She was gritting her teeth. He was going to ask and she wasn't going to lie. Frankly, the images that were forming in her mind were too hot to ignore. "Yes, Rassiv?"

"Am I correct in assuming that you have taken a lover here?"

"Yes, Rassiv. It was a while ago."

"And you enjoyed it."

"At the time, yes." She leaned into Vhol with her eyes shut. Rassiv's soft exploration of her ass was driving her mad. He slowly removed his fingers and her knees buckled slightly at the loss of sensation.

The men shared a look that clearly meant they were going to discuss her the moment she was out of the room.

She removed the last traces of semen snaking down her inner thigh and rinsed her hair. The

twisted-braid arrangement made it easier to manage her hair in the variety of climates she visited. It also kept her springy locks under control.

In the sudden silence, she left the shower, snagging a drying cloth on her way out. She wrapped it around her and left them alone.

With morbid curiosity, she approached the wall where she had been shackled. There was a seam in the wall next to her and when she pressed on it, the seam opened to expose a panel full of objects that she had seen back on Earth in some form or another, but here seemed totally out of place. Sex toys, whips, clips, clamps, chains, lube, there was no limit to the amount of items exposed as the panel covered half of one wall.

Idly, she lifted the sarong that she had been given in medical and folded it neatly. Dizziness assailed her suddenly and she fell to her knees.

“Aster, what is wrong?” Vhol was at her side.

“They couldn’t wake me when they opened the cold pod. The physician was trying to get them to give me a day to recover. I think I am just a little exhausted.”

He snorted, then sighed. “A little exhausted is right. They haven’t fed you either, have they?”

She shook her head.

Rassiv was watching them, “Put her on my bed, so she can sleep.”

"Why your bed? Why not mine?"

The world was spinning. "Move the table and put your mattresses on the floor. I will rest on both of them."

They looked as if they wanted to argue, but her pale colour convinced them to move.

She removed the towel and crawled into the centre of the mattresses, she pointed in front of her, "Rassiv, here." She pointed behind her, "Vhol, here."

Blinking, they took up positions around her, heating her chilled skin with their bodies. Once they caught on, she found herself between two tigers and both purred her into oblivion.

Hands were lifting her, supporting her and a cup of water was pressed to her lips. "Come on, Aster, drink."

Vhol's voice was behind her and as she cracked open her lids, Rassiv's face came into focus. She opened her mouth and drank. The wave of cold water spread in her mouth to splash in her stomach.

"That's it, beauty. Wake up and have something to eat. The doctor just came in and gave you a stimulant to wake you, but you are in a dangerous condition."

Looking around the room, Aster was confused. It was not the same room she had fallen asleep in.

"Where are we?"

They looked at each other over her head. "We have been moved to an accommodation with a larger bed."

She rubbed at her head. "How long was I out?"

"Over twelve hours. We got worried enough to summon the physician." Vhol's hands stroked her sides slowly as if measuring her breathing.

"When did he give me the shot?"

"Five minutes ago. You were slowly fighting your way to consciousness, so he left before you could be caused any more distress."

The room they were in was not just larger with a larger bed. There was an entertainment console as well as a food dispenser. "These are very nice quarters indeed. What spurred the change? It can't just have been for our comfort."

They looked at each other again. "It was the vid of your SRT. Sales went wild and these rooms are thanks from Thura."

A blush started under her skin at Vhol's words. "Did you see it?"

"No, but we have been given a copy to our new unit gratis." There was a smile in his voice. "We look forward to watching it when you are a little stronger."

Rassiv winked at her and went to the food dispenser, keying in a selection and waiting for the delivery. He was wearing a short wrap skirt in

a deep grey that covered him to mid thigh. The collar that she had barely noticed the day before was standing out against his flesh now that she could see all of him at once.

Squirming, she turned in Vhol's embrace and looked closely at his collar. It was segmented for expansion. That explained how he could be both a man and a tiger while wearing it.

"What are you looking at, Aster?"

Reclining with him at her back, as she turned over, she was draped across him. His arousal accentuated swiftly, kicking the velvety steel of him against her belly.

"Um. I was looking at your collar. I noticed Rassiv's and wanted a closer look at one." She eased away from him carefully.

Rassiv cleared his throat and jerked his head into the seating area near the entertainment screen. "Dinner is served, Aster. Vhol, playtime is later."

The reversal of their roles made her smile slightly as she crawled free of the seven-foot expanse of the bed and waddled over to the table that was set with a variety of snacks.

"Aster, here." Rassiv held out a fresh wrap for her.

Smiling gratefully, she wrapped her body with the soft fabric and sighed as the warmth and snugness comforted her. She knelt next to the table

and reached for a chunk of fruit. The scent relaxed her and the explosion of flavours on her tongue almost made her moan.

She reached for another one of the peach-strawberry-kiwi fruits and looked up at an amused pair of shifters. "Thank you. Will you join me?"

Vhol had put his own wrap on, but its distension showed that it had been an awkward process. He nodded, "We will. It has been a while since they fed us in beast form."

Instead of them taking the couch as she had intended when she took the floor, they sat to either side of her. "Really? So...oh. Raw meat."

"More or less. Not nearly as pleasant as this." Rassiv took a small sandwich and he popped it into his mouth, groaning in delight.

Vhol wasn't even speaking, merely using his right hand alone to select tidbits to destroy in less than two bites.

Since they were digging in, Aster reached out and brought some sushi-style snacks closer and enjoyed herself. While they were hitting the protein, she was concentrating on food that would be easily digested. At this point, she hadn't eaten in at least a day of consciousness and probably a week of cold sleep. Best to ease carefully into food again.

Halfway through the destruction of the meal,

Rassiv stood and crossed to the bathroom bringing back damp cloths for them to wipe their hands. Looking around, Aster found the cup that they had been giving her water with and stood to go get it.

"Where are you going?" Vhol looked as if he would join her.

"To get some more water."

"Ah. There is a pitcher on the side table next to the bed."

She found it and filled the cup, returning to the rapidly dwindling food selection. Drinking deeply, she swallowed heavily and returned to dinner.

A few more pieces of fruit and she was done. Any more and she would be uncomfortably full and that way lay vomiting. Not a fun way to spend an evening.

Wait, how did I know it was evening? There were no windows. She looked up and there was the answer, a huge skylight displaying the rising moons.

Are you seeing this?

I am. Coordinates are set. Assistance is on the way and I am not engaging in any more peeking. The last time almost singed my eyebrows. Natalia laughed and faded out of Aster's mind.

"Who are you talking to?" Rassiv gave her a knowing look.

"My cousin." She shrugged. "I always think of her when I get in over my head."

"You are close?"

"We were. I have not seen her in years. Not since I left the Earth for a life in the stars." It was true. They just kept in touch mentally. They had even been in separate basic-training courses. As a relay, Tal was suspended in liquid with her mind being used for data transmission and relays. Even when visiting her outpost, Aster had not been allowed to look her in the eye.

She cleaned her hands carefully and offered the water to first Rassiv, then Vhol. Neither of them took it.

"What is in the water?"

They blushed. "The doctor mentioned that he wanted to keep you in a responsive state of mind. He drugged the water."

Fury ripped through her and she jumped to her feet. "With what?" The shriek echoed off the walls.

"Enjel water of love. You have about ten minutes before your body's heat becomes unbearable." Vhol looked guilty.

Rassiv had flickers of remorse running over his features, but a sense of anticipation as well.

"Come on, I just ate. Shouldn't I wait an hour or something?" Aster felt tremors running through her, a slow pulse between her thighs.

"We can wait as long as you can, but it will

happen. The doctor ensured it." Vhol sighed and started cleaning up the empty dishes.

Snarling, Aster paced furiously. She was trying to turn the pounding in her blood to anger, but lust was overwhelming. She slammed one fist into the wall and when it popped open to expose another toy collection, she screamed.

Rassiv was seated on the edge of the couch, watching her carefully. Vhol collected a set of glasses and a pitcher that he poured liquid from. He offered a glass to Rassiv and then to Aster.

"It is just juice, Aster. Nothing else in it."

He approached her slowly, but she was backing into a corner. Her body was sending signals that her mind was fighting, a battle that it was slowly losing.

She whimpered as he continued to advance and she fought to keep from throwing herself on him. She lost that battle with a scream and a lunge.

CHAPTER FOUR

The cup of juice went flying when she tackled Rassiv. She kissed him, tracing his lips with her own before thrusting her tongue inside to taste him. He tasted of male and wilderness.

As she ran her hands down his chest, his pheromones started to pour into the air. He smelled good, but it was incomplete. Behind her, Vhol ran his hands down her spine, caressing her through the cloth. He pressed against her back, his cock prodding at her buttocks as Rassiv's was at the juncture of her thighs.

She leaned on one hand and used her free arm to lift her skirt to give them access. Her slit was dripping moisture and she smelled her own heat in the air. Vhol's scent met with Rassiv's and suddenly she knew that they were the two halves to her whole. She needed both of them, together, to feel the intensity that was racing through her mind and body.

The slick pouring of oil between her ass cheeks

had her flinching at the thought of what was to come, but when Vhol pressed against her, she only had one thing to say. "Wait. Rassiv has to be inside me first or this won't work."

Rassiv's intense blue eyes widened, but he lifted his wrap to expose his dripping, eager cock to her. He was almost as wet as she was.

She mounted him quickly, sliding and rocking on him until he was fully seated and then she leaned forward, presenting her other opening to Vhol.

He was not slow in taking up the invitation.

She groaned as he worked his way past the tight resistance of her rosebud and when he slid into her and then out again, she lost herself to the spiralling heat.

Two men inside her, their cocks rubbing her from the inside out, stroking slowly and then faster into her as she hung on to Rassiv for dear life. Their breath came faster, moans and groans peppered the air as they moved toward release...together.

Aster's orgasm hit her like an electric shock, sensations blazing across her nerve endings as her body clenched around theirs, pulling their release in her wake. They each bit a shoulder as they thrust and jetted into her, snarls coming out of their throats in a raw frenzy.

When the storm was over, Aster lay quietly,

draped over Rassiv with Vhol lightly licking sweat from her spine.

The flames in her body were quenched, but it wouldn't last forever. She would need more.

Vhol withdrew and her whole body flinched. "Don't move, beauty, I will be right back."

Rassiv held her tightly against him, cupping her hips with his wide palms. "This was wonderful, lovely, but next time, tackle me to the bed. The floor is hard."

She snorted and moved until he worked free of her. "If you had warned me that I had been dosed, we could have tangled in any place, any position. But since you waited until my self-control eroded...shut up." She gave him a quick peck on the lips and started to sit up, but he stopped her.

The warm cloth made her yelp. It soothed and cleaned her of the remains of their intimate exchange. The cool cloth that replaced it felt so good on her chafed flesh that she sighed happily.

Vhol laughed softly. "You mentioned being sore. The cool cloth helps?"

"It does."

"Glad I brought two then." Her feet flexed as he pressed the second cloth to her and the relief that it gave her was amazing.

With her limbs trembling, she left Rassiv and flopped onto the bed with a huge sigh. Every bone in her body ached from the unaccustomed

activity. "I am exhausted."

Vhol lay next to her scooting as close as he could while Rassiv took his turn in the lav and joined them on the bed when he re-entered the room. They each took a hand and caressed her fingers.

It was surreal, laying on the bed with her two shapeshifter bookends. Aster breathed deeply, enjoying the scent of the two men lying next to her and when the heat started building again, she cursed deeply and fluidly.

It was going to be a very long day.

"Okay, enough. Get near me again and I swear I will find a way to cut them off." Aster rolled her way across the bed until she was lying with her back against the wall. She was sore, exhausted and, most of all, sore. Vhol and Rassiv had dropped her off after their latest group shower.

They chuckled weakly. Rassiv smiled. "Don't worry, if you don't put out pheromones, we won't respond."

Aster groaned. "Easier said than done. I do think that the last bout burned off most of the water of love, but if we don't all have to get off at the same time, I am going to veto the threesome."

The two shifters looked at each other. "Fine with us. You just are more violently responsive to both of us, but we will restrain ourselves if you

will."

She squinted at them both. "Not funny."

Vhol was chuckling, "I thought it was. We need to get some rest anyway. Rassiv and I have a fight in the morning."

"You don't need to tell me twice. I will keep myself out of your hands all night." She yawned and snuggled around until she found the edge of the sheets and pillows. The bed was huge, but with three of them in it, it took on more modest dimensions.

"Oh, we don't want that. Come here, Aster." Rassiv hauled her close, sheet and all. He wrapped himself around her and with a lithe manoeuvre that stunned her, Vhol wrapped her from the other side. She was covered by male from head to toe.

She yawned, "Oh, this is comfortable."

"Shut up and go to sleep, Aster. You have had a long day." Rassiv tucked her head against his shoulder.

"Yup. And fortunately, the lengths are now flaccid. Night."

Chuckling gave way to deep purring and the sound relaxed Aster into a restful, dreamless sleep.

Warm fur was rubbing against her on all sides. Aster sat up and rubbed her eyes. Yup. There

were two blue-eyed tigers in bed with her. The skylight was pink, shedding morning light on them and the boys were awake and in feline form.

Aster winced when she looked down at the bruises that were left from the frenzy of the day before. Her entire body was flaring with aches and pains. "Excuse me, fellas, I have to stretch a little."

She moved out of the embrace of fang and claw, avoiding stepping on any tails as she went. Aster bent, stretched and flexed until her body was able to move without wincing. The tigers stretched with her, leaning and rolling as she did.

"Do you want something to eat?"

The rubbing heads and lashing tails were enough confirmation for her. She ordered food for herself and raw meat for them. They each ate their breakfasts in cheerful silence.

After she disposed of the dishes, Aster covered her body in the wrap dress and sat on the couch with two feline bookends. "So, what is on the agenda for today?"

The door whisked open without warning. "Come on, you are up in thirty minutes. Lord Thura wants the woman to come along as well."

The harsh features of the guards were not flattered by the morning light.

Aster got angry at the demand of her presence, but she stood quietly when a leash was clipped to her collar. Rassiv and Vhol snarled at the guards,

backing them up and freeing her leash.

"I will follow. You do not need the leash." Having the large cats remove the intestines of the Nordians would be amusing, but they were outnumbered in this area of the arena. It would be stupid to start a losing battle.

The guard looked as if he would argue, but he didn't make another move for the leather strap. As a group, they walked the halls and approached the roaring of a crowd. Aster opened her senses, there wasn't a crowd ahead of her, the noise was far louder than the amount of beings in the viewing area.

The blast of tropical heat almost made Aster faint as they entered the fighter area. Handlers monitored the fighters and the roar of the crowd approved a battle just around a corner.

"Lord Thura wants her on the dais." The guard lunged for her leash and a handler separated her from her men.

She followed calmly, a few looks back at Rassiv and Vhol pricked tears in her eyes. She hoped that they would win whatever battle they were forced into. Instead of hauling her into the stairwell, he pulled her into a room with other women and shoved her away from the door as he backed out. "She needs proper clothing."

Two women smiled and approached her. One was a Tival, her golden skin similar to Aster's

own. The other woman was an exhausted-looking bronze and blonde Azon, her nails blunted.

The Azon introduced herself. "I am Tella, this is Noor. We had better get you into what Lord Thura considers *proper attire*." She went to the wall and with a few taps on an open panel, withdrew a handful of clothing that made Aster shudder in anticipation.

"That doesn't look like much fabric." Aster eyed the green silk with suspicion.

Noor was stripping her efficiently. "It isn't. You are going to be on the dais and acting as a distraction for the fighters."

"Me? Why not you two?" It wasn't polite and when Tella looked at her with exhaustion in her face, Aster wished she could take it back.

"We will be there as well, but you are new and have to go under guard. We have been tamed, so we will appear on our own."

Aster wished she could tell them that a rescue was approaching, but no one could know. She was the only one on the planet, as far as she knew, that was impervious to mental invasion.

By the time she was dressed in the emerald silk, she knew that she would wince when she saw herself in the mirror. Noor pulled on a similar outfit in sapphire blue, Tella wore ruby red.

A light chain was the base of the costume. It anchored panels of silk that formed a modest skirt

as long as she didn't run or there were no sudden drafts. Her top was a single, wide ribbon that was attached to her skirt, looped over her neck, hooked into her collar and came down on the other side of her navel. She knew that quick movement was not recommended in this garb.

The only bonus to the costume was the matching slippers. Her feet welcomed the slight pinch on her toes as a fair exchange for the covering of her soles.

The door opened without warning and a Nordian-scaled face was framed in the opening. "Is she ready?"

"She is." Noor lifted the end of the leash and handed it to him.

He didn't waste a moment, but tugged her out and down another hall toward the arena. Lord Thura was seated on a dais at the far edge of the arena and instead of leading her around the fighting pit, her escort waited until the current fight had concluded. A vicious battle involving an acid-based creature and the winner, an Oesh sporting six legs and the physique of a feline centaur.

The shoes made sense as she was drawn through the arena to the catcalls of the crowd, through the blood and dust of the previous fighters. Aster held her composure while she was taken for a walk around the ring.

“Ladies and gentlemen, we present to you the new pet for your two favourite fighters, Rassiv and Vhol. Today, when they fight, they fight for their place in her bed. Or her place in their bed. That is right, gentle beings. She takes them both at once.”

Aster paled and almost passed out when the large vid screen above Lord Thura’s head showed a short clip from one of their matings the day before. The contrast of her paler skin against that of Rassiv with Vhol stroking her back from behind before he mounted her. The clip was ten seconds, but it was ten seconds too many.

Her skin heated when the howls started.

“For those of you wishing to purchase the full collection of their mating, you can buy it in five-minute increments.”

The announcer finished his spiel and Aster was led to the dais. She was pushed to the floor and she sat looking out at the arena. Rassiv and Vhol were seated in the entrance across from her. Their teeth were bared and tails were lashing. They were not pleased, but they were in a mood to fight.

Lord Thura leaned down and patted Aster on the head. “You are making me quite the profit, Terran. The recordings of your SRT were off the charts and the joinings that were recorded between you and the Kalordans have paid for the

capture expenses already. There are even bids for a night in your company from some of the other fighters.”

Bile rose in her throat at the thought of other men touching her.

CHAPTER FIVE

The fury that was bristling through Rassiv and Vhol helped them as the Kalordans took on the pack of four Hickom wolf shifters.

The slashing claws of the tigers faced off against the snapping jaws of the wolves for all to enjoy.

Aster got a little queasy as Rassiv's claws opened the ribs of one of the wolves. Blood spurted as flesh tore. The wolf was spun to one side of the arena floor and shifted back into bipedal form.

Boos and hisses struck as the shifter was removed from combat and the rules became clear as to what was required. If Rassiv or Vhol shifted to bipedal form, they would lose the match. It was why they had been returned to their quarters on four paws, covered in the loser's blood.

When two of the wolves jumped on Vhol's back and dug in with their teeth, Aster gasped, sitting up straight.

"Stay put, Terran. If they lose, we will find another set of playmates for you." Lord Thura laughed at his small joke.

The sound of the arena was now explained. Vid screens covered half the seating areas. It was all pay-per-view. The roar of the crowd was of several thousand voices, but only five hundred watchers were physically at the event.

Tella and Noor came up through a hatch in the floor. They took up a position on either side of her, arranging their skirts to frame their legs in an absentminded manner.

Tella whispered softly, "Don't worry. They are still in rut. They will not chance losing you."

The comfort was just what she needed. She sat with her fingers knotted in her lap and watched the bloody mess of snarling-and-fur-encrusted combat.

When Rassiv and Vhol approached the dais, all of the wolves were in human form. Lord Thura picked up her leash and nodded for her to attend her men.

The announcer put it succinctly, "They have successfully won the day, but can they possibly win tomorrow against six of the battle-hardened warriors of Tival? Return and find out."

She paused until Lord Thura unclipped her leash and then walked down the steps to her Kalordans, extending her hands to them to

identify herself through the coppery smell of blood.

The low purr that came from both throats reassured her as they walked the length of the arena and their guards joined them on the march back to their rooms.

Once inside the chamber, she did a quick analysis of the room until she found the first of nine cameras that were everywhere in the chamber, including the shower that Rassiv and Vhol were taking.

They looked at her face and concern flickered over their tired features. Vhol asked, "What is it?"

"Nine cameras in here. Nine. I don't care how horny I get, I am not going to let them get any more video of us." She crossed her arms and admired the deeply muscled backs that were being pelted with water.

"I believe we only have one choice left then." Rassiv nodded.

"Will you fill me in?"

They looked at each other and laughed, "Not until we are off camera."

Shower finished, they put on their short skirts and turned to her. "We need to go to the market place. What is our reasoning?"

She looked down and laughed. "New clothing for me?"

"I sort of like that look on you. Very direct."

She slapped Rassiv on the arm before she realized he was still sporting a large gash on his bicep. "Not funny and I am sorry. I didn't realize that he managed to bite your arm that deeply."

"We are lucky in that they usually bite off mouthfuls of fur. It cuts our injuries down tremendously." Vhol tucked her hand into the crook of his arm.

They opened the door, surprising the guards. Rassiv spoke, "We need to spend some time outside. Our little pet is upset by all the cameras. Nothing more will happen in there unless we can get her calmed down."

The guards laughed and formed an escort.

The next three hours were spent tasting street food and trying on new clothing. A long tunic of fine fabric, slit up both sides to mid-thigh, sashed tightly to her waist, was Aster's top pick. She also managed to get the guards to buy her a metal comb and three wired hairpins.

Together with the Kalordans, she laughed, smiled and when Rassiv came up to her and whispered, "Get on my back and hang on." She did it.

He shifted from man to tiger in an instant and bounded into the jungle with Vhol behind them.

Aster clung to his fur, holding tightly and doing what she could for the escape effort. She blocked the signal that their collars were putting

out. With his collar almost staring her in the face, she turned it until the locking mechanism was facing her and used the hairpins and the comb to set to work.

She used the comb as a jack to expose the electronics and the pins to press contacts inside the collar. It took her five times as long as it would have if they had been still, but soon, his collar fell to the ground behind them.

They paused to rest and she removed the collar from Vhol in a lot less time, throwing it down a ravine.

Her own collar posed a problem. It had leather components, but it would take a fine and steady hand to separate it at the seams. Swallowing, she said, "I would like each of you to slip a claw under my collar and when I say rip, slice it away."

Kneeling on the earthy loam of the jungle floor, she took a deep breath as they did as she asked. "One, two, three, rip!"

She stifled the scream as the nails dug into her skin as well as the collar, but two pieces of the hated thing did fall away. They also ended up in the ravine.

The chuffing of the tigers distracted her from the stinging pain, so she climbed onto Vhol's back and they were off through the jungle at a frightening speed. She focussed on the rocking motion of the beast beneath her. Her concentration

was in her hands, holding tightly to Vhol's ruff.

Where are you? The gathering is ready to move.

I am bolting through the jungle on the back of a tiger, Tal. You can have the raid without me.

How a gusty sigh managed to translate on the psychic plane always stunned Aster.

Aster, that is exceedingly bad form. We plan and we plan and you don't even show up for the party.

I know. Can you have someone drop a shuttle in our path or something?

No need, the Sector Guard has sent the Guardian Echo. I will tell them to keep an eye out for Kalorda bio signs.

Wonderful. Is there such a thing as cat sickness?

Laughter ran through their link and Tal signed off.

Aster's world was white and black, the fur of Vhol's hide was all she could see.

The thundering of paw beats finally ceased and she lost her grip on the fur that rapidly became skin. Vhol turned under her and she was astride him with the bright sun beating down on them.

The clearing that they had managed to find was lovely. Dappled shade let in dashes of sunlight, dancing across the sunlight-spattered waterfall that filled the centre of the open space.

The sight underneath her was prettier than her surroundings. Vhol was breathing heavily under her, the muscles of his torso rising and falling. She tried to dismount, but he caught her hair and

tugged her down to him. The kiss warmed her blood more than the oppressive heat of the jungle.

The taste of him, scent of him drove her wild, but there was something missing. She raised her head and looked for Rassiv. He was standing under the waterfall, rinsing off blood and sweat.

She stood and took Vhol's hand. They joined Rassiv under the pounding water. Aster leaned up and kissed him, with the icy water flowing around them. This was the other half of the scent and taste that drove her insane.

She pulled back and groaned. Stumbling out of the falls, her clothing wet and clinging to her, she sat on a rock and put her face in her hands.

They came to her and knelt in front of her feet. "What is it, Aster? What is wrong?" Hands touched her knees.

"It has to be both of you. That is what is wrong." Tears were rolling from her eyes. She looked from one to the next, seeing the confusion.

"We don't understand the problem."

"Your kind is monogamous?" Rassiv seemed to catch on.

She sniffled and nodded. "It seems right, but not right by what I have been taught my whole life. Isn't a woman on Kalorda marked as a whore if she can't pick a man and be unmoved by others?"

"Not anymore. It's a new regulation. If a

woman will be faithful to a companion set, they will be acknowledged as a formal union."

She inhaled hard, "What?"

"She will still be tested by other Kalordan males in the same manner as a paired woman, but if she passes, their union will be legal and binding." Rassiv sat on her left while Vhol took her right.

She wiped her eyes. "Tested how?"

Vhol caressed her cheek, removing her tears. "The men will try and work their way into your bed before the ceremony. If you resist and only allow us into your bed, you will be considered worthy."

Aster leaned into his hand, more happy with the simple touch than she could imagine. Rassiv wrapped one arm around her waist and they sat there in the spray of the waterfall.

She was forgetting something important.

Raid is underway. The Guardian Echo has you located. They will be there in a few minutes.

Oh, shit. I forgot.

The uproar of mental laughter made her flinch. "Rassiv, Vhol, I have something I need to tell you."

Vhol held her hand, "What is it, Aster?"

"An Alliance rescue raid is taking place at the arena and we are being tracked by a transport shuttle. You are going home." Tears started again.

"That is wonderful news." Rassiv stood and

started watching the sky. He needn't have strained his eyes. A blast of fire cleared a path and a large shuttlecraft settled in the burnout.

Vhol was looking into her eyes. "So soon?"

"Yes. Sorry. I am so sorry." She snuffled and gave in to the tears again. She didn't want their joining to be over, but her assignment was finished. She was done now, time for the next post.

"It will all turn out all right, beauty. Come now. Let's get airborne." Vhol cradled her as Rassiv took point, waiting for the door to open on the shuttle.

Two sets of drawstring pants flew out of the hatch as it opened. Grinning, her males got dressed.

The male who was scowling at their trio gestured for them to board the shuttle. Vhol and Rassiv bowed before entering. "Prince Alzor, nice to see you in one piece."

"Troublemakers." The word was said with affection as the other man helped Aster into the shuttle.

"Ah, you know each other?"

A voice from the front of the shuttle snorted, "Of course they do. The population is so small that all of these reprobates know each other."

Aster blinked. She knew that voice. "Maura?"

A rich chuckle reached her, "Hello, Aster."

“Why are you here?”

“Rescuing these studly representations of Kalordan masculinity.” The deep blue-black braids winked in the low light of the jungle. Maura turned and winked at Aster. “Take a seat, I will let Tal know you are safe and sound, if lacking in discerning judgement.”

Aster knew better than to take umbrage. She strapped in and turned to watch Rassiv and Vhol do the same. They whispered quietly to each other while Alzor took his place next to his wife for takeoff.

Aster felt alone, more than she had in a very long time. She swallowed the pain in her chest as the shuttle revved its engines for takeoff. It was time to leave this world and her fleeting attachment to the Kalordans behind.

CHAPTER SIX

No one spoke to her during the takeoff, but by the time they had left the shadow of the hulking Alliance warship, she didn't care. "Maura, where are we going? I thought I had to be handed over to medical the instant we were off the surface."

"We are heading to Kalorda. Our kidnapped feline friends back there have worried families on the home world." Maura sighed, "And Grandpa has probably gotten tired of babysitting by now."

"You have a baby?" That was news to Aster. She hadn't heard much about Maura since she had transferred into the Nyal sector.

"Yeah, a little boy, Tishan. He is with his Grandpa Nrodin right now." Maura shifted the shuttle's trajectory and accelerated toward a jump beacon.

They were in Nyal space. The Alliance didn't have the beacons. They relied on relay connections for the convergence points.

"Brace for jump." Alzor's hands were moving quickly over the control panels.

Maura closed her eyes and grabbed the helm controls tightly. Aster could see the outline of a crown of some sort on the pilot's head. That halo flashed brightly and Aster felt the tug of the jump as the Guardian Echo pulsed through two points in space at the same time. They arrived in front of a swirling cloud of gaseous debris and without a beat, Maura removed her halo and handed controls over to Alzor.

She unbuckled and came over to Aster, unfastening her harness and hauling her to her feet for a hug. "I am very glad to see you alive and in one piece."

Aster hugged her back. "You had doubts?"

"When the slavers get running, I err on the side of paranoid." Maura released her and took her hand, hauling her past Rassiv and Vhol and into the dining area.

"It will take Al half an hour to break through the vortex around Kalorda, so you and I can have some tea, or would you prefer coffee?"

Hope spilled into Aster, "You have coffee?"

"Sort of. Amy was willing to find some plants for me and Alzor and his family have been kind enough to assist me in growing an enclosure full of the stuff while I was pregnant. I couldn't drink it, but that gave me some time to work on the

greenhouse." Maura worked quickly, heating water and adding the grounds into a press-type coffee maker.

Aster smiled as her boys came sniffing after the scent. "What is that?"

Maura laughed, "It's coffee. Smells wonderful, tastes horrible. A treat from our home world via Kalorda."

She poured two small cups and eyed the new arrivals. "Would you like some?"

From the front of the ship came the warning cry, "Don't drink it! Whatever you do!"

Maura snorted and took a seat. "Don't listen to him. He just coughed his out his nose the first time he drank it."

Aster took a sip and nearly repeated Alzor's performance before she calmed and took another sip. Her eyes watered and she sighed happily.

Rassiv was concerned. "Are you all right, Aster? Your eyes are tearing up."

"I am fine. It tastes just like Kodiak back home." She swallowed heavily.

Maura laughed and got her a glass of water. "It takes some getting used to. The acidic nature is slowly being bred out of my plants, but it will take a while to get it just right."

"Any time I am in the vicinity, feel free to use me for taste tests."

Rassiv poured a tiny amount of coffee into

Aster's glass and sipped it carefully. His eyes watered and he fell to his knees.

"I told you not to drink it!" The singsong nature of Alzor's voice rubbed in the discomfort that Rassiv was in.

Aster laughed and knelt next to him, handing him the glass of water. "It takes getting used to. You need to be determined to like it. It is also usually better with sugar or milk."

He drank gratefully, swishing the water in his mouth before he swallowed. "How can you drink that?"

"It reminds me of home. Sometimes you would put up with anything for just that touch of home." Her voice was wistful and Vhol looked at her intensely.

"What is wrong, Aster?"

"I don't know when or where my next assignment will be. This little bit of home is all I have right now." She smiled weakly.

"You have us." Vhol walked around Rassiv and lifted her from the floor. "For ever and always, you have us."

"I don't think that is possible. I am an active tracker. A recon specialist. I need to stay busy to remain sane." She snuggled against Vhol's chest and was comforted the moment that Rassiv hugged her from the other side.

Maura whistled, low and admiring. "You

know, I knew about triads, but I haven't met one before. Don't worry about the Alliance, by the way. The Nyal are so desperate for their own version of the Sector Guard, they are letting almost anyone in. Alzor and me for example."

That little tidbit made it through the relief Aster was feeling at being surrounded by concerned affection. "Me, in the Sector Guard?"

Her voice was muffled by Vhol's chest, but Maura seemed to understand her. "Well, when you can leave any little ones you have at their grandparents' houses. The recon sense is a handy one. We were able to make a surgical strike and you folks were the last ones off the moon."

"I do try." She chuckled and Vhol tilted her chin up with the back of his hand. The kiss was consoling, sweet and it had her up on her toes looking for more.

She was just reaching up to grab Vhol's ears when Alzor's voice broke through her warm stupor. "Buckle up, we are aiming at re-entry."

Vhol kept kissing her but walked to the bench seats and sat down, holding her in his lap until the ship shuddered. With a quick manoeuvre, Vhol and Rassiv had her buckled in and aching for one of them to finish what Vhol had started.

She didn't notice the re-entry, her mind was whirling, trying to figure out ways to mount one of her companions while staying buckled in for

safety.

Her seat in the back of the shuttle did not allow her a look at Kalorda as they approached, but sunlight streamed in through the forward window the moment they levelled off.

Rassiv and Vhol lifted their heads to embrace the sunlight.

The landing was smooth, barely a bump betrayed their arrival. Her companions were unbuckled so fast, she hardly saw their hands move. Her harness was released before she could blink and then they were hauling her out into the Kalordan sunlight.

A crowd was gathered and cheered as the missing men were returned to them. Aster took in the standard of clothing quickly. The men wore dark leather or fabric pants and boots, the women wore dresses.

Vhol smiled as a man and woman approached them, "Aster, this is my father, Drkal, and my mother, Elorin."

Rassiv smiled at another couple who approached, "Aster, this is my father, Mordn, and my mother, Sova."

The two couples looked at each other and at their sons. Mordn asked, "You are a triad?"

The men answered together, "We are. No two of us are complete without the other."

Elorin looked Aster up and down, "And you,

Aster, do you take them both as equals?"

"Elorin, I have to. I cannot take one to me without the other near. It doesn't feel the same." She nodded formally to the assembled parents.

Sova gave her a calculating look. "What species are you?"

"Terran, the same as Maura."

That started a murmur of approval that she didn't quite understand.

A tall, serious man strode through the crowd. "Lady, be welcome on Kalorda. You are an honoured guest in my home until your wedding can be arranged."

A quick look at Alzor and she knew who this man was.

"King Nrodin, thank you for your hospitality, but I don't know if my government will allow me to remain here."

He laughed. "A relay requested authorization for your mating to two of my men four days ago. The confirmation came through this afternoon. If you want them and they want you, you are welcome to them, Lady."

Rassiv grabbed her before she could follow Nrodin. He kissed her hard. Vhol followed with a lip lock that sent her mind reeling. "Remember that you belong to us and us to you."

"Fine. How long until we can get hitched?"

"A week. We need to prepare our new home."

They bowed, laid a kiss in each of her palms and then moved away as Nrodin came back to claim her.

“Come on, Tishan is teething and if Maura gets there first, she will take away the bone that I gave him. She thinks it isn’t proper.” He snorted and led her through the crowd made up mostly of males.

A few interesting scents caught her nose, but none had the impact of her men. Her men. For a moment, she let the warmth of love float through her. Maura and Alzor were right behind them, but as they got closer to the large palace, Maura sped up, passing Nrodin in a full sprint.

He scowled as his son, “You know if she had to wear a skirt, she couldn’t move nearly that fast.”

Alzor laughed. “I enjoy watching her run. It is quite a lot of fun to catch her.” He was completely unperturbed by his father’s displeasure. “You are just upset because now that she is home, Tishan will be with us. Have you been feeding him sweets again?”

“No, but my housekeeper has. Do you think she will notice —”

“Nrodin! He is blue! Why is my son blue?” The decibel level was impressive, considering that she was two floors away.

The king looked at his son, “Hide me.”

Aster cracked up.

Alzor sighed. "You turned him blue?"

"I took him on the tour of the dye centre. He fell in." Nrodin told his son in hushed tones.

"You deal with one Terran, I will deal with the other." Alzor straightened his shoulders and forged into the palace.

Nrodin nodded. "Aster, I have arranged for your quarters to be near the family area. It should cut down on the number of men sneaking into your room. You are aware of the restrictions placed on your behaviour?"

"I am. No nooky with anyone outside my fiancées. Got it."

Nrodin smiled at the simplicity of her statement. "There are gowns in your room, we had to scramble as you are a little shorter than Maura and of different colouring. Select what you wish to keep and we will return the rest."

He led her through halls full of men and women attending their duties and when they arrived at a cloud of men around a door, she knew it was hers. She extended her mind out and counted three men hiding in her bedroom, two in her bath.

"Three men in the bedroom, two in the bath. Can you oust them before I try to get some rest or change my clothes?"

Nrodin grinned and moved to the door, he opened it quietly, shifted onto all fours and sent

out a roar so loud that it shook the walls. The men scrambled out, two in feline form wearing part of their clothing.

Nrodin resumed human form, put his clothes back on and gestured for her to take her rooms. "I will have someone call you for dinner. Feel free to relax until then."

Aster nodded and slipped into her room with a smile. The cloud of musk and pheromones in the hall made her vaguely nauseated. She wasn't going out there without some protection, in any form.

Her shower was quick. She didn't trust the men to not try and jump her when she was naked and wet. It was better to be safe than abducted while nude.

The dresses that had been assembled for her gave quite a cornucopia of choices. She tried on a white and light floral selection and found that it made her skin glow. It was tight in the bodice but flowed out from the knees in a mermaid style. She thought of Nrodin's comments about running in dresses and knew that this was one of his picks.

Underwear was not even an option. There was none to be had.

Vulnerable did not even begin to describe Aster's feelings at that moment. Bored and agitated, she looked around her room and eventually found a book on the shelves that she

could read. *A history of Kalorda.* It looked like fun.

So, you are settling in?

Yes, Tal. And you have been busy. Apparently, someone filed for my right to start life on Kalorda.

Wow. That someone must know how much you are really feeling for your new lovers.

Almost like that someone was snaking around in my mind.

Almost. I prefer the term concerned to snaking though.

Thank you.

Oh, I have a job offer from Guard Base Morganti. For you and me, actually.

In what capacity?

You and your men can be a recon team and you will finally have the muscle to back you up that you have always needed.

It sounds too good to be true.

Well, you will be on paid leave any time you get pregnant. If you get pregnant.

I am currently under six-month warranty with my shots. No chance of little paws sprouting this year.

Well, with all the practice the boys are giving you, the second that you are viable, you will probably be knocked up.

Hush, Tal. Don't jinx it.

Fine. Enjoy your evening. I wish I could attend your wedding, but even if I get decanted, I wouldn't be up and running for weeks.

You are getting out?

I am. I promise to visit the moment I am loose and on my own feet.

The hug that Natalia sent to her was warm and gave her more hope than anything that had occurred since Vhol and Rassiv had wrapped her in their bodies. That had been a good moment.

When her mind was quiet again, she returned to reading the origin of the Kalorda. The original genetic donors, the races that went into them. The history of a cloned species that grew and spread, then was hunted back to a small colony when their predation on local women grew too intent.

Even Maura's entry to the society had been recorded for posterity. Her insistence that the men who wished to share a woman should be allowed to was outlined and detailed.

A knock on the door sent Aster's senses to high alert. "Who is it?"

A rough laugh came through the door. "Alzor. No one else risks the wrath of Rassiv and Vhol. I am relatively safe. Maura would kill me and then you if there was a problem."

Smirking, Aster opened the door. "As if I would get in the way of a woman with a blue baby."

He was standing or leaning against the wall. "Come along. Rassiv and Vhol are going nuts without you. It isn't a pretty sight."

"I thought they were with their families." She

closed the door snugly behind her.

"They are. That is what is driving them nuts." Alzor extended his arm and she tucked her hand into the crook of his elbow.

Smiling, she walked in step with him. "I read a little about Maura's efforts to encourage the more open marriage practices."

Alzor grinned. "I am just lucky that I have never had that close a friend. I might have had to kill him. Your two have been the closest of companions since childhood. I am amazed that they never formed a romantic partnership, but they didn't and here you are."

The Kalordans were full of surprises if their prince could speak so casually of male-male relationships.

The dining hall was full. The atmosphere as well. Aster almost choked on the pheromones that were clogging the air. She moved quickly through the tables lined with benches and when Rassiv and Vhol stood, she buried her face in Vhol's neck. His clean scent cleared her head and she turned to Rassiv an instant later to complete the combination that would calm her down. She blinked up at them after her head was clear. "Hello."

They started to chuckle, then turned to glare at Nrodin. "See? We told you." Rassiv's voice was low, harsh.

King Nrodin opened his hands. "Fine. We will have the ceremony after dinner and then you may take her to your new home."

She looked at her men in confusion. "I thought it would take a week."

Rassiv whispered into her ear in tones so low she could feel them between her thighs. "A message was sent to our families that we were returning with a bride. Our parents banded together and the house was waiting for us this afternoon. It needs a little bit of finishing and furnishing, but it is liveable."

Maura was sitting on the other side of the king, her baby in her lap.

Aster stifled laughter. He was a beautiful shade of turquoise blue.

"Are you laughing at my grandson?" Nrodin was trying to make his voice ferocious.

Aster's grin grew, nothing could ruin her mood now. "Yes, and the look on your daughter-in-law's face. She isn't going to leave you alone with the little one for a very long time."

He scowled and drummed his fingers on the table. "You know, I could cancel your wedding."

Vhol and Rassiv tensed on either side of her. Aster was having none of the little power play. "You know, I could tell Maura about your threat and she could move her family to another area of the system."

He inclined his head, a small smile playing around his lips. "Touché, as Maura would say."

Aster inclined her head and under the table, she laid her hands on her men's thighs.

Each of them pressed his hand on top of hers while they waited for dinner to be served. Tonight was their wedding night.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Rassiv reluctantly freed her hand to let her eat, but often she would find a small tidbit of food in front of her lips that she hadn't tried before, held by one or the other. In thanks, she licked their fingers clean, sucking gently.

The audience of unattached males was snarling while she took Rassiv's fingers into her mouth one by one. Her lovers smiled at the frustration that was rippling through the crowd.

"You are enjoying this far too much." She picked up a piece of bread and ran it through the aromatic oil that was in a dish for that purpose. She shoved it into Rassiv's mouth and then did the same for Vhol with a second piece.

When they each put their oil-stained lips to her neck, she shivered in reaction. Her nipples pebbled and pushed against the tight fabric of her bodice. Vhol murmured against her skin, "You aren't enjoying this at all?"

His hand caressed her left thigh, approaching

the heat at the juncture of her thighs. The only thing stopping her from parting them for him was the fabric she was sitting in.

Aster took in a stuttering breath. "Maybe a little. Can we finish dinner?"

While her wild pulse spluttered and as she calmed, she glanced at their watchers. Glowing eyes were fixed on them as Rassiv and Vhol raised their heads from her neck. Lust, envy and lust were glaring at them.

Nrodin cleared his throat. "I pronounce you men and wife. Now get going before there is a riot."

They didn't need to be told twice. Rassiv swung her up and into his arms while Vhol guarded them from any interference. He opened doors, checked the other side and then watched Rassiv's back as they left the palace.

A skimmer was waiting, a young man seemingly watching for them. "The king told me you would be coming out soon. No one has stowed away."

Vhol clapped the young man on the shoulder. "Thank you, Havil."

Havil beamed in delight that Vhol knew who he was. "It was my pleasure." He bowed low and stepped aside so that they could enter the skimmer.

Vhol took the pilot's seat and Rassiv sat next to

him with Aster still in his arms. A few switches, the skimmer lifted off the ground and they were on their way. Where they were headed, Aster had no idea, but she was alone with her men again and that was a very good thing.

The night air was bracing, but with Rassiv's body under hers, she was comfortable.

It was a comfortable silence in the skimmer—anticipation and relief were the undertones. They travelled for half an hour over unoccupied areas until they arrived at a dwelling that stood out against the night sky when they landed.

"Where are we?" Aster sat up and tried to look around.

"Home." Vhol stood and took her from Rassiv and put her on her feet outside the skimmer.

As a group, they walked to the front door. A light reacted to their approach and illuminated the porch. Aster wished for sunlight so that she could see everything, but the sun wouldn't rise for another eleven hours. What was a girl to do?

Rassiv opened the front door and held her right hand while Vhol took her left to lead her into the house. "This house is now yours, provided by our families. Take it and allow us to care for it and you."

Aster swallowed around the lump in her throat. "I accept...both of you."

Vhol grinned, "We are very glad. Now,

tomorrow is good enough for a tour. Tonight, we test the bedding that they selected."

Rassiv blew his hair off his forehead. "Can we please talk tomorrow? I want to formalize this union before someone figures out where we are."

Vhol nodded. "Good point."

He swung Aster into his arms and walked up a set of stairs. Rassiv passed them and opened what Aster assumed was the bedroom door.

"You were kidding about someone coming here, right?"

"I am afraid not. It has happened before that if a triad doesn't consummate immediately, it is thought to be a mating of convenience." Vhol smiled down at her, his blue eyes sparkling with laughter. "On the bright side, we won't make a sandwich out of you tonight. We can do that tomorrow."

Aster shivered. This was sounding a little too attractive to her.

The bed was enormous, larger than the one at the arena. Vhol set her on her feet and unfastened her gown, letting it slide to her feet.

Her thighs were damp, the smell of her own heat made her blush.

"Don't be embarrassed, beauty. We like your heat, the wet, slick welcome when we thrust into you." Rassiv smiled and took her hand, leading her to the edge of the bed and guiding her into a

sitting position. He removed her shoes and moved aside as Vhol stripped off his boots and trousers, kneeling naked between her thighs.

When Vhol pushed his hands under her thighs to use his forearms to lift her into a proper position for his tongue to part her lower lips and his breath to heat her clit, she knew why Rassiv had settled her on the edge of the bed.

Her fingers dug into the mattress, she arched her hips toward Vhol and gasped in surprise when Rassiv bent over her to kiss her. He supported her neck with one hand while he caressed her breasts with the other. Vhol's attentions between her thighs had her moaning into her other lover's mouth.

Rassiv broke away from the kiss and trailed caresses with lips and tongue down her neck to her breasts. When he covered one nipple with his lips, he started purring and it made her jerk at the sudden sear of sensation between breast and clit.

Vhol sat up, leaning forward with the dripping head of his cock aimed to her core. As he straightened, her body lined up with his. He was rubbing against her and working his way into her in seconds. Rassiv moved under her, supporting her as Vhol started to thrust. The friction of his trousers against her spine confused her, but Vhol's high thrusts were stroking her g-spot and hitting her clit. She reached out and caught his shoulders

with her nails, screaming as the scent and feel of her men around her brought her to orgasm faster than she had ever experienced before.

Vhol leaned forward and bit her as he came, shuddering as his cock twitched and jerked inside her.

When he was finished, a sigh of relief came from beneath her. "Finally."

Rassiv flipped her to her belly, dislodging Vhol. He stripped off his clothing and was on her in under a second. He draped her legs over the edge of the bed and with a swift thrust, he entered her, stroking deep over and over again. He reached between her and the bed, rubbing her clit and his thrusts moved her over his fingers in a manner that made her dizzy with pleasure.

When he started to purr against her back, the vibration working inside her as well as outside, she went off like a rocket, screaming and bucking into the sheets. Rassiv chuckled and picked up the pace, moving harder, deeper, faster until he started to groan when he leaned forward to bite the other side of her shoulder.

The pain flared with the pleasure she was feeling. It set off nerves that were lying dormant and sparked another wave of release that she stifled into the bedding.

Rassiv lay across her, his body sweaty, limp and purring.

Vhol was reclining at the head of the bed, also purring.

Aster squirmed and moved away from Rassiv, curling up against Vhol. Her former lover followed as she knew he would. Together, they tangled in a heap and as their hearts beat in a calming rhythm, they slept.

A knock on the door was not welcome, but it woke them all. Rassiv and Vhol went downstairs without clothing and Aster knew that that was not good.

She jumped into the gown from the night before and did the back up as best she could.

It was strapless, so the marks left behind by her new husbands were there for all to see.

She extended her senses and found six men in her yard that should not be there.

Rassiv and Vhol were keeping them back at the door, but Aster wanted them away from the house.

"Gentlemen. In light of the fact that last night was wonderful, I wish for this house to remain intact. Take any physical altercations down to the grass."

She walked up behind Rassiv and Vhol, but none of them were expecting a man to grab her and haul her into the yard. "What are you doing?"

"They have a thing together, that is fine, but we

don't want them wasting a breedable female." The man who had her arm was snarling.

"I am their mate. Both of them. Not one before the other. Both of them and there are vids on the black market to prove it." She was getting angry.

Four men were holding Rassiv and Vhol on the steps, but the snarling and cursing told her more than turning her head would have that her warriors were now in furred form.

The man who held her acted quickly. He sniffed the marks on her shoulders and then knocked her to her back and lifted her skirt. His scenting her crotch was beyond what she had been anticipating, but he leaned back, stunned. "You really are mated to both."

She was lying on her back, in her yard and looking up at the sky during the worst exam of her life.

He seemed to realise what he had done. "My apologies, Lady." he smoothed her skirt down over her thighs and stood.

"Everyone, fall back. It is a legitimate mating. We apologize for the unwarranted attack and will accept any penalties you choose to exact."

The four men pinned down by her husbands backed up when they were released. Aster got to her feet and smoothed her dress down, then walked to her men...who were cats.

"If this is a Kalorda wedding tradition, it

blows." The intruders bowed and left the property. They were alone.

Vhol got bipedal first. "I think we need a breakfast before we bother discussing Kalordan traditions. They will spread the word that you are ours. Genuinely, lovingly ours."

Rassiv stood. "The kitchen is this way. What do you fancy for breakfast, wife?"

Aster walked behind them considering. The view was truly a wonderful thing to consider. "Oh. Just thinking about a sandwich."

She didn't even have time to laugh—she was over a shoulder and on her way to the bedroom in the time that it took to say, "Just kidding."

Life on a small farm on Kalorda might be boring to some, but Aster had years of rolling around in haystacks ahead of her. Now, she just needed to find out if they grew hay.

She could ask them after lunch.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Welcome back to the Kalordans. A cloned race of tiger and lion shifters. They were first seen in Enraptured and again in Impulse. Maura and Alzor get around.

Thank you for joining me for another Terran Times novella. I love writing them, so if you have any characters that have not yet gotten their soulmate, ideal match or arguing partner, remind me so I can fit them in.

Thanks for reading,

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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.