

FLIGHT AND FANTASY



VIOLA
GRACE

Wingless Annanya has been working on a flight suit for the grand exhibition, but meeting a handsome prince throws a wrench into the works. Can a woman raised amongst a species with wings ever find true happiness with a man who can soar when she can't? Hell yeah.

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Flight and Fantasy
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FLIGHT AND FANTASY

BY

VIOLA GRACE

“She went this way. Get her!” Feet pounded past her hiding place and kept going.

Annanya hid under the skimmer, flat on her back with no clearance between her breasts and the transport.

Since she would be stuck there for a few minutes at least, she looked at the open panel right above her head. There was sparking damage from a short so she reached up and began to rewire the ship.

Running into Cabre with Nasha had been trouble, but when her friends started in on mocking the *wingless wonder*, nothing could stop them. They fashioned a pair of wings out of garbage and were trying to pin them on her when she struggled away from Cabre’s cronies and hid under the skimmer.

She froze when she heard footsteps return. “Sir, have you seen a wingless woman here?”

A deep voice almost made her jump out of her skin. She hadn’t thought there was anyone in the repair bay. “No. Nothing so exotic as that.”

Cabre’s voice was tight, “Sorry to disturb you, sir. I will look elsewhere.”

“That would be wise. The owner is fussy about

those who surround his skimmer.”

She could see Cabre’s feet as his heels snapped together and he departed the repair bay. The other feet did not go anywhere.

“Miss? You can’t have much room under there and the skimmer can’t fly right now, so you are stuck unless you choose to come out and converse with me.” The boot tips were pointed at her and she couldn’t help but admire the deep burgundy gleam of the polish.

“Just give me a minute to finish these repairs and I will be right out, sir.” Since Cabre had addressed him as sir, it was a safe bet that she was under the skimmer of a noble.

The last couplings were managed with the wire cutters and crimping pliers she kept in her corset. Some girls packed it with tissues, she put tools in.

Annanya sealed the panel and scooted slowly out from under the skimmer. She was sure that she had grime on her cheeks and hands, but when she saw the owner of the skimmer her stomach dropped to her tailbone. “Your Highness.”

She scrambled to her feet and gave a curtsey with her short skirt. Her tights were bagging at the knees, her corset was bulging with tools and her blouse was a silvery grey. She was not at her best to meet royalty.

He touched her chin and lifted it so she was looking into his unbelievably blue eyes. “You recognized me.”

"Of course, Your Highness. I read the news and follow the flickers." She shoved her white blonde hair out of her eyes. It had escaped from her braid once again.

"What is your name, little mechanic?"

She blushed. "Annanya Fennor."

"It is odd to see one of your kind this far from the city. How is it that you come to be so far from the Orion Rest embassy?"

"I was raised here, your highness. I was found as an infant and taken in by the Fennors. They tried to find anyone who knew who or what I was and were unsuccessful. So, they raised me with their own."

"I see. Unusual circumstance for an unusual woman."

"If I may ask, sir? What are you doing here?"

He grinned, sending her heart tripping at nine times its normal rate. He was handsome, with his golden hair waving from his forehead to that chiselled chin and those devastating eyes. She could have fallen in love with just his looks if he hadn't also been a philanthropist and polite, even to her in her wingless condition.

"My shuttle had a malfunction over your fair town and I decided to land before I killed myself. I didn't know that there was a festival going on, or I would have gone to the magistrate to arrange the repairs."

She smiled softly, dazed by his presence before

she realized what he was talking about. "Well, your skimmer is fixed, but there was a problem with rodent infestation. You may want to watch where you park it."

He was chuckling while he spoke, "You fixed it while you were hiding under it?"

"I needed to have something to do with myself and I had all my tools with me." She patted the corset that was standard wear for a proper lady, but hers was stained with grease.

"I will pay you for that bodice." He reached into his pocket and withdrew a purse. "Also, I will reimburse you for the repairs."

She blushed. "Your Highness, it isn't necessary. I destroy more clothing than I can count, and the repairs kept me calm. Also, you did drive off one of my pursuers so for that I owe you."

He tilted his head and ruffled his midnight wings. "Why were they after you?"

"I am wingless, they are not, they enjoy tormenting me, knowing I have only one means of escape."

"I see."

She was afraid he did.

"Will you attend the great mechanical exhibition in Morcroft next month?" There was something in his eyes that was inappropriate for his station, and hers.

"I had planned to, yes. I have an item to exhibit."

He took a few coins out of his purse and pressed the purse itself into her hands. "Show that at the main tent and they will bring you to me. I would enjoy a conversation on how you gained your mechanical skills."

She looked down at the heavy purse with the royal seal on it and bobbed another quick curtsy. "Thank you, Your Highness."

"Call me, Denaric. I will see you at the display. It is shaping up to be quite the interesting event." He bowed to her and kissed the back of her grubby hand before winking and waving for her to make her escape.

As she crept out of the repair bay, she tucked the purse into her corset, feeling the warmth of his crest while his skimmer hummed to life behind her. Her repair was solid and he would make it wherever he was going.

She was taking her money right to the supply shop to get the final component for her project. Her father had offered her bits and bobs from his workshop, but she needed the canisters to help the hydraulics run.

She giggled as she dodged the sight of her pursuers and ducked into the supply shop. Time would fly until the great exhibition, and soon, so would she.

Vahsha watched her pack up her creation. Annanya loved her sister, the only one of the

Fennor siblings who didn't pick on her. "I can't believe it works."

It was the ninth time her sister had said that and Anna grinned. The test flight had occurred in the middle of the night, with only Vahsha as a witness. "I know, but it does and I want to display it at the exhibition. Father is bringing his new harvester so I will be down the centre from him. No one will know we are related unless he tells them."

Vahsha ruffled her dark grey wings and frowned. Her matching dark grey eyes were sober. "Father is not embarrassed by you. He and mother love you very much."

Anna wrapped a final tarp over her creation and looked at her sister. "I know it. And I also know that having a wingless wonder in the family brings aspersions to Father's bloodline. If that can be avoided, I am all for it."

"And since Nasha is coming, you need to be on your guard. I understand." Vahsha helped her tie the tarp firmly in place. "It is odd to me that she would go in the hopes of finding someone better than Cabre, but she always was greedy."

"We both know she hopes to marry nobility, but with her looks, settling for Cabre would be the wiser course." They both giggled.

Nasha entered the workshop and frowned. "Are you ready? Father is waiting."

Annanya winked at Vahsha and hauled the

small cart out of the shop. Her father helped her load the whole thing into the wagon so she would be able to drag it around the exhibition.

“Come on, brainy, it is time for us to begin our journey to Morcroft.” Vorlar Fennor smiled fondly at her and waved for her to mount her horse. Nasha couldn’t ride, her wings were too fluffy and tickled the horses.

That was the reason Nasha gave anyway. Annanya suspected that her eldest sister was afraid of the beasts.

Snowflake was Anna’s favourite mount, his ebony colour and red eyes gave a charming contrast to her own paler colouring. He pranced under her as she settled in the saddle, but calmed at her touch.

With her father and sister in the wagon and her mount eager to get started, they began the eight-hour journey to Morcroft.

Her registration ticket in her hand, Anna hauled her creation into the secure area for storage before their display. The registrar gave her wingless back a strange look, then read what her invention was and smiled. “Many of your kind have tried this. I have never seen one work yet.”

She merely nodded and put her cart into the security-laden area. Anna checked and double-checked that all of her components were secure before she left them. Nothing would

interfere with her part of the exhibition.

There were a dozen guards watching the dormant exhibits. This was the prime inventor faire of the year. The discoveries unleashed here could be sold throughout the stars. It was quite a moment for the inventors and investors alike.

With her duties discharged, she went to seek a meal. Everywhere around her, folk took off and landed with casual ease. The heights of the surrounding cliffs were alive with bars, taverns and hostels. The grounders had to make do with the tents pitched on the edges of the exhibition space. Food, drink and rest were not the best or most comfortable, but being on the ground meant a lower class indeed.

A large pavilion was arranged with the colours of the royal family fluttering in the breeze. She pressed a hand against her corset and felt the bag beneath the fabric. She needed only to present it to the guards and they would take her to the prince.

Her hand trembled as she thought of him and she quickly pushed those images of his black silken wings aside.

Anna tilted her head and an upward glance showed her Nasha and her father sitting on one of the lower balconies. They looked down and her father waved while Nasha pretended not to see her. Smiling to herself, she sought her own element. The grounders.

Broken and single wings filled the dining hall

with a few wingless patrons sitting at well-worn tables. She sought familiar faces and grinned when she found one. When the elder with two broken grey wings waved her over, she joined him and held up two fingers followed by one fist when the barkeep looked over.

"I did it, Tenyen. I managed to come up with a workable solution."

"Greetings to you, Anna. Are you sure?" He leaned back to let a waitress clear his plate and deposit two beers.

"Yes. I have tested it."

"Do you think it will work in the exhibition?" His bright blue eyes twinkled.

It was a common thing that the most grand of machines would not work on the day. She winked. "It will. I even packed spare parts for it."

"I look forward to seeing it. What did Vorlar bring this year?"

She smiled at the waitress as her own meal was delivered. "He has a harvester for some of the more delicate crops. What did you bring?"

"A seeder. It is completely solar as well."

She applauded him. "Bravo. How is Mitia?"

"She despairs being married to an inventor, but she has been doing so for the last thirty-nine years. You would think she had learned by now." He toasted her with the beer she had ordered.

"Some women are slow learners. Any of our regular crowd here this year?"

He scratched his head. "Tomas, Nukidial, and of course the Vekkor brothers."

She nodded. "No sign of Garthol?"

"His wife just had a baby."

"Ah." She dug into the stew and tore off chunks of bread to douse in the gravy. She ate and they chatted for twenty minutes when the interior of the grounder's tavern fell quiet.

Someone had walked up behind her and Anna was afraid to turn around.

Tenyen got to his feet and bowed. "Your Highness. How nice to see you here."

Anna flinched and slowly looked up and to her right. Yes, she was not going insane, he was really there. His blue eyes sparkled in the candlelight of the tavern and she smiled. "Good evening, Your Highness."

"And an enchanting evening to you, Miss Fennor. I had hoped to hear from you when you arrived." The chastising note in his tone caused Tenyen to hike one eyebrow high in amusement.

"You two have met?"

"When I first met this lovely young woman, she was flat on her back. I noticed her legs first, actually." His grin was bordering on evil as everyone within earshot laughed.

"And you thought enough of her legs to seek her out?" Tenyen was having a hard time not guffawing outright.

Anna sighed and pounded her head against the

table repetitively.

"I did not mean to distress you, miss."

"Oh, I think that was your intent, Your Highness." She looked up at him while rubbing her forehead. "What brings you to the lowly grounder tavern?"

Tenyen blinked. "Where are my manners? Your Highness, would you sit?"

Grinning, he moved to sit across from Anna, bracketing her knees with his own. She tried to shift away, but he held her where she was.

"Why didn't you come and find me when you arrived? The registrar said you were in an hour ago."

She blushed. "You asked the registrar?"

"Of course. How else would I have known when you got here?" His gentle chide made Tenyen laugh. Her old friend was enjoying her predicament far too much.

A beer slid in front of him and the waitress took care not to brush against him. It was humorous that a woman who would come on to a rigid stick took a wide berth around royalty.

Anna found herself staring into the eyes of the prince who had come to a place beneath his standing in search of her. "Your Highness, it must not be every day that you find yourself among the wingless."

"My people are not determined by their wings, but by their loyalty to the crown." He inclined his

head and in that moment, it struck Anna that he would one day be king.

"You are judging the inventions tomorrow?"

"I will attend, but others will judge. I am merely the deciding vote."

Something relaxed in Annanya's chest. She wanted her invention to be deemed worthy, not simply on its workability, but its merits.

"I had another motive to seeking you out. Would you dance with me this evening?" His demeanour was earnest, but his words confused her.

"What? Where? This was my last stop for the night. I was going to the grounder barracks to sleep after this."

His brow furrowed. "There is a ball this evening. An invitation was sent to your father's house, I am sure of it."

Tears came to her eyes as the reason for Nasha's attendance was now clear. "Nasha gets the mail. She must have known about it and just forgotten to tell me."

His face darkened with anger. "Will you come anyway?"

"I have nothing to wear." She shrugged. "I only brought work gear with me. I am afraid that I will not be attending your function."

His hands clenched on the table, but a calculating look spilled into his eyes. "What if I told you it was a masked costume event? Would

you be able to scrounge something up?"

Tenyen leaned over and covered her mouth with his hand. "She will be happy, too. What time will you pick her up? You know, of course, that she cannot fly there."

"An honour guard will come for her in an hour. Is that enough time?" The prince rose to his feet and the room jumped up around him.

Tenyen jumped to his feet and saluted. "Your Highness, you are in the largest conference of inventors in the world. She will be ready in an hour."

He grinned, kissed the back of Anna's hand and left the tavern.

The moment he was gone, the room burst into action.

Annanya was shoved outside into one of the interim workrooms and around her, a costume of fantastic metals wove itself from chains, rivets and sheets of bronze.

Tenyen made her mask and another inventor donated silk from their tent. A corset was shaped from bronze and chain while sandals were crafted from coiled wire and laminated rubber. Fifty inventors came to her rescue, and when the honour guard appeared, she was dressed like a lady who enjoyed a little metal bondage.

Her mask was made of heavy gauge wire strands soldered together and shaped to her face as it cooled. The guard looked surprised to see

her, but she merely held her hand out to him and let him escort her to an open area where he and his companion could lift off. He held her in his arms and jumped, holding gently but firmly.

She had analysed the flight patterns of her people, and the telekinetic shove from the earth was the biggest portion of their advantage over mechanics. Her suit had fought to use magnetic forces to compensate and she had succeeded with a solid shove of her legs and a surge of power through a coil of wire.

Anna finally noticed their destination. "The floating platform?"

The guards looked at her as if she was stupid. "All major celebrations are held on the platform. This one is no different."

"Oh. I have not been invited before this."

"That much is obvious. I hear that the wingless find the platform uncomfortable." He didn't say anything else, but she had gotten the impression nonetheless. *Wingless*.

* * * *

Lights and colours exploded and wings of pure white and black were everywhere. A few dove grey wings were in small bunches in the crowd, but most of the winged were on the dance floor.

The royal family were arranged at one end of the platform and everyone was wearing a mask

and costume. For once, she barely stood out.

A figure detached from the royal dais and approached her. Denaric. In a mask, he was her equal, even with his wings. He strode right up to her and looked down into her eyes. "If this is what the inventors can do in an hour, we need to increase their funding. They can work miracles."

She looked down, but he didn't give her a chance to demur. Anna was in his arms and dancing before she knew it.

His hand on the small of her back sent tremors through her, but she tried to keep her mind on matters at hand. "I have never been on the flight platform before. It is nice, Your Highness."

He leaned back and laughed. "In masks, call me Denaric. It is far too informal a night for anything more."

She inclined her head and smiled, but it was only two rounds on the dance floor before he leaned forward and whispered in her ear. "Say my name, Annanya. I want to hear it from your lips."

She opened her lips and whispered it to him, "Denaric."

The gleam of satisfaction filled his bright blue eyes behind his mask and his lips tightened below the gold edge of the eagle features. The stylized raptor suited him well.

"This event is quite large, Denaric."

"We hold it every year on the night before the opening ceremonies."

"There are few grounders here." She clung to him as he swung her around another couple and she laughed nervously while she caught her footing.

"The dignitaries from Orion Rift will be here tomorrow for a tea. Each one will be flown up by a guardsmen. They have no wings." He smiled down at her with a conspiratorial grin. "Would you like to attend?"

"I would enjoy that, but I will be at my category showing off my invention."

"What is this mystery machine that occupies your time? Should I be jealous?" He drew them to a halt on the edge of the dance floor and kept one arm around her waist.

"You will have to wait until tomorrow like everyone else. If it doesn't match my expectations, I won't be showing it."

He laughed. "Not even a sneak peek for me?"

She smiled at his persistence. "No. Not even you. If something goes wrong, I don't want anyone beyond myself disappointed."

"You were talking with your friend about it."

"That is different. With inventors, it is a competition. It is good to rattle your competition. That, and he and I are in different categories." She took the cup of punch that he handed her and sipped. There was enough alcohol under the subtle fruit to make her head spin.

"Denaric, introduce me to your lady friend." A

woman in a dark gown with a feline headdress that matched her ebony wings approached.

"Mother, this is Annanya Fennor. Annanya, this is Queen Amaraic."

Annanya found herself face to face with the ruler of Horshell. "Your Majesty." She curtsied deeply.

"So, you are Denaric's flightless attraction. I have to say, you do look lovely this evening, child. Isn't that curtsy a little painful by now?" The rich amusement in her tone made Anna look up.

"It is cramping me up a little, Your Majesty. May I stand?"

Denaric snorted and lifted her by the elbow to a standing position. "No need to curtsy. My mother is masked and most rules of etiquette do not apply tonight."

"You have the colouring and physique of Orion Rift. How do you come to be among our citizens?" Amaraic took a cup of punch and sipped at it. A respectfully large space opened around them as the queen spoke to the wingless one.

"I was a foundling as an infant. The Fennors took me in and raised me with their own."

"Where were your people?"

"I don't know. No one in the area knows where I came from. My father found me in a field, almost ran me over in a harvester." She chuckled.

"That's horrible. You were just lying there?"

"Yup. Naked as the day I was born. No trace of

anything on my body that could lead to who my people were. The Fennors had daughters, so I joined their little group. When my mechanical traits became evident, my father encouraged me and that is how I ended up fixing your son's skimmer."

She was babbling and couldn't stop herself. Denaric was behind her with a hand on her ass. His wings were full enough to hide his actions from casual viewing.

"Ah, so that is how you met him. I did wonder. So, you have something in the competition tomorrow?"

"Yes, madam. I do." The hand on her ass was slowly exploring the curve of her buttocks and she was having a hard time keeping her mind on the conversation.

The flash of silver in the background got her attention and she turned her head to see Nasha swishing her skirts at the nobles, her dove grey wings fluttering to catch the eye.

"There is my sister. I am sure she will be relieved that I made it to the event after all the fuss." She turned to her dapper groper. "Would you care to escort me, Denaric?"

Amaraic smiled and waved them off. "Go and show each other off. Enjoy your evening, my dear."

Annanya smiled as she resumed the dance

floor. Nasha's face was worth every unsure moment she had experienced getting ready for this evening.

"I need to be going soon. The display starts early." She swayed against him and smiled in a happy haze of lust and a touch of alcohol.

"You wouldn't leave me so soon?" His laugh was deep and he held her close.

"An inventor keeps odd hours. I have been up since before dawn. It is time for me to be seeking a bed."

He leaned in and whispered, "I would have you join me in mine."

"I don't think I could stand the heights." She smiled and brushed her fingers against his cheek.

"I sleep in the tent on the grounds. You are merely a walk of shame away from your own bed." His words were persuasive.

"Are you sober enough to fly?"

He pressed his erection against her and waltzed her over to the edge of the platform. With a flare of his wings, Denaric launched them into the night sky and together, they glided to earth.

She was safe in his arms as the silent wind fluttered her hair and blew past them. The silk of her skirt fluttered wildly around her legs and she fought the urge to giggle madly as he landed and simply kept his grip on her as he carried her past the guards into the depths of the royal pavilion.

"How does this come off?" Denaric was

tugging at the metal corset.

She leaned back and flicked the two levers on the left side of the garment under her arm. It popped open and left the thin damp fabric of her improvised dress clinging to her body.

She shivered as he slid the gown off her shoulders to pool around her feet, but the glow in his eyes warmed her considerably. Her nipples tightened and her inhalation lifted her breasts to him in offering.

He was not slow in answering the invitation. Her winged prince leaned down and took a nipple in his mouth, kneeling in front of her for better access. She threaded her fingers through his golden hair and when he looked up at her through those incredibly blue eyes, she bit her lip and stifled a moan.

His hands stroked her back as if delighted to find smooth skin without the distraction of wings. She shivered in his hands and held his mouth to her breasts as her thighs became slick with the evidence of her arousal.

He slid one hand between her thighs, parting them gently and slipping one finger between her folds and teasing his way inside. Annanya yelped in surprise and clutched his shoulders. His finger retreated and then re-entered in a smooth motion that made her rise up on her toes.

His teeth held a nipple firmly and she dropped back to flat feet under the threat. A second finger

joined his first and he hooked them forward, searching for something. When he pressed on a spot on the front of her channel, the breath left her lungs and her knees buckled.

He stroked that spot with deliberate pressure until her eyes went wide and a high wail came from her lips.

Bright sparks flew behind her eyes and the world spun around her as her channel gripped his fingers. She came back to her senses on the bed and Denaric was quickly divesting himself of his clothing.

His wings framed his golden body in a dark halo as he approached her. She trembled with anticipation as he crept toward her with the intensity of a hunting jungle cat. She reached out and stroked his feathers, reaching around him to touch the base of his wings in a slow stroke.

He groaned and the heated rod of his erection left a trail of liquid up her thigh.

Annanya kissed Denaric before she could change her mind and arched her hips against him in invitation. He reached down and fitted himself to her as he pressed kisses to her neck.

She held perfectly still as he rocked against her, sliding in tiny increments into her depths. When he reached her hymen, he stopped and looked down at her in surprise. "Annanya?"

She stroked the base of his wings hard while wrapping her thighs around him and his hips

jerked forward, breaking through.

She winced and fought the tears of pain that rippled through her. Amidst the pain, she felt a defiance. She had chosen the man of her first time and he was beautiful, fun and charming. When she left the exposition, she would have this memory to remind her of being desired for once in her life.

Denaric wasn't moving inside her, but he was fighting for breath. He retreated cautiously and thrust back into her with the same care. Sweat was slicking his torso, which brushed against her breasts as he rocked into her and withdrew in a slow rhythm.

Pain took a back seat to pleasure as he trailed kisses down her jaw line to her neck and over to the other side. When he started to move inside her in earnest, he pulled back and met her stunned gaze with his own.

He reached between them and rubbed at her clit, building her rise to climax in under a minute. She opened her mouth to shriek, but he claimed her mouth with his own and took the sound into his body.

His groan was given back to her the same way and he slumped over her, his wings covering them both. He lay there for a few minutes and then rose to dampen a cloth in water. He washed his cock and then returned to her with a fresh cloth and removed the blood from her thighs.

He tossed the cloth to the side of the bed and rejoined her, cuddling her against him spoon fashion. "You should have told me."

She closed her eyes and then muttered, "You figured it out."

"I could have made it easier for you."

"It was wonderful. I am sorry to have importuned you. I will go." She tried to move out of his embrace, but he held her still.

"You are going nowhere. I have you and I intend to keep you." He nuzzled her neck and trailed light kisses across her skin.

"I am not yours to keep, Your Highness." She settled more firmly into his embrace, the silky softness of his wings a lovely blanket.

As she drifted off, she thought she heard, "We will see about that."

"Your Highness, there is a message for your companion and you are needed on the platform. The Orion Rift delegation has arrived."

Annanya bolted upright, but Denaric's wing stayed between her and the guard in the doorway.

He was holding a folded parcel that seemed to be her coveralls. "What is the message?"

"They have moved up your category because of the incoming storm. You have half an hour to make it to the display area." The guard nodded and placed the coveralls on a chair near the doorway.

The instant he disappeared, she turned to Denaric and gave him a quick kiss. "I have to go."

He laughed and ruffled her hair. "Take your mask off first. I will see you later. Have a flawless exhibition."

Blushing, she removed her mask and splashed water on her face. The coveralls went on quickly and she found her security tag in the pocket. She may be barefoot, but she was set for her day.

She turned to wave goodbye to Denaric and he was standing and stretching. The perfect image to leave her with. She muttered a quick goodbye and ran for the storage area, flashing her card to the guard on duty and making her way to her storage section. The knots were intact and she sighed in relief that her creation had not been tampered with.

With no thought to her potential audience, she stripped off her coveralls and pulled on her flight suit. The wings were stabilizers, but they added a certain style to the whole creation. Annanya was listening to the wind pick up, but she was confident in her creation and its ability to fly.

With her registration tag on the outside of her suit, she test fired and was relieved when she lifted a few inches off the ground.

She moved toward the exhibition grounds, ignoring the laughter and mockery aimed her way. The suit was white with gold banding, designed to use electromagnetic force to lift her

from the ground.

“Annanya Fennor. Final call for Annanya Fennor.” The loud speaker announced it and Anna broke into a run.

She skidded to a halt next to the registrar and handed her entry pass to him.

The mocking look she received was unmistakable, but she took the stage slightly out of breath.

“Ladies and gentlemen of the exhibition, I present to you my flight suit for the flightless. It uses electromagnetic propulsion and the wings are both cosmetic and used as stabilizers.”

The panel of four were looking at her suit with expressions varying from interest to contempt.

“May I demonstrate?”

They nodded.

She pressed the toggles on the generator and lifted from the ground to a gasp from the crowd. She lifted herself fifty feet in the air, did some aerobatic manoeuvres and returned neatly to the stage.

Applause followed and she waited until they subsided before she continued. “The suit has a power supply that will last for two hours. It can be adapted to fit those who have lost the ability to fly or for those born without wings entirely. Thank you for your time.”

More applause followed and the contempt was gone from the one judge who had worn it. He had

a contemplative expression now.

"Who assisted you with the design?" One of the judges looked at her with an assessing glance.

"No one. I learned propulsion systems as a child and have been tinkering as long as I have been able to remember. My family is all winged, so I have had ample opportunity to watch and make sketches of wing patterns and aerodynamics."

"Thank you, Miss Fennor. We appreciate your creation."

Dismissed, Annanya left the stage and wandered around the exhibition grounds. A few folk came to her and asked about the suit, several took pictures. That made her smile. All of the inner workings were protected from the elements and prying eyes.

The wind jolted her a few times. Striking her wings and sending fliers tumbling above her. She watched them in the sky and then turned her attention to the flying platform where Denaric was meeting with the dignitaries from the Orion Rift. The platform was rocking in time to the blasts but when a particularly vicious blast struck it, it tilted ominously.

The wind did not die down, but started a horrible rocking that must have petrified the occupants of the platform. Many of the winged jumped off and then were sent ass over teakettle into the sky, eventually gliding to safety. Fabric

fluttered loose as those on the platform fought for balance.

Annanya fiddled with her gear and her visor snapped across her eyes, enhancing her vision. The tiny fluttering of fabric was a woman with platinum hair. "Damn it."

There was no time to waste. She powered up her suit and shot toward the platform. The woman had people trying to pull her back onto the platform, but the wind was not letting up. Her repulsor field was working to keep her straight, the wind simply moved around her.

She moved faster when the woman was dangling by one arm and surged up to catch her as she began her fall.

Annanya grunted as she gripped the woman and she deposited her back on the platform. The guards were looking queasy. "Where is your control panel?"

Only one pointed, but that was enough. She unclipped her wings and sprinted to the control panel. With precise control, she started to lower the platform, keeping it completely level.

"Do you know what you are doing?" Denaric's voice was behind her.

"More than anyone on this platform. We are going down. Have everyone gather in the centre and each wingless person needs to cling to a winged one."

He pressed a kiss to her neck and she smiled at

the caress as she held the controls in a slow and controlled descent.

Their drop was slow and it took all of her strength to keep the platform dropping evenly. She didn't have time to check and see if everyone was safe, she simply needed to keep an eye on the dials as they dropped altitude.

It took them three minutes to land, but eventually, they were safe on the grass of the exhibition ground. She powered the platform down to ride out the storm and went to check on everyone.

Her wings were being examined by two men. One had wings, one didn't. The woman that she had caught was in earnest conversation with the queen.

Annanya approached timidly, she waited until the women stopped speaking before she came forward. "Are you all right?"

The woman turned and met her with a face that was an aged mirror of her own. "Yes, thanks to you. If there is anything I can ever do for you, I would be honoured."

Annanya removed the visor, hood and shook her hair out. The woman's face went from grateful to shocked. "Thank you, madam. I...you are the first wingless woman I have ever seen."

"Drayson! Stop fiddling with those wings and get over here." There were tears in the woman's eyes.

"What is it Tehshia?" He frowned down at his wife before turning his gaze to Annanya.

Anna stared into eyes that were the same deep brown as her own with the bronze rings around the pupils that she thought were hers alone.

"Who are you?"

"Annanya Fennor. Who are you?" Between the woman's white blonde hair and the male's eyes, she was feeling a little lightheaded.

Denaric cupped her elbow and made the introductions. "Annanya, this is Queen Tehshia and King Drayson Norfil of the Orion Rift consortium. They are one of our greatest trading partners and the supporters of many of these inventors."

Queen Tehshia grabbed Anna's hand. "How old are you?"

She didn't fight, she could feel an acknowledgment of kinship with these two. "Twenty-five. Papa says I was just a baby when he found me."

Tears started in both their eyes as they clung to each other. Anna moved to stop them. "Wait. I think I know what you are thinking, but isn't there some kind of test to confirm this before we all get teary and blubber?"

Tears were pricking her own eyes and Denaric wrapped his arm around her waist.

Tehshia smiled. "So logical. Yes. We will run some tests. Our medical bay on our orbiting ship

is quite well-equipped. May I have a hug in case we don't meet again? We knew she was lost, but never thought to look for her here. How could someone hide a wingless girl among a winged population?"

"Apparently, it worked, but I did get a good family and sisters and parents who love me, even if someone left me in the path of a tractor."

They flinched in unison.

"Your majesties, I know where to find Miss Fennor after the exhibition. You don't need to worry about anything. She isn't going anywhere." His squeeze was proprietary and Anna looked at him in surprise. After their night together, she thought he would be done with her. The look he gave her communicated many things and she couldn't figure them out.

King Drayson was frowning at Denaric, the familiar eyes narrowed with a gaze that took in the prince's hand on her waist as well as the position of his fingers under her breast. If it was Vorlar's gaze, she would have said it was fatherly.

Bemused, she turned her attention to the comings and goings outside. Concerned crowds were forming around the outer edge of the platform. The nobles who had been trapped on the rocking contraption were making their way to the fairgrounds as the wind up above continued to rock those foolish enough to fly.

The queen grabbed her hand, startling her out

of her consideration of the botched flights. "Come and have dinner with us, Annanya. Whether the tests are positive or not, I want to know you better. How did you come up with the idea for that suit?"

The woman eased her away from Denaric and Anna smirked as Drayson kept him from following. Anna explained growing up flightless in a winged family and the problems inherent in the common designs.

Tehshia asked intelligent questions and explained that she had a background in mechanics. It was why she had been chosen to be on the King's assessment team and how she had met her husband all those years ago.

"You lost your daughter?" It had to be asked.

"I did. We were away at an exhibition of this type and we had left her with her nanny. There was a break in and her caretaker was murdered. My daughter was taken and we never saw her again." The tones were calm, but the emotion that Tehshia was radiating was incredibly sad.

"And there were no clues as to where she was taken?"

"The conspirators died during a shuttle crash. They left no clues as to what they had done with my daughter."

"You had no other children?" Anna found herself clinging to the queen's hand.

"No. We tried, but no other children survived

birth." The woman shrugged. Years of pain were unspoken.

They fell into a soft silence that was broken when Denaric handed her her wings and asked her to meet him for dinner.

"I really would like to, but this is all I have clothing-wise. I was not expecting any events like this." She shrugged. "It will have to wait until the next exhibition, I suppose."

His surprise didn't faze her, but his words did. "I will have something appropriate brought to you. The guard will accompany you and I will see you at seven."

Tehshia was smiling behind her hand. "I look forward to seeing you again before you leave, Annanya. Make sure that you don't forget."

Anna wasn't pleased, but she bowed as gracefully as she could in her flight suit. She picked up her wings, bowed again to Grayson and Denaric's mother and left the platform.

She stopped when applause broke out and quickly made her way through the crowd and back to the invention storage facility. Her coveralls were where she had left them and when a throat was cleared behind her, she realized that the prince had made good on the threat to assign her a guard.

It was the same guard who had flown her to the party the night before. "I have been assigned to keep you safe, Princess."

She shushed him. "There have been no tests. Nothing has been proven, so call me Anna and turn your back. I have to change back into my coveralls. This suit gets too much attention."

He turned his back and flared his wings, giving her a feathered curtain to change behind.

Getting out of the suit was harder than going in, but in five minutes, she was slithering back into her coveralls and sighing with relief.

The wings of her suit went back on the wagon, as did the pack. The bodysuit was rolled and tucked under one arm. "Okay, let's get some grounder accommodation. You can wait out front. No sense in you sullyng your wings with such a low association." She snorted and led the way to the rest tents.

He trailed behind her without saying a word. He hung back when she entered the tent and paid her fee for a quiet cot in the depths of the long tent. She ordered a bath to be brought for later and used her thumbprint to pay for that as well. The tiny fabric cubicle was blessedly quiet, the noises of the exhibition were far away.

She snuggled down on the cot and tried not to think.

Her guard showed up as she was drying from her bath. A grudging respect was in his gaze as he handed her a stack of boxes. "Thank you for saving the queen and the others."

"It was my pleasure." She put the boxes down on her cot and smiled determinedly at him until he left her to get dressed.

The gown she was given was made of a multitude of layers of silk. It was beautiful and had matching shoes covered with delicate beadwork.

The corset that was provided was covered with gems and as she laced herself into it, Anna felt like a mouse in a treasure chest, surrounded by luxury but not part of it.

The final box had a note from Denaric. *Wear these. D.*

The tiara fit to her head with combs and the necklace and bracelets made her glitter in the dimming light. Without a mirror, she could only guess at how she looked, but the guard snapped to attention as she emerged from the tent.

She was still clutching her suit. "I need this somewhere safe."

"Carry it and there will be someone to guard it when we arrive." He stepped toward her and a voice made him pause.

"Annanya, what the hell are you wearing?" Nasha's strident tones cut across the space between them.

"I am wearing a gown provided by the royal family of Orion Rift." She didn't mention the gems she was covered in. Let her sister think what she wanted.

"Where are you going?" Her eagerness to approach made the guard shift nervously.

"I have a dinner invitation. Where is Father?"

"Enjoying his success. He won his category today. I see you didn't."

In all the fuss, Anna hadn't given it any thought. "I suppose I didn't, but I made some new friends. Now if you will excuse me, I have to meet someone for dinner."

Her nod to the guard had her up in his arms and with a powerful shove, they were gliding away from her open-mouthed sister still on the ground.

"She is hungry for power." The guard's unsolicited words startled her.

"Yes. Power, position, family connections, she wants it all." They were heading toward the aerie, a stone edifice that Anna had never imagined setting foot in.

Guards snapped to attention as they arrived and saluted her formally as she was set on her feet and walked in to the royal home. A guard spoke to one of the household servants, and the grey winged man extended his arms for the folded suit. "I will take good care of it, Princess."

Anna sighed. "Thank you, but I am not a princess."

The man grinned and simply took the suit from her. "We will see, welcome to the aerie, mistress."

Unencumbered, she wove her fingers together

and followed her guard through the halls. Paintings covered every available space and a few held wingless women with their winged men. That sight gave her a measure of hope.

Denaric greeted her in the entry of the formal dining room. Vorlar Fennor, her father, was waiting inside with a pensive look on his face.

"You are stunning, Annanya. You should dress like this every day." He kissed her in front of all assembled, causing gasps and murmurs in the nobles waiting in the room.

She rose up on her toes to keep his lips on hers until he moved out of her reach. His eyes sparkled and he led her into the room where a very nervous looking King Drayson and Queen Tehshia stood next to Queen Amaraic.

Amaraic raised her hands and silence fell. "It is my distinct pleasure to announce the engagement of my son, Denaric, to Princess Annanya Melshia of the Orion Rift. With the joining of our two houses, may prosperity touch both our worlds."

Anna froze and stared at the man she had known as father. He nodded and came to speak to her. "I love you, your mother loves you, but they loved you before I knew you. Let them learn about the amazing woman you have become and know that my pride is overflowing at everything you have accomplished."

He kissed her on each cheek and pressed knuckles to her forehead. Normally he would

have ruffled her hair, but with the tiara in place, it was inappropriate.

"You will always be my Papa. And my sisters will always be those of the Fennor family." Tears pricked his eyes and he bowed to the prince before returning to the other side of the room.

The rulers of Orion Rift came toward her. Tehshia took her hands and smiled. "The test was positive, you are our daughter and we have decided to agree to Denaric's proposal so that you will not have to leave your home."

"Where did you get the sample? I don't remember giving you one."

While Drayson's face darkened, Denaric whispered in her ear, "I gave them the sheet that we were on last night. It moved things along with satisfying speed."

Anna paled and swayed as she almost fainted. The sheet stained with her virgin blood had provided the sample. No wonder she was engaged to him already. Wait. *Engaged?*

"You proposed to me and I wasn't even there?" Her whisper was more of a hiss.

"It is the way of royalty. I promise to make it up to you in strange and unusual ways." His words were not whispered and while Drayson frowned, he was also amused. Tehshia covered her mouth with her hands and laughed.

Surrounded by family past, present and future, Annanya realised that, despite the strange start to

her life, the rough portions of her memories, she was surrounded by those who accepted her for who she was.

She smiled and embraced her mother and father. The Fennors would never fade in her mind, but there was more than enough room in her life for those who birthed her.

Being wingless shifted in that moment into a mark of honour and with Denaric at her side, she had her own wings when she needed them.

Life was looking up.

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.