

# ENCODE

A surreal landscape featuring a woman in a long, flowing white dress standing in a shallow body of water. She is looking towards the camera. To her right, a vibrant phoenix with orange, red, and purple feathers is perched on a rock. In the foreground, a grey seal is swimming in the water. The background includes a large, full moon, a gnarled tree with hanging branches, and a rocky shoreline under a starry sky.

Viola  
Grace

Honey Barrow serves the Alliance as an Encoded Courier, putting biologicals into her own body to keep them viable during transport. This job has kept her flying for years, but that is about to come to a screeching halt when she accepts an assignment to transport the semen of an Alpha multi-shifter to the High Prefect of Shoshan. Honey has to prepare for her job by intaking a series of hormones, throwing her into a simulated heat, a heat strong enough to gain the attention of the Alpha she needs to gain the co-operation from. Raddik pursues her with single minded intensity, guaranteeing her return to him via devious methodologies with no twinges of conscience. When her life hangs in the balance, a ripple of events takes her life and her job beyond her control and leaves her at the mercy of the Alpha.

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**ENCODE**  
**A TERRAN TIMES NOVELLA**

**BY**

**VIOLA GRACE**

## CHAPTER ONE

Honey Andrea Borrow blinked and asked her client, "You want me to transport what?"

"The sperm of the Oefric alpha. Raddik Norfim. He has agreed to father my child, but I can't leave Shoshan right now and he is at a summit for the Alliance near the Nyal border. You are my only hope, Courier Barrow."

The elegant High Prefect of Shoshan smiled. "Come now. You have certainly had harder assignments?"

"Yes. But none so...personal." She was having trouble keeping a straight face. "You need an Encoded Courier for this?"

"You have passes through space that no other couriers have, as well as the experimental jump engines created by the Sector Guard."

The High Prefect poured Honey a cup of tea and herself a cup of wine. "You have to obtain a fresh sample, place it inside storage and get back here before it is inert."

"Is he aware of what is required?"

The High Prefect blushed lightly. Her yellowish skin turning orange across her throat. "Yes. We have had some frank discussions and he has agreed to anything that you ask of him."

"What kind of container will you provide?" Honey had a suspicion.

The High Prefect cleared her throat. "I was given to understand that *you* had a *special* container for this sort of transport."

"Ah. That explains asking for me by name." Honey rubbed her forehead. "Yes, I have a means to transport it in a safe biological environment, but that will cost a great deal extra."

"The money is already on its way to your account. I ovulate in five days. Please be here by then."

A servant cleared the tea tray and Honey took the hint. She got the data pad with the coordinates on it and headed out to her shuttle.

Launch clearance came and she flipped the toggles and set the halo to control her ship. Time to go to work.

She grinned as she confirmed her accounts, transferred the money to a secured account and lifted off. She was being paid as sperm transport, she had better get ready. This was going to require some medical intervention, which she would hopefully have time for before the jump and before she made contact.

The skies of Shoshan were clear weather-wise, but full of transports. She lifted directly through the open channel she had been given and *still* almost got pegged by traffic. Muttering to herself about tech-savvy planets and morons behind the steering situations, she headed for open space.

The nearest jump beacon was four hours away. Honey got her special medical kit ready and stripped down to her underwear. She started her rounds of hypo sprays to open the pouch she had had installed in her vagina. It was a bizarre experiment by Alliance medical staff that led her through a round of treatments which boggled the mind and left her able to attach any living matter to her own body as a passive graft.

She opened her kit and assessed the vials that she had available. The graft took more easily if she primed it first.

Honey looked out the view screen and checked her time. The meds were making her twitchy, but she still had an hour before the jump coordinates were achieved.

She checked for ambient traffic before stripping completely. Getting hostile messages from irate or interested crews of nearby vessels was irritating.

Honey reached between her thighs and parted her labia. The medication was working, she was lubricating slightly and as she eased the tube in, it went with only slight back and forth motion. It

was small and flexible, she could move with only a little restriction to her gait and comfort.

As soon as her fingers assured her that it was inside the pouch on one side of her vagina, she withdrew them, wiped her hands, closed her kit and got dressed.

It was jump time.

"This is the encoded courier shuttle, Baldur's Heart. I am requesting landing permits and a private meeting with Alpha Raddik Norfim."

The voice on the station was wry, "This is Station 13. Please come aboard, Encoded Courier Borrow."

She hadn't given her name. "You know who I am?"

"Of course. The Alpha is waiting for you. Proceed to the docking area."

Bemused, she followed the course aligning her to settle the Heart in the portion of the bay that the crew directed her to.

There were several diplomatic shuttles denoting the variety of species that were attending this event. The world, Balen, slowly rotated beneath them, writhing in its reviving throes as it returned to life.

She checked her ship suit and the code that the High Prefect gave her. She prepared for the artificial gravity of the station and opened her



hatch.

The face waiting for her was welcome, if somewhat of a surprise. "Kaylee?"

"Hey, Honey, you're home." The woman was wearing a Sector Guard uniform and an evil grin.

"That joke just doesn't stop being funny." Honey walked forward to hug her fellow Terran and was relieved when Kaylee stayed solid.

Kaylee hugged her back with matching enthusiasm. "How have you been?"

"Eh, some assignments are worse than others." She laughed. "This one is a doozy."

They walked the halls of Station 13 arm-in-arm, discussing the state of Terrans in their positions within the Alliance. For the most part, Terrans were thriving, only a few dozen had died in the line of duty. With the humans born of Earth entering the Sector Guard, the death toll was bound to increase, but neither woman said it.

"You are here as an active courier or I would ask you to hang around, but if you are on the clock, it can't be today."

"Sadly, that's true. But I can stay overnight. Is there room?"

Kaylee chuckled. "This is a space station. Of course there is room."

They passed several crewmembers and staffers who nodded politely to Kaylee as they passed.

"The Alpha is in a meeting, but you can wait for

him here. I will have him sent over as soon as he is finished with the debate. Balen's new avatar is taking all of these leaders to school." Kaylee's glee was unmistakable.

"She is the one born of two avatars, right?"

"Yes. Tears of the Star. She has very rigid ideas for the treatment and upkeep of avatars, as well as any offspring they might have."

"I thought most planets provided for their avatars."

"Some of the more developed governments are taking up a more aggressive stance toward the planet that they live on. They feel it is owed to them and if they don't agree with the avatar, they ignore it. They also ignore the needs of the avatar or the avatar's family."

Honey let out a low whistle. "Don't they realize that a displeased avatar can freeze them out? Literally?"

Kaylee laughed. "I don't think that it occurs to them. If those governments do not get themselves under control soon, they will find themselves facing floods or ice ages."

"Well...that will get their attention."

Her host waved her into a viewing lounge and smiled. "Let's hope that that is not what it takes."

## CHAPTER TWO

Kaylee and Honey had a nice, long conversation that covered all topics of interest to them with the exception of Honey's assignment. Classified was classified.

A quintet of men came into the observation area and made a straight line for the ladies.

"Is that him?"

"Oh yeah." She whispered, "If Dirven wouldn't smell him on me, I would take a run at him. Maybe just peep in on him in a shower."

Honey laughed and elbowed her friend, falling over as Kaylee turned into Haunt and went intangible. It wasn't the most dignified of meetings as the guards stood aside and she was facing two seconds.

"Alpha Norfim, this is your Encoded Courier, Honey Borrow. Honey, the man behind the thugs is Alpha Raddik Norfim. The thugs are his daily guard and his advisors and seconds, Morin and Lefflik."

Kaylee was standing and Honey slowly got to

her feet. She nodded to all the men and bowed as a sign of respect to the Alpha. "The High Prefect of Shoshan sends her greetings."

The Alpha had been raking her over with an assessing gaze and when the words came from her mouth, he physically jerked.

His nostrils flared as he scented her. His eyes were the darkest purple, his hair and eyebrows deep black. His skin was the lightest thing about him and it was a mahogany bronze. His guards were wearing similar skin tones with a slight differential in tone.

Honey had to swallow as she took in the impressiveness of his physique. His shoulders were huge. The muscles that banded his chest were enormous and visible through the skin-tight grey fabric under the open robes of state.

She wasn't able to see much of his thighs and calves, but staring at his crotch was also out of the question. Her training kicked in and she kept her face polite and bland as he gave her the same perusal.

"You are the secured courier?"

"I am. Pleased to meet you, Alpha."

"Raddik, please. A woman with your obvious charm and beauty should never stand on ceremony." He reached out and took her hand, bringing it to his lips with a smile.

"And a man of your wit and power should

never stand on bullshit.”

The guards all suffered from a sudden rush of asthma. It took them several seconds to get themselves back under control.

He didn’t release her hand, but he smiled against her skin. “Wit is not my sole purview, it seems.”

Honey almost jerked her hand back as she felt the light flick of his tongue. He was tasting her.

“The Oefric are known for their prowess in battle, not in wordsmithing. I commend you on your ability.” She inclined her head and the moment he relaxed his grip, she let her hand drift back to her side.

Kaylee stepped in, her eyes wide but amused. “I believe that you have business to discuss, Alpha. May I offer my private office for the purpose?”

His companions looked curious, but he nodded. “Thank you, Haunt. Your graciousness as a hostess knows no bounds.”

She inclined her head and took his words as acceptance. Kaylee led them through the halls and showed Alpha Norfim and Honey to the office. “It is a secured office as per protocols. No listening or transmitting devices will work in there. Take as long as you wish.” The mistress of Station 13 closed the door behind them and a privacy lock engaged.

Honey took up a stance beside one of the chairs. "Shall we discuss the particulars of this assignment?"

The alpha started pacing on the far side of the room like a trapped animal. "I am aware of it. You need a sample of my breeding semen. You will seal it into yourself and transport it to the High Prefect."

She nodded. "Will tomorrow morning be soon enough?"

He stopped and levelled one of those dark purple gazes at her, "You don't want to buy me a drink first?"

She bit her lip to stifle her laugh. "No, I think that our interactions had best stay on the professional level. May I ask a personal question?"

He turned to face her and slowly approached. "By all means."

"Why is it specified as breeding semen?"

He continued his approach and she sat heavily in the chair while he leaned down. "Like many shifters, the Oefric have a developed sense of smell which means that when we find a suitable mate, we produce active breeding cells. Only under the circumstance of deliberate will do we create those cells."

When Raddik inhaled again, Honey ran through what he could be scenting and mentally cursed when she found the answer. The meds that

she used to activate her seals were mimicking or possibly throwing her into oestrus. She was in heat and he could smell it.

“Back off, fluff and stuff. I may smell good, but I am not for you.” She raised her foot, pressed it to his chest and pushed him back.

He stumbled back in surprise. “You would deny me?”

“I only just met you. I don’t let strangers sniff me.” A roaring was starting behind her ears. Her hormones were going from mild to wild. If he didn’t back away, she was going to get aggressive.

He took a step toward her and she snarled as her brain told her he was a threat.

He backed off and held his hands up. “Easy, Honey. I am not going to injure you.”

She stood and started pacing. His scent was coming to her nostrils and assaulting her sensibilities. He was too close. She wasn’t sure if she wanted to attack or to embrace and the confusion was getting to her.

*Mood swings* they had told her when she implanted her device. She could expect mood swings. This was way more than that. The chemistry of the Oefric alpha was driving her to an intensity that she couldn’t stop. Rage was her default—it was the easiest emotion to access.

She tried to speak normally, but with her pacing and her teeth clenched, it was difficult. “So,

you will trigger your breeding reaction, produce a sample and I will place it into living storage so that the High Prefect can use it."

"Something to that effect. I have sent samples to a few females in the past, but none have ever resulted in offspring. Did the High Prefect mention why she needed a special courier?"

"Because I transfer living tissue. I keep it alive and viable within my own body until the code from the recipient unlocks it."

Raddik leaned back against the wall. "Where exactly do you keep the transported bio-containment?"

She scowled, "None of your business."

"I believe that it is my business. I am entrusting you with my genetic material, after all."

"It is in a very personal place."

"Excellent. Show me. I want proof that you are not simply using your wives to obtain my prime genetic stock."

She was getting more and more irritated, "Fine. But you stay on your side of the room. It is your right to see the storage area, but not to touch."

Honey peeled open her jumpsuit and as Alpha Raddik stared at her in astonishment, she shimmied out of it, including kicking off her boots. In her bright floral bra and panties, she stood for a moment before sliding the panties to the floor. Honey hopped up on the edge of the



desk and parted her labia while Raddik's eyes took on a throbbing heat. Her fingers dipped inside and opened the pouch on the wall of her vaginal canal. The container was pulled out with a flourish. "Are you satisfied that it will be safe?"

He swallowed several times before he nodded. "Yes, yes, I do believe that it will be secure."

She nodded and re-inserted the capsule, closed her thighs and got dressed.

Raddik was showing definite signs of arousal. His skin was tight across his cheekbones, his hands were trembling and a muscle in his jaw was clenching and relaxing in a series of spasms.

When she finished sealing her suit, she looked up into his eyes. He was a lot closer than he had been the first time she glanced at him. "That is a fascinating hiding spot."

"It is wired into my biology for life-support purposes. Whatever is in there will be provided with all the hormones and nutrients it needs for survival."

"And you have been...supplementing your hormones?"

"Yes. Unfortunately, the cocktail I use makes me more aggressive. I wish that I could work off some of the tension."

A thousand responses flickered across his face. He got control of himself and asked, "How do you normally work off this kind of...tension?"

"Bi-Lat. I play Bi-Lat on every station with a gym or arena." She was shaking as she ran her fingers over her bound hair.

"Then I challenge you to a game of Bi-Lat." He sealed his challenge with a kiss and she was up against the wall with her hands buried in his hair, pulling his mouth to hers with a savagery that she could not contain.

His scent, the pulse of his corded neck, the wild taste of his lips and the hard thrust of his tongue in her mouth as he lifted her to rock his hips against her sent her into a spiral of lust. Raddik's throat issued a low growl and it was that noise that snapped her back to her senses.

With all her strength, she pushed him away, sending him stumbling back several feet. She gasped and leaned against the wall, "Challenge accepted."

\* \* \* \*

Kaylee chattered to the guards outside her office. "So, how has your stay on the station been? Have you needed anything?"

"Nothing that we haven't been able to find, Haunt. This is a very well-appointed station. You have done an excellent job transforming it from a research station to an operating Sector Guard base."

“Why thank you.”

As a group, they ignored the thud against the wall.

When the door slid open to reveal Honey and the Alpha, Kaylee was not the only one holding her breath to stop the gasp of shock and laughter. Honey’s hair was wild and Raddik’s was no better. Her friend’s lips were swollen and there was a hot light to her eyes.

“Um. Honey, close your suit all the way.”

A dazed Honey hid the peeking cleavage and looked at Kaylee, “We need to use the Bi-Lat arena. Now.”

Grinning, Kaylee pressed her hand to a terminal and reserved the largest arena. Folks were going to want to see this.

## CHAPTER THREE

A crowd was gathering in the Bi-Lat gym. It seemed that dignitaries fighting couriers was an event to watch.

Kaylee was smirking as she helped Honey into the gear. The multi-shifter on the other side of the arena was getting the assistance of his second-in-command. Raddik's smouldering glances were distracting, but Kaylee made sure that all the sensors were in place and that Honey could move smoothly.

Honey enjoyed the physical aspect of Bi-Lat even if she was going to feel it the next day. The computer read her strength, her aggression and her skill level, using all of those to create a three dimensional avatar for her. On the other end of the gym, Raddik was going through the same checks and when both of the lights above the fight stations glowed blue, they stepped forward.

The computer sounded in her ear. "The participants wish to place a personal wager on the results."

That was news to her. She read the private display in front of her and read the words with disbelief. *One night in my bed if I win.*

Honey stared at him in surprise across the battle floor. She thought quickly. *A set of Masuo boots if I win.*

"Private wager has been accepted." The computer's private line whispered in her ear. "Prepare to fight. Generating avatars."

Honey put her lenses on and watched the visual display come on line as it generated her form. It was a generic sexless form so that Raddik would not have a problem striking her. His figure was similar to hers and they faced each other and waited.

The horn that sounded started the fight and they bowed formally before circling to look for the first opening. Honey struck with a sharp kick to the back of his knee and he went to the floor on his back. The surprise on his face was almost comical. She held her fist out and let a blade slide to the throbbing point at the base of Raddik's neck.

On the private com line, she whispered, "Maybe we could just cuddle." The taunt worked. He knocked her blade away and with a roar, was back on his feet.

The fight got fast and furious. She used the phantom blades provided in her suit and his fists were drawn back with damage.

When he landed a punch on her virtual self, she felt a sting in her physical body. She was stinging now as his kick struck her ribs and she went down on one knee. Honey was up, but staggering as he rounded on her and struck again.

She ducked and rolled under his fist, stabbing the phantom blade into his thigh. He roared and went down on one knee, reaching for her wrists. He caught one, but she managed to sink the other blade into his chest before he grabbed her other wrist.

She was stuck. Even her hormone-driven fury could not get her free. He rolled onto her and pinned her to the floor of the arena. "Do you yield?"

Honey squirmed under him. It was a good thing that he had chosen a gender-neutral body, or she would have suspected he was very turned on. "I admit you are the victor, but I will not yield."

His grin was satisfied, but the gleam in his eyes was predatory. He leaned toward her, his lips seeking hers and she hit the panic button that disconnected her from the virtual presence. His avatar was left kissing air.

Kaylee helped her remove her goggles and the sensor suit. "You did well, Honey."

"I know." She grinned. "I have to pay up, but it was worth it. It certainly lowered my stress level."

"Pay up?"

"Raddik decided to place a private bet. I agreed and now I have to pay up." She stretched as she got the last of the sensors off. "What time is it?"

"Eighteen hundred hours, Balen time." Kaylee cocked her head. "Why?"

"Because I only have ten hours to clear my debt. I had better get over there. I will see you in the morning before I leave."

The Guardsman gave her a hug and Honey hugged back. With an eye on the dwindling audience, she circled the fight floor and approached Raddik. His seconds stopped her until he beckoned her forward.

He was moving stiffly and she grinned as she realized that his discomfort was due to her using the blade options in the ring. If his nerves were still prickling like hers were, he had to be uncomfortable.

Raddik walked up to her and looked down into her eyes. "Well fought."

She shrugged. "A bet's a bet."

"And an honourable woman as well." He inclined his head. "Would you join me for dinner?"

"I am a little peckish. Yes. Thank you."

He held out his hand and she frowned for a moment before placing her hand in his. "This isn't really appropriate considering that I am under delivery contract."

"Unless you join me, you will be unable to complete your contract." He winked. "I hope the High Prefect is aware of how dedicated you are to your work."

"Oh, she is. I made sure of it." The amount of money that an encoded courier cost was astronomical.

The station had a commissary for staff, but since neither of them were staff, they ended up at one of the many restaurants in the central hub.

Raddik and Honey took a seat and his staffers were nearby, but not close enough to hear everything that was said. Even with their Oefric hearing, the restaurant was designed to block the travel of sound between tables.

"So, Courier, what do you do between assignments aside from play Bi-Lat?" He flicked a gaze at her, looking up from his in-table menu.

"I visit friends, read the latest novels from a variety of authors and exercise in my shuttle."

"No productive hobbies?"

She perused her menu, making a few selections of her favourites. "They are for the ground-bound. I don't have many places to put items that I create. I tried making them to give them away, but that started a gift exchange and I have no home base, so it got awkward."

"I concede that such could make things difficult."



She smiled. "What are your hobbies?"

"I ride, help the colony with construction and have a small farm."

"You ride? I thought you could shift into something that could run or fly."

He smiled. "It is not a hobby. It is just what I am, like your ability to fly a shuttle. Once a skill is part of you, you can't stop using it."

She chuckled and was silent as her food was brought to her and Raddik's to him. She had kept her selections to finger food and immediately started rinsing her hands in the bowl that the server brought to her.

He did the same and she smiled as she noted that his food was of the same type. There were more prepared meats than vegetables on his platter, but the method of preparation was basically the same.

"I liked to cook." The words blurted out of her mouth before she could stop them.

He quirked one of his dark brows at her. "Past tense?"

"Fires on a courier shuttle are not a good idea." Honey put her concentration into daintily lifting each portion of food, dipping it in the sauce and placing it between her lips. The flavours exploded on her tongue, the sauce fizzing lightly in her mouth. She closed her eyes as she chewed and swallowed.

Raddik was staring at her, that predatory gleam now a flaring heat in his gaze. "You are enjoying it?"

"Oh yes. I have been living on rations for weeks. Few clients want me hanging around once they have what they want." She reached for another morsel and watched his eyes as he tracked her every move. "Is there something wrong?"

"I have just never seen a woman show that much enthusiasm for food before."

She blushed. "I am sorry."

"Don't be sorry, it is refreshing to see a woman with an...appetite."

Her blush flared another notch. Her stomach gurgled, so she kept her eyes down and fed herself, trying to put him out of her mind. She heard him eating on his side of the table and she studiously watched her own meal disappear as her right hand continued its rounds.

It was with a sigh of relief that she finished her food. She rinsed her hands again and the server came by to retrieve the plates. Raddik had finished before she did and he was sitting back in his chair, watching her. She self-consciously used the napkin that was provided to catch any spills or drips and checked her suit for blemishes.

"That was very nice, thank you." She leaned back in her own chair and grinned. "It has been a long time since I was able to enjoy a leisurely

meal."

"You did not enjoy much leisure here. I am sorry. I could not take my eyes off you. I have never seen a woman like you."

She winked, "And after tomorrow, you never will again. Well, unless there is a courier posting for me on your home world."

"I may be able to think of something that might require your particular skills." The innuendo in his voice was hard to miss.

"Do tell. I don't think you could afford me for that sort of thing, though."

He rocked back in his seat and laughed. "I am quite sure that you are correct. A woman like you does not rent out her affections."

"I like that you said rent. No, I either give them freely or not at all."

"Speaking of which, I believe that you agreed to one night in my bed. Shall we adjourn to my quarters?" He extended his hand to her and she looked at it before moving.

He sighed with relief as she placed her hand in his. "A bet's a bet."

Raddik pulled her to her feet and they left the restaurant, with his seconds and guards rushing to catch up.

Honey kept her mouth shut as they walked the halls. The VIP area of the station was under guard as well, but Raddik nodded to the watchers and

they waved them through.

The guards entered the room before Raddik was allowed in. When they emerged, his seconds nodded and left for their quarters. The guards took up posts on either side of the door.

Raddik tugged her over the threshold and Honey knew it was too late to run, even if she had wanted to. The door sealed and locked behind her and the shifter tugged her through the enormous front room into the spacious bedroom.

“Now, dear Honey, where was that storage spot again?”

## CHAPTER FOUR

Honey bit her lip and started to open her suit. Raddik replaced her hands with his own and peeled the fabric from her shoulders. "What is this article of clothing?" He cupped her breasts and thumbed her nipples gently through the fabric of her bra.

"It's a brassier. A bra. Women on my world wear them for containment and support."

"It is lovely. Is this lace?" His fingers traced the back strap and he flicked it loose.

"It is." She shivered. Her arms were pinned by the fabric of her suit and when he slid her bra to her waist, her breasts were up thrust and undefended.

Raddik leaned in, nuzzled her ear and sniffed his way down her neck to her breasts.

The heat of his breath made her tense and when his tongue snaked out to taste her, she shivered from the inside out. His tongue's texture was both cat and doglike at the same time. Rough and smooth and very hot.

He licked at her nipples until they were hard, alert and aching for more. Honey tried to push her breasts more firmly into his mouth and his chuckle was the only response.

She struggled against her constriction.

"Just allow me this one night, Honey. If it is all we have, I want to enjoy it." His low tones skimmed along her flesh.

It took her all of five seconds to make up her mind. His mouth starting a light suction did help the deliberation process. "Oh, I think I can go along with that."

"Excellent. Just promise not to hide any of your responses. Once the animal in me takes over, I will have only one thing on my mind." He straightened and his gaze bored into hers as if trying to impart something important.

Her hormones were in a writhing state of anticipation. She blinked and felt sure that her eyes were a bright green with the energy in her body. "Yes, fine, whatever. Just don't stop what you were doing."

"You may regret this in the morning, but I really don't care." He resumed his licking and sucking on her breasts until she was twisting helplessly in his grip.

Eventually, her arms were freed and she flicked off her bra and wrapped her arms around his head. She inhaled sharply as he suckled her breast,

cried out when his teeth grazed her sensitive flesh. The noises she was making started a low growling purr in his chest.

He carefully removed her boots and suit, sliding her panties to her feet in a smooth move that involved him lapping at her clit the instant he removed the last barrier between her flesh and his tongue.

A sharp ripple of pleasure ran through her and she screamed hoarsely as her knees buckled.

He cupped the back of her thighs and kept her upright as he made her ride the full wave of her orgasm.

Honey was limp when he finally released her from the endless sensation. She slumped into his embrace and the low chuckle didn't even get her mad. She felt a fabric-covered surface beneath her and then it was time to watch the show.

Raddik removed his robes of state and laid them across the foot of his bed. *His bed? What the hell am I lying on?* She pushed herself up and she noted that she was on a backless chaise. Just wide enough for one.

His footwear hit the floor along with socks.

His bodysuit opened at one shoulder and he peeled it down, exposing toned skin and muscles that made her mouth water. His cock arched toward his belly and a drop of fluid formed.

"I can see why they made you alpha." Her soft

words made him blush, but he quickly got back to the matter at hand.

He knelt in front of her and resumed his caresses and licks to her breasts. His hands stroked her spine, rubbing and kneading her muscles while his mouth fed at her breasts. She was swiftly back on the edge of release, this time with her fingers threaded through his soft silky hair, her cries climbing rapidly into the ear-piercing range.

Raddik withdrew from her, turned her to lean over the edge of the chaise with her ass facing him. She felt the hard pulse of his cock against her opening while he pressed into her. He eased forward and she clenched her fists into the fabric as he worked his way inside.

A groan fought out of her throat as he bottomed out and then withdrew. The next inward stroke did not hit her cervix and it was then that she remembered what she was dealing with. *Shifter*. He was changing his shape to conform to her body. It would be sweet if it wasn't so sexy.

He started to move inside her, each thrust stronger than the last. His hands covered hers on the chaise and as she watched them, they formed claws and sprouted hair. A sharp blaze of pleasure rocked through her and the instant that she screamed, a hard bite struck her shoulder.

The pain struck and blended into pleasure as he



started purring with her flesh in his teeth. A vibration ran from her shoulder right into her channel where he was embedded. She almost jumped out of her skin when his cock began a slow stroke inside her, but his hips weren't moving.

Raddik's member churned, writhed and twisted inside her until he growled, let her shoulder go and howled as he pumped into her in a hot stream.

Her ears were ringing when he withdrew and placed her back on the chaise. She was dazed, tired and the scent of their coupling was starting another hormonal response that she couldn't subdue. A warm wave of relaxation and arousal swept through her until she was twisting on the couch.

Raddik turned her on her side and scooted behind her. He wrapped his hand around her waist and spread his hand over her belly, pressing her back into his newly risen member.

Honey inhaled sharply. "Raddik, will you still have what has been promised to the High Prefect?"

"She will have what I agreed to, now sing for me again." His lips pressed the curve of her ear and his tongue traced the outer edge. He eased a hand under her and grasped her uppermost knee, drawing it to her chest. With her sex wide open,

he slid into her again, rocking into her inch by inch.

Honey groaned. He certainly had a lot of inches.

She watched the hands caressing her change as his movements became more fevered, faster and harder. The nails extended to claws and they narrowed and elongated into paws that would have normally sent her running for the nearest Guardsman. With him inside her, the shape shifting didn't seem so bad.

The hand on her abdomen moved and stroked her clit as she let each caress and sigh slip from her lips. Hearing herself drove her lust higher and she screamed when his touches finally turned her clit into an ignition source for her body's internal blaze. He was right behind her with a roar of satisfaction, his claws digging firmly into her flesh as he held her to him.

He was purring again. His body vibrating against hers. Sweat was cooling on her body and more liquid than she would like to admit to pooled between her thighs. His vibrations were nice, but only the parts of her body that stuck to him were warm.

She shivered and he immediately left her, gathering a blanket from the bed and returning to the chaise.

"Why not the bed, Raddik?"

He chuckled. "I will tell you in the morning. For now, rest so that I can enjoy the feel of you against me before the dawn intrudes."

She snuggled against him on her side and enjoyed the warmth behind her as well as the gentle hand cupping her breast.

Dawn would come soon enough. In the meantime, she could enjoy not being alone for this one moment in time with the idea of a life with a man who wanted her for nothing more than the pleasure of her company drifting through her mind.

## CHAPTER FIVE

“Here is the sample as requested.” Raddik had produced it in front of her and she was busy trying not to drool.

She retrieved her container and poured the sample into it. She sealed the unit and replaced it in her interior compartment. She dressed and when she had sealed her suit, she completed the encoding portion of her assignment. “Confirm witnessing of bio-placement.”

Raddik nodded, came up to her and whispered in her ear, “I confirm.”

Honey felt the skin inside her sealing and the capsule sinking into muscular tissue. “Confirm seal to the voice code of the High Prefect.”

His breath heated her ear, “I confirm.”

“Then as an Encoded Courier, I now proceed on my assignment.” She straightened and took a few steps toward the door.

“There is one more matter, Courier Borrow. When you complete your mission, contact me on this private line. We still have to settle your debt.”

Honey blinked and lost her professional courier façade. "What was last night?"

His grin was unholy. "The bet was for one night in my bed. We spent the night on a chaise in a space station. My bed is very, very far away."

"What? But I thought that last night..."

"As you said, a bet's a bet. The terms were very clear. One night in my bed. And my bed is on my home world, in my home." He crossed his arms over his very impressive chest and smirked.

A knock on the door interrupted their glaring-versus-smirking contest. "Honey, your shuttle is ready." Kaylee stopped short as she drifted through the door. "Whoa, what am I interrupting?"

"Nothing. Just taking care of some minor details. I am on my way out, Kaylee." She gave her friend a hug and escaped the VIP quarters that Raddik occupied. She was going to see him again. She never let a debt go unpaid.

Knowing that his sperm was locked inside her made her feel a little shivery, but she had gotten enough of the non-potent version during their night together.

Honey took the express lift to her shuttle and chatted with the bay crew while she ran an exterior check on the shuttle. It seemed that everything was in place and all plates and seals were intact. Once she was sealed inside her

shuttle, she called the High Prefect of Shoshan.

"High Prefect, I have the item I was sent to retrieve and it is coded to your audio signal."

"Thank you for your promptness. Your timing is exquisite." The High Prefect was looking a little warm, a brightness in her eyes that had not been there on their initial meeting.

"I am engaging in final checks and am less than twenty hours away. I look forward to discharging my duty."

"I look forward to receiving the item." The High Prefect nodded and inclined her head in dismissal.

Honey made the final checks and lifted off, moving inches above the floor and to the shuttle force gate. It flickered and she passed through.

Once away from Station 13, Honey put on the speed. She fired her jets to get her to the jump point.

The jump beacons flared invitingly, so she placed her shuttle in the optimum area before sending herself into Shoshan space.

She had just a moment to see her surroundings before her ship was rocked by impacts. Fire started within the computer systems and the suppressants were going non-stop. She was leaking atmosphere and only had enough time to send an emergency beacon and a broad-spectrum signal before Honey crawled to the emergency

supplies and wrapped a mask over her face and a decompression blanket over her body.

Someone was trying to kill her and they were about to succeed.

She was going to forfeit on that debt after all.

Lights and faces fluttered in and out of her consciousness. Some had the intense look of physicians and others the inquisitive looks of assistants or interns. Pain ebbed and flowed.

When the liquid of the tank closed over her head, she knew that she had been frozen for a while. The mask was over her mouth and nose and as soon as she regained consciousness, they removed it to allow her to breathe the oxygenated fluid.

One face kept appearing in her field of vision over and over. It was Raddik. He paced in front of her tank, interrogated a number of people within medical as well as several beings who were brought in by guards.

Days went by with people stopping to peek and glare at her and then finally, one day Kaylee came forward with a relaxed smile on her face.

Her visitor turned on the mike into the tank. "Hey, sport. I am glad to see you floating in one piece."

Honey reached out with her wire-laden arm and drew a question mark against the wall of the

tank.

"You were a decoy. The High Prefect has been trying to have time with her mate in order to create the next generation. She has released you from your encoding, but there was a problem." Kaylee winked. "Based on scans, the cargo you were carrying leaked and you are now in possession of the heir to the Oefric Alpha."

She made the question mark again. This was very confusing. There was no way that her container could have leaked unless she was impaled or dissected. *Pregnant?*

"The Prefect has been trying to get pregnant with one of her own, but as soon as she went into heat, they were assassinated. So, this time, she hired you so that everyone would be watching for your return. They tried to steal your cargo, but could not get past your protocols. It was messy and we are very glad that you were returned here for healing. The scars will fade from where they were digging at you, but we got there too soon for their doc to make it through the biological protocols. You will be slightly marked, but your baby is fine. It's teeny and your body's priority was to repair the damaged area that just happens to contain the little fella."

She drew another question mark with one hand on her abdomen.

"Yup. Sorry to ruin the surprise. Raddik has



taken custody of you by the way. He has filed a request with the Alliance Rep and he's been given permission to take you as mate given your consent."

Her hand moved up to her chest and she tilted her head.

"Yes, your consent. The moment you are out of the tank, he is going on a charm offensive. But he is planning on sweeping you off to his home. That you won't have a choice with. He has been given three months to gain your agreement, including travel time."

She held up three fingers.

"Yup. Three months. You have already been in the tank for a week. The baby is fine. Your encoding seems to have locked in around it. The developmental area is almost armour plated. I am hoping that you can do something about it or that is going to be one tiny kid."

Honey didn't see the humour in that and let Kaylee know it with a gesture that she could not mistake.

"Classy, Honey. You will be decanted later today. Your abdomen will be a little bright and stripey for a few weeks, but eventually, you will heal without scarring." Kaylee sobered and pressed her hand to the glass. "I am glad you made it. Not many could have been frozen almost solid, been ripped open and survived the

experience. Geez, Honey, if you hadn't gotten off those beacons and the message..."

Honey tried to shush her, but only her mouth moved. A shadow moved behind Kaylee and Raddik stepped forward. He didn't say a word, just stared at her in the tank.

She didn't let herself get uncomfortable, just stared into his dark purple eyes with acceptance. He kept up the staring contest for minutes until he finally reached into his robes and pulled out a note. He pressed it up against the tank and waited for her to read it.

In Alliance Common words were spelled out in block letters. YOU OWE ME ONE NIGHT IN MY BED.

Her lips twitched and she grinned. She stuck her tongue out at him and laughed silently. She tapped her abdomen and shook her finger at him. No fun and games until she was healed. If she really was pregnant, she wasn't going to risk the little one now that it could exist.

It suddenly hit her. She wasn't supposed to be pregnant because Raddik wasn't supposed to be in breeding mode. She tapped her belly and pointed at him, making the question mark symbol again.

The grin flowed into his eyes and he looked horribly smug.

She flipped him the bird and he looked confused. Kaylee was giggling at the gesture and

she must have told Raddik what it meant, because he lost most of his amusement as he folded the paper into precise folds and slid it back into his pocket.

Her Oefric guardian took a seat at a desk that was obviously there for his use and Kaylee waved a short goodbye before she faded through the floor of the medical bay. Honey tended to forget that Haunt was a member of the Sector Guard, intangible at will. She floated through walls and dropped through floors whenever she pleased. It was quite the party trick.

Honey floated idly, examining her belly as well as she could from her vantage point. Raddik's assistants came in with documents and briefed him on something, studiously standing with their back to their Alpha's chosen.

She was bored, so she started checking her hair for split ends and assessing her fingernails. She was on to the toenails of her left foot when the decanting team arrived. This wasn't her first time in a tank, so she extended her arms to ease the lift.

The rush of fluid past her ears fell into silence as she was folded over to vomit and cough up the oxygenated liquid, a messy but necessary part of the process. A mask slipped over her face and the cool, harsh hiss of air came directly into her lungs. Hands removed the majority of her life support cables and the world spun while she was lifted

onto a medical bed.

Raddik hovered in the corner of her vision. The moment that the assistants and doctors thinned out, he was at her side, his hand holding hers.

“Interesting technique, firing twelve distress beacons at once. Do they teach you that in courier training?”

She smiled and pulled her mask away from her face. “Experience taught me that one. More is better.”

He removed her hand from her mask and pressed her hand to the bedding, effectively pinning her down. He leaned forward to kiss her forehead. “I am glad that it worked. They caught ten of the beacons, but missed the other two. A Sector Guard unit retrieved you, but not until after both you and your ship had been damaged almost beyond repair. Freezing seems to have saved your life.”

There was a catch in his throat and a remarkably serious look in his eyes as he spoke.

She nodded. Speaking through the mask wasn’t a good idea, but based on what she could read over his shoulder, they were tracking gouges over an inch and in some cases two inches deep on her abdomen. She had to ask. “How am I still pregnant?”

One of the doctors heard her, his pointed ear twitching. “Your encoding reflex kicked in. Your

baby is surrounded by tissue so dense it is almost bone. We are holding you here until you are healed enough to relax the tissue. If you don't work on loosening it, the child may not survive past the two-month mark. It will run out of room."

She tried to speak, but they couldn't understand her. The doctor checked a scanner and removed her mask. "It will relax when I am safe or when I feel I am safe. I don't know when that will be. Can I get a blanket?"

She hated to be naked in front of strangers. Nudity was for fun and frolics, not for public display. Not even medical staff was on her list for access to her unclothed form.

Raddik scowled at the doctor and the man swiftly moved to get a covering for her. She sighed in relief as the fabric settled over her and she freed her arms so that it tucked in over her breasts.

"Courier Borrow, you have sustained extensive lacerations and a pregnancy from the leakage of the cargo you were carrying. It is odd though. We examined the item before returning it to Alpha Norfim and we could not detect damage that would have had any effect."

She turned to Raddik, "Yes, I find it fascinating that the damage could have had that effect. It is completely bizarre."

He grinned at her. "Isn't it though?"

"We can look into the possibilities if you wish."

The doctor interrupted their eye contact with complete unconcern.

Raddik answered. "I don't believe that it will be necessary. The courier's body has been repaired without the holding area that caused the problem, so we will never know. Perhaps there were a few drops on the exterior of the container before insertion. What we do know is that it is my child and I want it safe. That means calming Courier Borrow down by any means necessary."

The doctor took the hint and left them alone.

With only a few sensors and wires left, she was still surprised when Raddik lifted her and joined her in the bed. His whisper in her ear warmed her and irritated her at the same time.

"I am sorry, Honey. I was going to pursue you as my mate once you had delivered the parcel and returned to me. It never occurred to me that your heat would spur my breeding triggers. It was a miscalculation that I was unaware of until the rescue party brought you back and Haunt came to get me."

"Miscalculation Borrow. It's a good name for a boy."

He sighed and wrapped his arms around her, hugging her tightly. "It will be Miscalculation Norfim if it is a Miscalculation at all."

## CHAPTER SIX

Honey inhaled deeply. She was warm, safe and completely relaxed. Her bed was breathing, one hand was cupping her breast and the other was curled protectively over her abdomen. She exhaled and focussed on the tiny lump of tension beneath his palm, the only tension in her body was the casing around the baby.

She loosened the muscles of her uterus with the ease of practice and worked them in a caressing motion around the baby's shield. Despite what they thought, her body was not acting in defence of the baby. The baby was acting on his own.

Honey had wanted to try the internal caress on Raddik, but there had been no opportunity with him holding her still for his Alpha shenanigans. Now she used the muscles that had made her the specialist that she was to sooth the tiny spark of life into relaxing.

It softened and then dissipated as she focused on it. She sighed in relief. "There you go, little Miscalculation. I will call you Cal for short, I

think." She wanted to press her fingers over Raddik's, but that would wake him.

"Cal is not an acceptable name for my heir. You can name the next one." The voice of her mattress was thick with sleep.

"You are awake."

He shifted and sat up, dislodging the sheet for a moment before he tucked it up around them.

"Are you ready to come home with me?"

She sighed. "I still owe you a night, don't I?"

He grumbled low in his chest. "Is that the only reason?"

"For now. Let's see how things go."

He continued grumbling, but scooted out from under her with as much delicacy as he could manage. "As soon as the doctor gives you the all clear, we will be leaving. The ship is nearby and the shuttle is waiting."

The physician was impressed by her healing. He gave her a relatively clean bill of health, provided that she kept up with her recuperative regime. Plenty of rest, no sex for seven to ten days and regular stretching. She also had to keep an eye on her cargo to make sure it stayed out in the open and not in a capsule.

"Will do. Is that everything?"

"Yes. You are free to go."

She grabbed the sheet around her and made a beeline for the door. Haunt popped up in front of



her and stopped her in her tracks.

"Hold it, Honey. You are not going anywhere without getting dressed. *I* am the only one who floats around naked on Station 13."

"I will not allow you to sprint around naked either, Morin and Lefflik are coming with clothing for you in the Ohshlin fashion." Raddik wrapped his arms around her and held her in place.

The seconds to the Alpha arrived, each carrying boxes that they deposited on the bed she had recently occupied.

"I will help you dress, Honey. The boys can stay out here." Kaylee put an arm around her, stacked the boxes on the other and led her into a private space.

"You are going to love this. The Ohshlin clothing is almost indestructible and fashionable at the same time." Kaylee opened the first box and withdrew a breast band and some sort of briefs. "Here you go. Lean on me if you need to."

Honey scooted the breast band into place and then leaned on Kaylee as she balanced from foot to foot to work the briefs into place. They were silky-tough boy shorts and quite comfortable. The breast band supported and lifted while controlling the sway that her C-cups engaged in when unconfined.

"And now some shoes. Trust me, the skirt is so flowing that you want to get your foot gear on

before we drop the gown over your head.”

Honey took a seat and let Kaylee lace some toe-covering sandals on her legs. “Pretty.”

“Ohshlin isn’t just the mythical land of all shifter origins. It is also quite the fashion mecca.” Kaylee smiled and went to the large box.

With a laugh, she pulled out a slip and dropped it over Honey’s head. It settled into place with a whisper of heavy silk. The gown was yards of fabric that dropped over her head and laced up under one arm. It fit tightly around her torso and glowed brilliant white. A cross between Grecian and medieval, the gown flowed to the floor and in a modest train while the neck gathered in soft folds and left her arms free of fabric.

“You look amazing.”

The admiration in her friend’s voice warmed her more than she would ever admit. It was nice to feel pretty, it was even nicer to have those surrounding you admit that you were pretty.

“Thank you. How is my shuttle?”

Kaylee’s face filled with dismay. She was saved from the explanation when Raddik came around the corner.

“I will show her, Haunt. Thank you.” Raddik’s admiration was in his eyes, but when he bowed low to her, she truly appreciated that she looked like a lady for possibly the first time in her life.

She curtsied as she had been taught in basic

training and then took the hand he extended and let him lead her out of the private room and into the main medical bay. Objects and jaws dropped as she swayed slowly at Raddik's side, moving carefully on legs that were far from steady.

"So, Ohshlin?"

He smiled. "You paid attention. Excellent. Yes, we are the first contingent to attend any Alliance events in centuries, but the lure of the Sector Guard was far too tempting."

"The Sector Guard?"

"An entire branch of the Alliance designed for fast response to crisis might be able to use our skills. A few shifters have made it into the ranks and Dirven and I had interesting discussions on having some of the Oefric enter the ranks."

They were heading to the shuttle bay, but she still was not prepared when they entered and she saw her precious shuttle, torn open like a can of sardines. "Oh, my." A streamer of blood decorated the floor all the way to the edge of the tear.

Raddik's voice was carefully controlled as he filled in the blanks for her. "The decompression blanket bought you some time, but you were mostly frozen when they started digging at you. They couldn't get through your security, so they ripped open your shuttle. They tore open your shuttle in one hour. You were in their custody for an hour and then the Sector Guard ship arrived.

They had a healer on board that revived you, a Guardsman named Revivor. She sealed your wounds and then brought you back to temperature. By that time, you were back on the station and I was greeting those who attacked you."

The grim tone in his voice made her shiver.

"All of your private possessions have been transferred to the warship that we will be joining momentarily."

In stunned silence, Honey walked up to the Baldur's Heart and touched the tortured metal. Her ship was dead. It would never fly again in one piece. "They might be able to salvage something."

"If you authorize them to do so, they will."

With tears in her eyes, she turned to look around and saw Kaylee and her husband, Dirven, standing behind the Oefric. "If you can re-use the Heart, do so. I want it to live on in some way. It was a damned good shuttle."

Kaylee rushed forward and hugged her. "We will send it to Fixer and see what she can do with it."

"Thanks, Haunt. I guess I had best be going now."

"I think it would be best. You can't do anything for the Heart. We will make sure it lives on and I swear to tell you where the parts are as soon as the dissemination finishes." Kaylee gave her a sisterly

kiss on the forehead and turned her back to Raddik.

He was holding his hand out and she took it once again, walking with him to the sleek, glossy shuttle that had to be an Ohshlin design. Honey had never seen anything like it before.

With her dead shuttle in her mind, it felt like a betrayal to admire the new ship in front of her.

The interior was high ceilinged for a shuttle, but given the height of the men with her, it made a certain sense. She strapped into one of the cushioned and comfortable passenger seats and then they were on their way.

To say it felt odd not to be at the helm was a gross understatement. She felt helpless as they dropped away from the station and propelled themselves into the dark.

Through the window, she watched her friend's home and the planet Balen fade in her view. "It's funny how quickly a new place feels like home."

Raddik's deep voice rolled over her, "I hope that Ohshlin will be a new home for you as well."

"We will see. So far your courtship has lacked a certain subtlety."

Snickering erupted from the pilot and navigator seats. Raddik was seated in a passenger seat with her, so he was unable to scowl his lackeys into submission.

They engaged in an unannounced jump that

made her tense and just like that, there was a knot in her abdomen. "Damn it."

Raddik was at her side in an instant. "What is it?"

"I tense and he builds a fort. Tricky little bugger." She rubbed at the knot and her fingers were soon joined by Raddik's.

"He is doing it? You are not?"

"Nope. My talent doesn't work that way. I would have hidden him in an ovary. Or folded him in soft tissue. He builds a little fort every time I feel I am in danger."

He looked around the shuttle and frowned. "You are not in danger."

"No one announced the jump. It caught me by surprise, adrenaline flowed and now I am gestating a marble." The last was said on a grumble.

"Will he be fine like that for now?"

"Yes, the doctor said he was firmly attached to me, just armoured." She patted Raddik's hand. "It's fine. As soon as I get somewhere stable, I will relax again and he will come out to play."

"Fine, but if you are in any kind of distress, call me immediately. I will be there as soon as I can."

Honey nodded. "I will be fine, just get me home with a minimum of fuss and everything will be wonderful."

"Another jump," Morin warned.

She braced for it, coming out of it with pure calm.

"Thank you, Morin. That is helpful."

She suddenly realized that their warship was two jumps away. "You are still hiding from the bulk of the Alliance."

"Yes. We send out colonists, but they are under orders not to reveal the location of Ohshlin."

The sleek silvery blue craft got larger and larger in her view screen. "Holy cow."

The warship was huge. "How do you hide something like that?"

"There will be a lot more jumping involved. Can you handle that?"

"As long as I get a moment to recuperate between jumps and am warned for the next one, I think I will be fine. You do have a medical facility on board, don't you?"

"Yes, but our healers are a little more direct than the Alliance staffers. They are contact healers and can probably speed your recovery."

"But they have to touch me."

"Yes."

She shrugged. "If it will speed the process, then I will let them touch me. I may stay calmer if I am one hundred percent physically sound."

"Then we will visit medical after you have had a chance to rest. You are looking very pale."

Honey *felt* very pale. "Excellent. Sounds

amazing. Do I get my own room?"

"You will be residing in my quarters while I press my suit."

"What does your ironing have to do with this?"  
She snickered at her Terran joke while their shuttle docked.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

The interior walls glowed with a pinkish white light. Honey found it very soothing. She paced along at Raddik's side, his hand clasping hers and held at waist height. Crew members bowed and moved to the side of the hall as they passed.

The ship's captain greeted them when they were near an open area filled with green and growing life. "Courier Borrow. It is excellent to see you up and about. Descriptions of your injuries were horrific."

She inclined her head. "Thank you, Captain..."

Raddik filled in the blank, "Captain Norfim. My brother Andor Norfim."

The family resemblance was there, but the captain's eyes were a dark blue, not the purple she loved.

"Pleased to meet you, Captain Norfim."

"And you as well, little sister." His wink as he bowed over her hand was priceless. The growl that emanated from Raddik was a warning that his brother did not ignore. He dropped her hand

like it scalded him.

“Are our quarters ready?”

“They are ready and prepared for your arrival, Alpha. A light repast is waiting in your quarters.”

“Morin, Lefflik, please brief the captain on requirements for the jumps. I will take my mate to rest. She is still recovering.”

Raddik led her off through the brightly lit halls and eventually, they arrived at his quarters. “Press you hand to the plate, Honey. It will take in your biometrics.”

She followed his direction and when she withdrew her hand, he placed his over her palm print. “There, you may now come and go as you please. It is a week on this ship, so you had best get used to walking the halls for exercise.”

She yawned and wandered into the front room of the VIP quarters. Knowing ship interiors as she did, Honey found the bedroom on her first try. A table with snacks on it was sitting in one corner of the room, but she was too tired to care. The bed was calling and she wanted to answer.

She sat on the side of the bedding and tried to pull the folds of the gown up so that she could get at the laces of her sandals. The moment she lifted her weight from the folds of the gown, they slithered down so she couldn’t see her feet. In her stunned condition, she did this three times before Raddik chuckled and knelt in front of her.

"You need to remove your dress to get at the sandals. It is something that our ladies learn early. That or bribe me to put your shoes on and take them off." He trailed his fingers up her legs, "I am amenable to bribery."

"And I am recuperating for being almost disembowelled. No fun and games until I have a clean bill of health."

He sighed and drew her shoes off one by one. "You are severely lacking in romantic creativity."

"Nag me in the morning." she yawned extravagantly and twisted her legs into the bed, tucking herself in.

"There is food if you are hungry." Raddik sat next to her and rubbed her back slowly.

"Mmf." She sighed into the herb-scented pillows and let his touch sooth her into sleep. She was so relaxed that the first jump didn't even make her flinch.

"Who are you and why are you touching me?"

The darkly handsome man was frowning at her belly, his hands spanning from hip to hip as he concentrated. "I am the contact healer, Naro. Your previous healer did good work, but you need additional work if you are willing to allow it. I can have you back to fighting shape in a matter of days."

"Did you read the damage report?" She

couldn't be delicate about it. There was never any sense in lying to your doctor. What you omitted could kill you.

"I did, so there will have to be some invasive healing. The Alpha has agreed to be out of your eye line for that, or he will take another form if you want him nearby."

She sat up when he removed his hands and lowered her gown and slip. She was still fully clothed. He had simply lifted her gown and tugged down the briefs.

"Where is he now?"

A voice came through the open door. "I am here, Honey. Dr. Naro wanted to assess your level of comfort with only him visible. You didn't kick him, so everything seems fine."

Raddik came into the room, his formal robes and bodysuit discarded in favour of a shirt, leather vest and trousers combo. His boots were the only item from his previous outfit that were visible.

He looked relaxed, comfortable and the light wave in his dark hair made her want to run her fingers through it.

"You look...different."

"I only wear the robes of state when I have to. When I am on my home turf, it is all casual all the time." As he came into the room, the doctor stood and backed away from the bed.

"Dr. Naro, are you moving a pre-measured

distance away from your Alpha?"

He grinned at her, his dark eyes lighting. "Yes, Courier Borrow. Our ranks determine our distance from the Alpha."

Raddik sat next to her and took her hand. "All my people have been ordered to answer any and all questions that you put to them regarding our customs or manners. Rank and traditions keep our people from violence fairly successfully."

"So, because everyone knows how to behave, there is little conflict?" It made a certain sense. "What about blundering morons like me?"

"You will be given a year to acclimate and after that anniversary, you will be held accountable for your insults."

"Accountable how?"

There was a slight unholy gleam in Raddik's eyes.

"The mate of the offender is usually responsible for administering the punishment, after which an apology will be tendered to the injured party."

She narrowed her eyes at him. "What kind of punishment?"

"Whatever the mate determines to be suitable. Nothing that will permanently damage the mate but enough to engender true remorse."

"So, who punishes the Alpha?" She raised her eyebrow and heat came into Raddik's eyes.

"I believe that I will leave you two alone,

Courier Borrow. I will see you in four hours in medical, or Alpha Norfim can send for me." Dr. Naro bowed and left them alone.

As the door sealed to the outer chamber, Honey laughed. "I think we made him uncomfortable."

He leaned over her and hovered, his lips inches from hers. "No one punishes the Alpha without reaping the consequences."

The kiss was exploratory, their first heated kiss far too long ago for Honey. She sighed at his taste and worried for a moment about morning breath before pushing those thoughts away and enjoying him. The ball of tension low in her belly relaxed and their son dropped his little shield.

With the last bit of stress out of her body, she curled up against Raddik, pulling him firmly onto her. He rolled so as not to crush her and the feel of his arousal against her made her squirm.

"How long am I going to be out of commission?"

He closed his eyes and was visibly trying to calm his breath. "Three to four days depending on your progress."

"So, are there other quarters for me? Or are we going to drive each other nuts?"

He sighed. "I am thinking."

She snickered. "Let me try and relieve some pressure on your brain." With an evil grin, she scooted down his body and reached for his

trousers. She unfastened his pants and eased the hard, throbbing erection into her hand. It was slightly different from that of a human male, but the basic hydraulics seemed to work the same.

“What are you...” his sentence finished on a groan as she took him into her mouth.

He tasted salty, sweet and the scent that was all his was magnified at this close proximity. She was licking, sucking and stroking at him with one hand around his shaft and her mouth doing most of the work.

His legs spread to allow her easy access while his shoulders became the balance point for his body. A growling roar came from his throat and a hot jet of semen proved his release. She swallowed quickly and made a face. The shock of the release always spurred her gag reflex. Smoothing her features, she looked up and over at Raddik. There was sweat on his brow and a fine tremor in his muscles.

He pushed away from the bed quickly, leaving her feeling a little rejected. “Excuse me, Honey. I have to...” He didn’t finish his sentence, simply shifted from a man into a huge bird with golden feathers and rainbow wings.

The bird shook itself free of the shreds of fabric left after the change and he hopped forward to put his head in her lap.

“Raddik?”

The bird's crest lifted and he turned his head so that one dark purple eye was fixed on her. The scream that he let out shook her teeth. He tilted his head and she slowly reached out to stroke his feathers.

"I can't believe that you are the Alpha and your default form is a bird."

He ignored her comments and enjoyed her scratching as she worked both hands into his feathers and stroked his neck, crest and chest. The huge bird's eyes closed with bliss.

"You are very easy to please, Alpha. But I need to get some food. Is there still food on the table?"

He chirped drowsily.

She eased out from under the birdy and checked out her new rooms. The lav was huge for a starship, even larger for a warship. She scrubbed her hands, washed her face and winced at the mess that her hair was in. Her stomach rumbled in distress and she reorganized her priorities.

Raddik was positioned on the edge of the bed. Scars were visible on the surface that showed it was a popular perching spot. He ruffled his feathers and watched her as she uncovered a few trays to make her selections.

She had some of the items that she recognized and a light selection of foods that she didn't. Honey took a seat near the table and flicked on the entertainment unit while she ate. She noted the



large creature approaching from the bed and snickered when a huge wolf whined hungrily. She tossed him a meat pie, waited until he finished it and then fed him the next.

She spent an hour eating and tossing Raddik tidbits from the table. When he stopped and licked his chops, she filled one of the low plates with water for him to drink and refilled it again when he finished it.

When she put the plates away and washed her hands again, wolf-Raddik came up to her and put his head in her lap.

He shifted into an enormous panther and a purring came from his chest. Her hands dug into the soft and silky fur, enjoying the rumbling as he cuddled next to her and they watched a light comedy.

When the show was over, she wandered into the shower and took a quick sonic that left her and her clothing clean. Examination resulted in finding a hairbrush and assisted her in making her appearance more presentable.

Raddik was bipedal again and getting dressed. "I think that we should avoid any sexual contact until you are well. Holding still almost killed me and the extra energy cost me a set of clothes."

She sighed. "You didn't enjoy it."

He walked to her with his pants half-fastened. He grabbed her arms and shook her lightly.

"Don't be foolish, you broke the control of the Alpha, I was so overjoyed that I couldn't hold my natural shape anymore. I enjoyed it so much I didn't stop you before I started to lose control."

"Next time, don't start making out with me unless we can lose a little control."

He grinned and kissed her forehead tenderly. "Maybe we can just cuddle."

With her own words thrown back at her, she was only able to giggle and give him a hug, studiously ignoring the warm, silky feel of his skin against her palms. "Raddik, let's go for a walk. Somewhere cold. And boring. Is it time for medical yet?"

He chuckled and gave her a hug that made her wish her four days were up.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

Three days on the ship with every waking moment spent not thinking about her one night with Raddik came to a head when Dr. Naro came to their quarters for the final treatment.

“Are you ready for this, Courier Borrow?”

“Yes, Dr. Naro.” The reasons for the formality had become apparent when Raddik’s abstinence on her behalf had started to show itself whenever the doctor touched her on the second day. The third day was worse.

Today was the final day and it was guaranteed to get very personal. The only area left to repair was the interior of her sex and it was going to require close contact from the contact healer.

Raddik had already shifted into a cute little bunny and was staying in the outer room with the door open. It was the least aggressive animal that he had in his repertoire.

“I have foregone undergarments to speed this up.” She sat on the bed and drew the edge of the powder blue gown up to expose her legs and

thighs.

"This gel should ease the way and increase conductivity." He coated his fingers and pressed them between her thighs.

Over his shoulder, Honey could see a very large bunny in the doorway. As she watched, the bunny grew fangs. "Raddik, knock it off."

She was so busy watching the rabbit for signs of attack that Dr. Naro managed to work his fingers into her and the warmth of his healing started to spread. "The damage remaining is minimal. You would have healed within a week or two, but our Alpha wanted you complete as quickly as possible and seeing his face, I agree with him."

The doctor's babbling sunk in as he twisted his fingers to repair the last bit of muscle and mucous membranes. She didn't react as if she had a man inside her. This was simply a medical procedure only slightly more invasive than a Terran pap test.

He withdrew from her and wiped his hand on a cloth on a tray next to the bed. "There, all done."

Raddik was at the doctor's side in a second. "Then, dear doctor, I would suggest you leave."

Dr. Naro couldn't get his stuff together and leave fast enough.

"He's a gamma, isn't he?" Honey tried to stifle laughter as Raddik pulled her to her feet and stripped her gown from her, yanking it up and over her head without loosening the ties.

“You are learning fast. Yes, he is. Talented, but willing to follow orders unquestioningly.” His hands moved swiftly to remove her slip and then her breast band. She had kept her slip on in bed to remove temptation and he had kept to sleeping in an animal form. The pheromones were not right to trigger his lust when he was an animal, so it was safest when they were together.

She smiled as he palmed her breasts worshipfully. Time to tangle a little. The twenty jumps that the ship had gone through were passing over her senses like water. Only six jumps and they would be on Ohshlin.

As if he sensed that her mind was elsewhere, Raddik leaned down to take her lip between his teeth. It was enough of a distraction to have her wrap her arms around his neck and lift her lips to his. They fell to the bed with their mouths connected, feeding on each other, driving their bodies to the edge.

She rubbed her nipples into the hard planes of his chest and he thrust his thigh between hers. She groaned as he gripped her hips and rocked her against the hard muscle until she screamed when her release shattered her into glittering shards.

She focussed on him when he had rolled her to her back and was licking and sucking at her neck, breasts and belly. His tongue seemed long and had a rough texture as he tasted her again, when

he burrowed between her thighs, he kept the cat-like appendage working on her clit until it was pulsing with every touch.

Raddik lunged over her, seating himself easily within, his cock using the leftover gel for a frictionless entry.

"Oh, wow." The face that looked down at her as his body slid and thrust into hers was barely human by her standards. His ears were pointed, eyes slitted, nose flattened and teeth elongated and deadly. She already knew about his tongue and his hands.

He held still for a moment as she took him in. "Honey?"

"Do you just want to cuddle?"

The relieved grin that crossed his face was accompanied by an increase in his girth. "No, cuddling is off the menu until we land."

A hard thrust stroked inside her and she arched until her breasts touched his chest, crying out in enjoyment. They took on a rhythm as she lifted her hips to meet his halfway, bringing him as deep as she could. She dug her nails into the hard muscle of his ass and pulled him into her over and over as she got closer and closer to her peak.

He reached between them and stroked her clit with one talon and she screamed in release. His roar was on her in seconds and his teeth an instant after that. The sharp spike of pain started another

hot rush of spasms from within her, but gasping was her only option with a shifter on her throat.

This time, he licked at the wounds he had made on her neck, sealing them and taking the sting away.

He nuzzled the side of her neck and a deep purring ran through him. He rolled over with him still inside her and chuckled. "This is going to be a very long night."

She rocked her hips back and welcomed his returning erection. "Promises, promises."

## CHAPTER NINE

Five jumps had occurred during the night and after an eventful and entertaining evening, Honey was yawning as they stood on the observation deck with the captain and high-ranking crew.

"The last jump home is almost upon us. Ohshlin awaits." The captain was enthusiastic.

Honey stood in Raddik's embrace. It defied protocol, but her legs were a little wobbly and it was all the Alpha's fault. He had been determined to make up for lost time.

She had come to grips with the fact that all the shifters could smell Raddik on her. They seemed rather relieved that his irritation now had an outlet.

Honey wrapped Raddik's arms more tightly around her as she watched the darkness of space shiver for an instant before the ship jumped location. When space steadied, a blue jewel of a planet spun serenely in the darkness.

Raddik held her tightly. "Welcome to Ohshlin."



Two transports waited for them when they landed. Morin, Lefflik and two other staff members accompanied them as they boarded the first. Honey only saw a glimpse, but she saw a few boxes with cargo markings and hope surged inside her. Her things.

She sat next to Raddik and nodded off while they travelled. Hands shook her gently awake as they stopped moving.

"Honey, we are home."

She smiled sleepily, knowing that he didn't get the joke but gasped when the full expanse of an enormous house in the centre of a town became apparent. "Wow. Big house."

He tucked her under his arm and exited the transport with two men in front and two behind. "Don't worry, sweet. You don't have to clean it."

The folks around were on their normal schedules. A few stopped and greeted their Alpha, but others just smiled, nodded and kept about their daily tasks.

"That is a very nice, low-key homecoming."

"There will be a formal return in a few days. You will be introduced to your new people then."

She protested, though it was only for her own dignity. "I haven't agreed to stay yet."

He gave her a look that called her out. "I will have your agreement before this night is over. Oh,

for the sake of formality, I would like you to sign an IOU for the night you owe me.”

They entered the main hall and she noted that everyone here seemed to know their place. She hoped that she was a fast learner.

Their entourage turned into a tour. She saw and met several of the kitchen staff who fed not only the Alpha but all the unwed men who lived under his roof. It was a method of keeping the troublemakers in one place, under the watchful eye of an older, more powerful male.

The negotiations centre, the contract offices, the disputes centre, they all were bustling and everyone stopped to be introduced to Raddik’s mate. She had no status within their community yet, that would come later, if at all.

The head of his household appeared and smiled at her graciously. He was definitely a beta. Strong minded but eager to please.

Raddik introduced them. “Vilnin, this is my mate, Encoded Courier to the Alliance, Honey Borrow, late of Terra.”

“Pleased to meet you, madam. Your seamstress is waiting in your rooms. Alpha Norfim, there are documents for you to sign when you have settled your mate.”

He inclined his head and backed off to the side.

“Honey, these are my offices. Come inside for a moment.” Raddik pulled her inside and shut the

door, giving her a kiss that bruised her lips. "Now, let's make that document."

He gave her a writing implement and a sheet of paper, then took an empty decorative bottle and waited.

She wrote, *I, Honey Borrow, owe Raddik Norfim, one night in his bed.* She signed it with a flourish and handed him the paper.

He smiled at her. "Excellent. Lefflik will show you to our rooms, I have an errand to run. I will meet you shortly."

With that weird dismissal, she left him alone and unfastening his shirt.

"Um, Lefflik, Raddik would like you to show me to our rooms. He will meet me there later. He has an errand to run."

She was as perplexed as the rest of them, but two of the guards took up a post outside the office while the other two went with her to see her new rooms.

As they walked away, she could have sworn that she heard a window opening and a bird scream. *Nah.*

Seamstress was another word for torturer. Honey had been poked and prodded until she finally hissed at the dour woman. It wasn't a word—it was a displeased hiss that she had heard from the multi-shifters on the warship.

"I beg your pardon, my lady." She proceeded with care from that point on.

Honey stood and realized that she was going to have to act the part of the Alpha's lady. The hiss, rude by her own standards, had been a much delayed appropriate response.

A shadow moved in the doorway and the Alpha himself was there, winking. He could have stopped her torture at any time, but he wanted to see her react, she could see it in his gaze.

"This is funny, isn't it? Laugh while you can, Raddik. I predict a series of cold and dismal nights for you."

The gasp from the seamstress and her assistants was audible.

"Then I will wait for spring." He came forward and gave her a kiss, the dais she was standing on put them at eye level for the first time. "How grows our little one?"

"He is relaxed and at peace, more than I can say for me. This is quite a lot to learn." She gestured to take in the whole planet.

"You will manage. You are a survivor. Are you finished, madam?"

The seamstress floundered at being directly addressed. "Yes, Alpha. She has daily clothing and I will have a formal gown for her introduction."

"Excellent. Thank you."

He lifted Honey off the dais and led her to the private study that was part of their quarters. "I want to show you my telescope."

"Is that a euphemism for something?"

He laughed. "No. Come this way."

Instead of pointing it at the sky, he aimed it to a distant mountain peak shrouded in clouds. He checked the aim and then locked it in place. "What do you see?"

She leaned in to put her eye to the eyepiece and stared. She could see a hill of rock and a fluttering piece of fabric. "I see what seems to be a flying shirt."

"Why do you think that that is there?"

She was drawing a blank. "I have no idea."

He pulled her into his arms and smiled down at her. "If you ever try to leave, I will sue you for breach of contract and breaking your debt."

"What?"

"That flag is near a bottle and corked inside that bottle is your note. Proof that there is an outstanding debt between us as you can never hand me your voucher to confirm it has been fulfilled."

Sheer shock rippled through her. "Why you sneaky bastard."

"Not a bastard, you will meet my family during your introduction." He grinned madly and pulled her through to his bed.

“Now, given that you are in arrears with your debt, I do think that you should try and mitigate my wrath given that I am the injured party.”

She started laughing and kept it up throughout his snarls, his growling and his triumphant howl.

\* \* \* \*

In the front room, the seamstress smiled as she listened to the sounds of joyous mating. Perhaps the pale Terran was the right woman for the job of taming the Alpha after all.

## EPILOGUE

*Three years later*

**W**alking on the beach was one of the joys of Honey's pregnancy. "Corrak, don't go too far."

Her firstborn was frolicking in the icy waters, his seal shape keeping him toasty warm as he flopped in and out of the water, keeping to the shallows.

Every time he got out too deep, a shrieking golden rainbow of feathers would pluck him from the waves and deposit him back next to his mother. She sat watching her extended family fly, run and flutter on the beach, sitting solemnly on a rock, controlling them all with her voice.

Kaylee had come to visit the previous year and had remarked on Honey turning into the Shifter Whisperer. It was easy enough, she just had to always act like she was in charge and was aware of all consequences for all actions around her.

When it got to be too much, Raddik brought her here, to their little retirement home on the shores

of the main continent. His family came to the house as well and together they had a relaxing few days that helped her settle and gave her time to bake and cook.

As she watched, a few of the shifters changed into their bipedal forms and headed for the house. She was the only person she knew on this world who wore clothing during all outside hours.

As she thought of public nudity, her mate appeared in front of her, carrying their son. "Corrak is sleepy. I will take him up to the house for a nap. Stay here."

Raddik's mother was inside working on supper, she would keep an eye on Corrak. With this pregnancy, Honey couldn't stand to be around cooking food. She could eat like a champ, but cooking was out of the question, so when she and her little family were alone, the Alpha had to put on the apron.

Outside had become her safest and most comfortable place.

Raddik had found pants when he went inside, but had left his feet bare. He loved the feel of sand in his toes and they had spent many nights trying to get it out of other body parts.

Without asking, he lifted her up and put her down on his lap. "How is your stomach today?"

"Pretty good. Should we get the sex on this little one determined?" The baby was a bump



without its brother's bad habit of putting his body into a force field when threatened. It was a handy reflex when he was in the ocean, but at the top of a set of stairs, not so much.

"No. Let's have a surprise." He wrapped one hand around her waist and cupped her breast with the other. "Do you agree?"

She watched the sun set on this alien world and realized that it wasn't alien anymore. She had family and her life was starting all over again. She had a man who loved her enough to remind her of her debt and a people who refused to fetch the bottle back for her even though they could easily reach it. It was her kryptonite and it turned her into a more sympathetic figure for the Oefric. She was good for their leader and they were not going to let her go.

"You are the Alpha and I will always agree with you. Well, unless I don't agree and then I will take it up in private." She nibbled at his jaw and gnawed at his neck.

His increased breathing made her smile. That spot on his neck was a precise location and she had committed it to memory when she found it. She slid her arm around his back and sat happily with him, watching the first of three sunsets.

The sex would come, it always did and if she was very, very lucky, it wouldn't involve removing sand from crevices.

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

Hello, all, and thanks for coming.

In *Encode*, I went back to *Station 13*, referred to *Tears of the Star* and finally tumbled Honey into the arms of the Oefric. A race first seen in *Enforce*.

When a race sets up colonies, they need a home world and where did these critters come from? Ohshlin. A planet guaranteed to make some folks spit when they pronounce it out loud.

Thanks for joining me for this set of five, *Entropy*, *Entrap*, *Engage*, *Enforce* and now...*Encode*.

The next set of five is in the planning stages, some of the covers are on my work-in-process page on my website.

I love the new cover for *Chain*. It is one of Martine Jardin's best and in case you didn't know, she does all these weird and wonderful covers for me.

That's it for now.

Your faithful author,  
Viola Grace

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

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

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

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

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