

CHASE

A woman with dark hair in an updo, wearing a strapless purple gown with a small purple flower at the back, stands with her back to the camera. She is flanked by two leopards. The leopard on the left is rearing up on its hind legs, looking towards the left. The leopard on the right is sitting and looking towards the camera. The background is a deep purple with a large, faint, glowing orb in the upper center. The word "CHASE" is written in a large, metallic, purple font at the top.

Viola
Grace

Life on a space station is hard for a Terran, Nenita has adapted as well as she could. A raider strike on her station sends her and her crew to the battle stations as support and she ends up between a psycho and two of her best friends. Only two out of three survive the attack, something which burns in Nenita the whole time she is being tortured and altered to suit her captor's ideals.

With her talent out of control and her refusals getting violent, she is sent into the wilderness to await a selection of raiders and prisoners who have fought for the dubious honour of three days in her bed. Up a tree, she meets her matches, but unless something drastic happens she isn't going to come down to face the two men who defend her. Will the Oefric win her heart, or just a night in her bed?

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Chase
A Terran Times novella

By

Viola Grace

Chapter One

Nenita Chase sat with her friends and toasted to the upcoming wedding. “To Mari and her beloved Nishino. May you be together in harmony for the rest of your lives.”

The group of women cheered and raised their glasses. The Venith Station ground crew was together to celebrate the marriage of one of their own and they were having a lovely time doing it.

Nenita smiled at Mari and the glow of happiness that she had. She stifled her feeling of unease when she thought of the groom-to-be. Nishino was on Nenita’s crew and he had been making fairly strong advances toward her since the moment he landed. His engagement to Mari had not really slowed him down. Six months later and Nenita was still nervous about turning her back on Nishino.

“So, Nene, when do you choose a mate?” Sarcotra

elbowed her in the ribs.

“When the Alliance allows me to. It is out of my control and has been since I left my world behind.” She was raising her cup to her lips when the alarm sounded.

“Balls. All right, everyone on call, to your stations!” Nenita was out of her chair and running for her station in seconds. Three of the party members followed her, splitting off as they reached the launch bays.

The claxons continued for five minutes before the lights went to minimal ambiance. Nene shuddered at the implications as she set the ninth defensive ship into place with a few deft strokes of her keypad. Her station was filled again and ready as the next ship came up.

The crew of the battle ship was in place and the alarms sounded again when the outer hull of the station ruptured. Whatever was attacking them was well armed.

Nene took comfort in the soothing motion of gears and the whine of the launch gear as ship after ship was hauled into position. When she had gotten all of her pilots out to defend the station, she helped Sarcothra launch all of hers.

Nene asked her friend, “What do you think it is?”

“Raider attack. I heard the pilots talking. They have come to the station in force and I have no idea why.” The

Sheesin shoved at the final ship when it lodged in the launch gear.

“Stop shoving. Let me see.” A few light touches and she knew the spot to press. It was the stupidest of talents, but it worked well for her. When you struck the right place, little to no force was needed to move it. Her talent was finding that one little spot and knocking things loose.

A light tap with her wrench and she was forced to duck out of the way as the ship swung into position.

Sarcothra yelped and jumped out of the way, tumbling to safety in an instant.

“I wish I knew how you do that.” She was lying on the floor and watching the last ship deploy through the airlock.

“I wish *I* knew how I did that. It doesn’t matter. Let’s get to the armoury and load up.”

They sprinted through the shuttle bay and toward the armoury, pausing only to grab breathers as they went past the safety station. The rocking and shuddering of the station was freaking Nenita out.

At the door to the armoury, Nenita felt a presence behind her. She whirled to see Mari with tears in her eyes being held by Nishino. His arm was around her neck and a blaster was to her temple.

“I knew you would try for the weapons, Nenita. How charming that you are predictable.” His grin made her queasy.

“What is going on?”

He laughed. “Well, we have been looking for someone with your skills for some time, but since you couldn’t be seduced into joining us, perhaps you can be blackmailed into it. Remove your masks or I put a bolt through Mari’s skull.”

Nenita removed her mask and Sarcothra did the same.

She screamed as Nishino moved his hand and fired at her friend. Sarcothra fell to the ground and Nenita knelt at her side to put pressure on the wound.

“On your feet. I don’t want to have to drag two women to my shuttle.” His tone was cold.

Nenita used pressure points to relieve the bleeding. “I am not going to leave her here like this.”

Nishino walked forward and aimed at Sarcothra’s forehead. “I could make it easier to leave her.”

Nenita put herself between her friend and the blaster, looking down the barrel with surreal calm.

Mari was sobbing with her arm now in Nishino’s grip.

Almost sitting on Sarcothra, Nenita pressed the distress beacon in her friend’s belt.

It was a silent alarm used for self-defence of station staff, so someone should be coming to Sarcothra's assistance in a few minutes.

"Leave her alive and I won't fight you. I will come willingly." She raised both hands in surrender.

His handsome face twisted with suspicion. "Very well. Step away from her and head for shuttle bay three."

"You go first and I will follow once you are out of firing range. My word as a Terran." She wasn't moving until he had that weapon moved away.

He didn't look convinced.

"You still have Mari and I won't see her hurt either."

Nishino wrapped Mari in his arm again and backed down the hall until they turned the corner. Nenita kept herself between her wounded friend and the gun, heading down the hall toward her enemy. When she reached them again, she widened her arms to keep Nishino moving backward. He shoved Mari behind him while maintaining his grip.

"Move it. The attack will only distract them for so long." He herded Nenita along. A subdued Mari hauled in his wake.

She hiked to shuttle bay three and paused.

"The Tival shuttle on the right. Get inside." His snarl

was right behind her and she closed her eyes and wished for help. Her wish wasn't answered. She entered the shuttle and froze at the top of the stairs. There were only two seats in the shuttle. As the reality sank into her, she turned to see Nishino fire the weapon point blank into Mari's skull.

As her friend fell backward, her eyes blanking in death, Nenita heard her own scream a moment before a stunner was jammed into her ribs and pain racked her into unconsciousness as her nerves overloaded.

Her last thought before she surrendered to the dark was, *he will pay*.

Chapter Two

Nenita raised her head warily as the door to her cage opened. Nishino was watching her with light gleaming at his back.

“Have you changed your mind today?” He crossed his arms and she swore she could see the muscles bunching under his skin.

When she arrived, they had done two things, enhanced her talent with a viral infection that surged out of control when she got emotional and implanted a collar into her neck that was wired into her spinal cord. Her chances to escape were slim to none with the locator woven into her collar.

“Go to hell, you murdering bastard. I am never going to agree to be your mate.”

He sighed and leaned against the doorframe. “Not

mate, breeding partner. After I get a talented child from you, you will be passed to the next male of compatible genetics. I am not an ogre, it won't be too bad, I promise."

She shifted, the chains wrapped around her limbs clanking as she sat up. "Get bent. Go to hell. I hope your dick falls off and your skin erupts in boils."

His jaw flexed with anger. "Enjoy your time in the wilderness. You will be the target of the next hunt."

Her muscles clenched as the urge to claw his eyes out became overwhelming. Memories of the collar changed her mind. He was perfectly safe taunting her. If she attacked him, she would be brought down by a searing pain that would continue until she released him.

He waved in two of the guards who were stationed outside her cell and they approached with caution.

She stood, the chains falling to the floor in a heap. They didn't ask how she managed to unlock her shackles, it was her only hobby locked in the cell with nothing else to do and a collar around her neck. At this point, she was able to measure every twitch of their bodies and the strike zones that would render them unconscious as well as those that would kill them on contact.

The medical wrap she wore was stained and filthy, but it covered her from shoulder to knees. Nenita walked out

of her cell, the guards nervously fidgeting behind her while Nishino led the way out into the bright light of day.

Nene shaded her eyes with her hand, the group of males in collars watching her made her uneasy. The ones who were not wearing collars frightened her more.

Nishino raised his voice. "This is a Terran who has decided that she is too good to carry the next generation of talents. She will be allowed one hour of a head start and then you can chase her. You will have the opportunity to fight for the right to follow her first. Each pair of men to win will get to follow after one hour. At that point, a pair will be released every hour until she is brought back. Anyone who catches her gets three days with her, no permanent damage, but anything else goes. Let's see how she likes it when the choice is taken from her."

The men muttered to each other, grins were breaking out and the men were shifting from side to side with eagerness. She could almost smell their anticipation.

Without ceremony, the gates to the compound swung open. Knowing that they would cheat, she ran for it. He may have stated she had one hour, but that was a gross estimate. In her experience, men could get fighting in a matter of seconds and win just as quickly.

Nenita sprinted out through the gates and headed for the thick foliage and the hills. If she could get far enough away, she might just have a chance to set up a defensible position. Here was hoping that her enhanced talents could help her out.

Nenita hid behind the waterfall, her body submerged as the hunters milled around the pool. While she watched the men stalking around her trail, her hands worked at the back of her collar. The release point was obvious, but finding something both thin and strong enough to press it was a problem.

Watching the men argue and come to blows while her body cooled rapidly was frustrating. They could either leave or kill each other, but they needed to make up their minds, she was getting cold.

As she watched the men fight, she noted their weak points and got frustrated with their inability to find the weak spot in their opponent. Knowing that they were too wrapped up in their battle to notice her, she hoisted her body out of the water and warmed herself in the steamy air.

Her medical shift clung to her curves and she waited for the hunters to either kill each other or a victor to be

declared.

They battled close to the water's edge, fists swinging and legs straining. Nenita felt an evil grin cross over her features as she waited. The moment they toppled into the pool, she jumped in and swam toward them.

Her first victim didn't see her, but his opponent's eyes widened as she swam up behind them and pressed a cluster of nerves under her target's arm. He slumped and floated toward the surface immediately.

The second male backed away from her, but she lashed out with her leg and struck the zone near his spine with a roundhouse kick. He spun upward and she joined him, gasping for air and hauling her victims onto the bank.

Nenita sighed and sat back on the edge of the pool. Two down, over a dozen to go. One of the men unconscious next to her had a collar and the other didn't. She examined the collar closely and noted that it was the same model as hers.

A quick assessment confirmed that both men were still breathing and that she had two hours before they came back to consciousness, plenty of time for her to escape.

The lash of branches against her body irritated her,

but while she ran, she kept an eye out for any kind of instrument or creation of nature that would allow her to strike the pressure plate in the back of her collar. Her newly honed eyesight found it in a spine that was reminiscent of a porcupine quill. With a grin, she stabbed it through the fabric of her wrap and ran.

By the time she was aware of pursuit, she had reached the tall trees. Picking a likely hiding place, she scaled a tree, coming to rest over forty feet in the air. Her expanded talent was actually coming in handy. Each time she used it, she had a better grasp of the world and its weaknesses. Handholds that would bear her weight appeared in places she would never have thought to look.

Balancing on her perch was tricky, but her pursuers wouldn't be able to find her unless they enjoyed craning their necks and squinting into the sun.

Her mind chortled with triumph until she remembered Nishino and how she had ended up on this planet.

The bastard had tied her to the passenger seat and flown her away from the station. She woke up with the station as a tiny mark on the navigator screen.

"Why? Why did you shoot Mari?" her voice was hoarse from her screams.

“She was carrying my child. I have sworn to only breed with a talented woman, so she was doomed from the moment she informed me I was to be a father and had to marry her.” Nishino’s hands were moving calmly over the controls and he turned to face her.

“I chose you as my breeding partner, but you were not receptive, so an alternate plan had to be created. My clan was willing to attack, so the station was targeted as a diversion.” His too-handsome face was serious.

“I don’t understand. Who was taken?” Her mind was having trouble grappling with his meaning.

“This was all about you, Nenita. Your talent for finding the sweet spot is a valuable asset for the raiders and we hope it will breed true.”

She shuddered, the image of Mari’s surprised face in her mind as she fell back at the foot of the shuttle steps. “Why did you have to kill her?”

“I didn’t have to, but I swore to my clan that my first child would have a talent, so she had to die.” He shrugged. “Tival don’t have talents in their genes, so that means I require an extraordinary female.”

Nausea forced her to gag. But with her body confined, nothing else happened.

“I don’t understand your objection. I am very

handsome and perfectly acceptable to the majority of women I have been with.”

She swallowed. “Including Mari.”

“She pursued me and I let her catch me. With you rejecting my advances, I was getting a little frustrated. I realized that if I let Mari start a relationship, you would drop your guard around me. Unfortunately, that wasn’t quite correct. Why was that, Nenita?”

The icy silk of his tone ran through her. “You aren’t right. Nothing about you feels right for me. You feel creepy.”

He nodded. “Your talent at work, no doubt. You have no idea how hard it was to find a Terran who was not guarded. Most other species guard their talents, but yours puts them all over the Alliance and then depends on local governments for protection.”

Nenita didn’t bother telling him that her government had given her and almost two thousand others to the Alliance as a test. If those two thousand humans could meet their matches in the stars, integrate and grow, their race would be offered a welcome in the Alliance. Phase one was already complete, five champions had been declared in the human bloodlines, exceptional representations of their species.

Each of those champions was female and each had begun a family of her own. Some had been altered for the purpose of carrying babies who did not quite match their genetics, but all were sprouting babies who would have their own place in the stars.

She would cut her own throat before she brought a child of this murderer to term.

Shaking her head, she focussed on the sounds of pursuit from the forest beneath her. A vicious blue brute stumbled into the clearing and he raised his head to scent the wind. She saw, rather than heard, his snarl of frustration as her height scattered her scent to the breezes. The entire area smelled like she did.

She would have to return to the ground in a few hours, her thirst and biological needs would make sure of it. Despite the Terran male propensity for peeing on trees, she really had no urge to try it herself.

As she watched the blue man searching for her, another male came into the area, a wrist scanner on his arm. That bugger was *cheating*!

Nenita had hoped for more time and more sterile surroundings, but there was only one thing to do. With a deep breath, she pulled the quill from her wrap and tested

it in the tiny hole in the back of her collar.

She stilled her shaking hands with a deep breath, placed a small branch between her teeth and bit down as she worked the quill into her collar.

The controls were fairly simple, but the retraction trigger was what she was after. Nishino had ordered the control installed when she tried to kill him when he untied her after their landing on this rock. The influx of his clan members saved him and restrained her, but her fury wouldn't fade.

If she struck the control in the correct place, the collar would retract the electrodes that zapped her when she got too close to Nishino. She wanted him dead and nothing was going to stop her.

She grimaced around the branch as she sought the right spot. If she hit the wrong spot, she would be paralyzed or worse.

The collar started chirping as she pressed the nodules in order. She swallowed and held her breath as she slid the quill into place. She saw two large feline predators on the ground beneath her and kept her focus on them while she pressed down and activated the centre of the wiring.

At first, she didn't feel anything and then a disturbing slither inside her caused a gagging reaction as the

filaments retracted back into their metal housing. She removed the quill and popped the lock on her collar loose. Nenita looked down at the instrument of torture and control in her hands and scowled. What should she do with it now?

Chapter Three

Drioth looked at his clan brother, Hexar. They could smell the female in the trees above them.

Should we climb?

No. She will have to come down eventually. We will just have to remove the competition in the area.

Hexar shifted his feline form into something more deadly with longer claws.

Drioth matched him, his collar stretching around the thicker cords of his neck. They no longer needed to track the Terran. They knew precisely where she was.

She would be safe in the tree until they took care of her other would-be-suitors.

* * * *

Nenita couldn't figure out what the newcomers were. If it hadn't been for their collars, she would have thought them to be native-but-familiar animals, but when they shifted and stood, all similarities between them and leopards back home disappeared.

The creatures stalked the two men who were arguing in the clearing. She winced when the blue male scented something an instant before he was forced to the ground, his limbs bleeding from the attack.

The other male tried to press keys on his armband but was distracted by his arm being ripped from him by the jaws of his attacker.

With their opponents incapacitated, if not dying, the two creatures turned back in her direction and shifted into their leopard forms. Huge, graceful cats approached her hiding place and they paced beneath her refuge in slow and lazy patterns.

Nenita looked down the expanse of the tree and swallowed as the two beasts lay down to wait. There went her chances of a bathroom break.

She settled back and watched them through half-closed eyes. Napping was dangerous in her position, but she rested as best she could. She wouldn't have a chance with both of those predators. Even the other males

hadn't had a hope in hell of fighting the two shifters off.

* * * *

How long do you think she can remain up there, Hexar?

I don't know. She has been up there close to an hour if not over it, by my guess. The two that she stunned next to the pool were the first.

She did a good job on them. Brax and Neffer were always too full of themselves. It served them right to be taken down a peg.

You may want to clean the blood off your mouth before you shift. She probably won't enjoy seeing you covered in blood, Drioth.

You have a point. Clean your paws. You are covered with Henir's blood.

The two shifters began the arduous task of cleaning their fur. Blood stained horribly if you let it dry.

* * * *

Two hours later and Nenita couldn't stand it, she had to pee and there was no getting around it. The two cats had dispatched the other seekers with speed and returned to

the small clearing near the base of her tree.

She moved her stiff limbs and turned to face the trunk, seeking and finding the path down with her arms shaking from fatigue.

If the cats came at her, she would try to stop them, but she really had to attend to nature first. She kept her collar looped over one arm. She would only have one chance to make her escape and until then, they needed to know where she was. The moment they came looking for her, she would have the collar back in place, but she would make sure that it didn't work the way Nishino anticipated.

The cats remained seated as she got closer to the ground. When her bare feet pressed against the moss, they watched her while she staggered for the cover of the shrubs.

Tears of relief sparked in her eyes as the torment of the last few hours was eased. Now that she had attended to the nagging need, she peeked back through the shrubs to her alert followers.

Nenita weighed her options. She could make a run for the tree, run off through the woods or confront her followers. Her limbs were too sore for running, so that left option three.

She took four paces out past the shrubs and faced them, hands on her hips. “Fine. You caught me. You win.”

The cats looked at each other and stood on their hind legs, stretching into the form of well-toned men.

“Technically, you surrendered, we didn’t catch you.” The one with pale brown hair looked down at her with amusement in his blue-green eyes. The thick collar on his neck was banded for expansion and his trousers and boots seemed to be part of him, they shifted when he did.

“I am too tired to run.”

The one with black hair and peculiar gold eyes smiled. “We will have to arrange for you to run at another time. We enjoy a good chase.”

She rolled her eyes. Innuendo was not something she was in the mood for. “Wonderful. Who and what are you?”

“I am Drioth Nerosa, guardian of the Oefric colony on Mkara.” He bowed, his naked torso rippling in the most fascinating of ways, his brown hair sliding over one eye as he stood.

“I am Hexar Wen, guardian of the Oefric colony on Mkara. What is your name, lady?”

She sighed and got it over with. “Nenita Chase of the

Alliance Protectorate of Terra, assigned to Venith Station.”

Drioth frowned. “You are the woman that the one known as Nishino was after.”

She scowled. “Apparently. How long have you been here?”

Hexar grunted, “Six weeks. We were lured into a trap on Mkara and ended up here. They trot us out for sparring practice.”

“I know why they wanted me, but why did they take you?”

Drioth answered, “They love to fight against natural talents. They work on enhancing themselves so that they can be more aggressive in their attacks. Well, that and the Tival constantly attempt to breed talents into their bloodlines. This way, they can try out their experiments on those they plan to attack.”

She looked at their thick necks and licked her lower lip. “Is your collar wired into your brain?”

They blinked and as one, they noticed her collar on her arm. Hexar nodded. “Yes, they are. It causes us to seize when they trigger the pain.”

“Would you like them removed? You can still wear them, but they won’t work on you anymore.” She quickly

finished her last sentence when it looked like they would interrupt her.

Hexar quirked a brow. “How would you do that?”

She pulled her quill out of her wrap and looked up into his golden eyes. “Do you trust me?”

Chapter Four

Hexar was in front of her and Nenita had to admit his back was truly a lovely sight. She stifled her hormones and examined his collar. It was a lot easier from this angle.

“The quill fits into this small space and with the correct pressure on the nodes, it retracts the filaments that are linked to your nervous system.”

“You can do that with a small spike? It took surgeons to implant them.” Drioth was watching over her shoulder.

“The collars seem to have a failsafe if you die or it needs to be removed in case of emergency. This tiny spot, the same size as the quill tip, is perfect for striking the sensor.” She paused and asked Hexar, “Are you ready?”

“If it will free me from this control, I am. Drioth, keep an eye out for any additional visitors. I don’t know if

more suitors will be released to seek her out.” Hexar sighed and leaned forward to give her complete access to his neck.

“Nenita, whenever you are ready.” He let his air out and breathed slowly.

“I will tell you when to hold your breath, but this will be painful, so try not to shout and startle me.” Her fingers stroked along the nodes activating the sequence that her talent told her was correct. It was different from the combination on her collar, but when the light began to blink blue on it, she inserted the quill and said, “Hold your breath.”

He froze and she could see the tick on his forearms as the electrodes retracted. The moment it was completely free of him, he collapsed, leaving her to unlatch the collar and put it to the side.

Sounds of battle drew her attention. Drioth had found some more suitors and based on the snarls and growls, they were having a difference of opinion.

“Stay here, Hexar. You will be fine in a few minutes.” Nenita moved toward the sounds of battle while checking back on Hexar. He was lying on one side, his hand pressed to his neck where the paler skin marked where the collar had been.

Drioth was dealing with more than two suitors. Four men bearing the marks of the guards were attacking him. Drioth was in that in-between form again. Long claws, huge teeth, a long muzzle and only his blue-green eyes were the same. His body covered in molten gold fur and muscles banded with sinew and looked designed to kill.

Two of the guards were sparring with Drioth and a third was using a remote to trigger the collar. His teeth were clenched as he fought the pain, but the growl was constant. He wasn't going down without taking them with him.

The fourth guard was waiting for an opening. He was the only one to notice her. He approached swiftly and her talent kicked in, measuring a grid over his body and finding the weak points. He reached out to grab her arm and she dodged, ducked and struck at the position that gleamed with a violent purple to her inner vision.

He stopped, choked and fell to his knees. She turned on the man who was using his remote on Drioth and rushed him.

It took three swift strikes to cause him to buckle, but he went down with features contorted in pain. Nenita quickly disabled his remote and turned to watch Drioth dispatch the other two guards.

She looked cautiously at him, blood dripped from his claws and jaws. “I turned the collar off.”

He nodded and jerked his head back toward where Hexar was recovering. Taking the hint, she returned to the Oefric who was struggling into a sitting position.

Hexar was rubbing the back of his neck and looking at her warily. “Is it off?”

She smiled. “Yes, it’s off. It’s on your left. I think Drioth is cleaning up, that or he is eating the guards that came to retrieve us.”

“He is cleaning up. It isn’t proper to speak to you covered in blood.” Hexar reached out and closed his hand over the collar, his fingers whitened as he gripped it.

“If he will let me, I will remove his collar as well. Where is the nearest stream or body of water? I am a little thirsty.” She was more than a little thirsty, but downplaying it seemed safe.

“I will take you. I could use a good splash of icy water on my face.” He wobbled to his feet and held out his hand.

Nenita took it, her vision giving her a number of spots on his body to touch, none of them for the purpose of immobility. A light blush heated her features as she took his hand. It was slightly cool, but steady and strong as his

fingers closed over hers.

She swallowed at the inappropriateness of her hormonal surge at the polite contact. This was not the time for her to find a man that she responded to and certainly not the place.

He tugged her through the brambles and three minutes later, they were at the edge of a stream. Drioth was in his bipedal form washing his hands and face. “How are you feeling, Hex?”

“Better. It feels really weird, but better. Do you want to get yours done?”

Drioth looked over at Nenita, “Would you please assist me by removing the collar?”

She shrugged and tugged the quill from her wrap for what she hoped was the final time. “Sure. Kneel a little away from the water. We don’t want you falling in.”

“Nenita, have your drink of water first. You are very pale.” Hexar ducked his head under water and shook out his hair, the dark locks flying.

“Good idea.” She went upstream from the bathing and blood and washed her hands before palming water to her mouth. It was ambrosia, but her stomach gurgled angrily. She hadn’t eaten in over a day and she was rather hungry.

Feeling more alert, she turned to Drioth and gestured

for him to kneel. “I will tell you what I told Hexar, you must hold still when I activate the withdrawal. The nodes will have to be pressed in a certain order and then I will warn you to hold your breath. Understood?”

He inhaled and exhaled slowly, “Yes.”

Hexar shifted to his feline form and watched the edge of the woods, his ears swivelling and his attitude one of full alert.

Nenita did her own deep breathing as she blinked and analyzed Drioth’s collar. His had a different sequence than Hexar’s or her own. As she readied her quill, she bit her lip. The quill was fracturing from the pressure required to activate the release. Her stupidly enhanced sight was pinpointing each stress point, so she gripped it carefully and aimed it. “Hold your breath.”

The moment he locked up, she hit the sequence and struck the tiny pressure plate deep within the collar. He remained immobile as the wires retracted back into the collar. The moment they were free, he fell to one side and retched. Nenita removed the collar and held it while he shook in reaction to the retraction.

The quill snapped when she pulled it free of the collar. Having done its duty, it simply gave up and turned into a pile of carotene splinters in her palm. She tossed them

into the stream and they floated in procession until she couldn't see them anymore.

She sat with her two shifters and her gaze fuzzed as a blast of light struck her. Nenita covered her eyes and blinked frantically.

"What is it?" Hexar was at her side as she regained focus.

"Nothing. My talent was enhanced with a viral catalyst. It surges out of control from time to time." A halo settled around Hexar's face, the dazed and recovering Drioth sported his own. She didn't know why they had changed in her sight, but her own hands were not quite free of the iridescence.

Blinking rapidly, she could not clear the light that coated them all. Unsure if it was her talent or her vision, she ignored it. She could work around it.

When a guard crashed through the trees and into their small clearing, she saw him clearly. Her mind identified him as a target and pinpointed three attack zones.

When Hexar shifted and brought the man down, she watched the savagery absently. While the guard presented himself as a target, the Oefric were glowing with a soft, attractive light. "Oh dear."

Drioth lifted his head. "What is wrong?"

She opened and closed her mouth as his blue-green eyes glowed in his perfect face. Absently she patted his arm as if she had done it a thousand times. “Nothing, love. Nothing at all.”

Chapter Five

Once Drioth recovered, they buried their collars and the men shifted into a larger form. At his invitation, she rode Hexar into the lowlands of the mountain range as far away from the raider outpost as possible.

Once there, they made camp in a deep cavern and Drioth retrieved some wood for a fire.

“So, what do we do now?” She sat with them on the rocky ground and listened to her stomach gurgle.

“We come up with a plan to return to the camp, grab a shuttle and get off the surface as fast as we can.” Drioth prodded the wood and started to drill to gain a spark.

Nene stood and wandered over to the wall, running her hand down the stone to find what she was looking for. When it sparked in her vision, she knelt and picked up a rock.

“What are you doing?” Hexar was behind her, squinting at her hands in the dim light.

“Speeding up the fire production by chipping off a few pieces of iron-based stones to match the flint on the floor.” She smacked the rock to the wall and a chunk slithered down.

She took the fallen piece and picked up the shard of flint, walked back to the pile of wood and scraped the two together. Sparks didn’t issue on the first two strokes, but they did emerge on the third.

“How did you know what would work?” Hexar was looking at her intently and his focused gold eyes caught her in a web of intensity.

“What would work?” She blushed when a light smile crossed his lips.

“That those rocks would make fire.”

“Oh, I used to go camping with my family. I know what to look for in a sparking rock.” She flicked a few more times and the cascade of sparks caught on some of the tinder Drioth had been working on.

“That isn’t what I meant. You were able to remove the collars, but you don’t seem to have any medical training. You were able to disarm and deflect a guard when you obviously have no hand-to-hand combat training and now

you can pick minerals at random and start fires in moments.”

She breathed gently on the embers until they flickered into flames.

Drioth added slivers of wood and small twigs.

There were teeth marks on a lot of the wood, but she wasn't up to guessing what kind of shape could fell a tree and crack the branches and logs in that manner.

She nodded to Drioth when he took over on the fire and then she sat back against the wall. “It's my talent. Thanks to the forced enhancement the raiders provided, I can find whatever I need whenever I need it.”

Hexar tilted his head, his dark hair sliding along his neck and brushing against his bare shoulder.

She bit her lip as her gaze quickly broke him down into the sum of his very attractive parts.

“Are you the first in your family?”

She shook her head. “My grandmother told me her grandmother had the same talent that we shared. It skips a generation.”

“What did your grandmother do?” Hexar settled near her.

“She raised her family and used her talent to untangle yarns and threads when she did needlework. She said the

only truly enjoyable bonus to her talent was when it showed her my grandfather.”

“What do you mean?”

She could feel his body heat from where she sat. Her own flesh was cold and clammy, but since they didn’t have any food to offer her, she couldn’t ask them to risk hunting for her benefit.

Her stomach rumbled again and Hexar looked down at it.

She talked over the noise. “She claims that when she first saw my grandfather, a gold glow surrounded him. That glow followed him through their entire life together. She had to chase him down a few times until he realized that she was the one for him. Forward women were not common in his time. She eventually landed him though.”

Nene was talking way too fast, her words were tripping over each other as her vision blurred. She slumped to the side.

She heard Hexar calling to her, but she was busy falling into darkness.

With her body relaxed after a day of tension and no food, it did what it needed to do—it shut down for a rest.

A sharp, tart scent woke her.

“Welcome back, Nenita. We have obtained some fruit for you. You have to wake up to eat it though.” Drioth was smiling at her, his eyes bright and the glow around him brighter.

She was sitting in Hexar’s embrace, Drioth had a peeled segment of fruit in his hand, the enticing scent was coming from his fingers.

“Open.”

She opened her mouth and he popped the fruit in. It exploded in a burst of flavour. The liquid spread through her parched tissues and trickled down her throat. It was better than sex. The low moan that broke from her throat caused her companions to share a look.

“Sorry. I was just really thirsty. I don’t know how you guys can go so long without eating or drinking.” She sighed and opened her mouth for another slice.

“They fed and watered us this morning. I am guessing you did not get the same treatment.” Hexar’s tone felt as well as sounded soothing.

“No. Haven’t eaten for a few days, Nishino likes to show me who is boss by making my food random. That or he is just a dick.” She chuckled at her tiny show of spirit.

“Why does he torture you?” Drioth fed her another piece.

“He wanted me to fall for him so that I would come along quietly, possibly besotted by love. I didn’t, he killed one of my friends and shot another on the way out and I almost killed him when he managed to get me here, wherever here is. He wants my genes, nothing else.”

Hexar asked, “Not to be indelicate, but why doesn’t he simply get you pregnant via in-vitro or with force?”

“Ah, because I promised him that I would kill myself before bringing a child of his to term. Heck, with my talent, I can probably keep the sperm from taking at all.” She lifted a shaking hand to take the next piece of fruit, but Drioth dodged her and lifted another piece to her lips.

“Really? Why does he want you so badly?” Hexar’s words weren’t flattering, but they were to the point.

“I have no idea. It might be because a child of mine would have citizenship in the Alliance, I carry talented genes, or he just wants a Terran because we are a limited commodity.”

Hexar nodded and settled her head more firmly on his shoulder. “I can understand that. Were you married before he took you?”

“No, the Alliance never made a match for me. They said I was a *complicated case*.” She grimaced at the statement as it came out of her.

“Ah. I know that that information can be distressing. It is the same reason that we were assigned to Mkara. There was no one for *us* back home.”

“Us? Oh. You two are...” Her Terran mind had no words for that situation.

“Bond brothers. We share a mind and most of a soul. It is not unheard of among our people, but usually a third appears within the population. That was not our case.” Hexar’s voice was solemn and Drioth kept feeding her.

“How do you tell when you have found your mate?” She tried to sound nonchalant, but Drioth smirked.

“Our folks engage in the most basic of attachments for shifters. We go by scent.”

She blushed as she noticed that Drioth’s nostrils were flaring and Hexar’s chest was rising more than was usual under her head and shoulder.

Chapter Six

Grubby and full of fruit, Nenita made it through a full night without waking in a panic of someone coming into her cell. Hexar was spooning her and Drioth was guarding her front. Nothing was getting to her with two mountains of muscle on either side. Unfortunately, being guarded did not stop nature from calling, so she lifted Hexar's arm and got to her feet.

On silent feet, she crept to the cave opening and shivered in the morning air. Dawn was just making her appearance on the horizon.

Skimmers were appearing and disappearing in the woods. "Oh hells."

She retreated into the cavern and came face to face with the Oefric. "They are looking for us in force."

Drioth nodded. "We heard them and came to get

you.”

“Can we go deeper into the cave?”

“No, it doesn’t go anywhere, but that one does.”

Hexar pointed to a small crack in the ground.

“Oh balls. I can’t see in the dark and the fit will be really tight for me.”

“If you can get in, we can lead you. It opens up after ten feet.” Hexar gave her a quick hug. “If you want, we can make a run for it, but if you want to be safe, it’s the cave.”

Nenita left his embrace and after a quick look at the skimmers gradually getting closer, she slipped feet first into the narrow crack in the earth.

The feeling of falling lasted seconds until she struck the bottom of the cavern. It opened up and she could feel nothing on either side of her. A soft slithering repeated and her companions reformed with glowing skin. She didn’t want to know what shape they had taken to get through the narrow opening, it had sounded very creepy.

“Come along. They are almost here and their scanners can go fairly deep.” Hexar grabbed one hand and Drioth the other as they started to move.

The glow from their naked torsos was enough for her to see by, but she still stumbled in the darkness on the

rough floor of the cavern. They caught her every time her footing was unsure.

With every passing step, the air grew cooler. Her urge to pee was also becoming un-ignorable. "I need to stop."

"We need to get to the next opening in the rock. Why do you need to stop?" Drioth's voice was impatient.

"For the same reason I had to get up and sneak out of the cave this morning. I can't just pee against a tree." Her frustration made her testy.

She could hear his amusement when Hexar led her to a small outcropping of wall and explained that she could attend to nature there and then follow the glow down the hall. Or she could call and they would come and get her.

Nenita attended to the essentials and straightened her ragged wrap with a sigh. Now, she needed a pool or a bath and she would almost feel human again. She took one step away from the outcropping and then another. Her eyes looked blindly around her and saw nothing, so she took another step. A sigh of relief swelled in her and she returned to her ideal men. There was no arguing with the talent, it knew her perfect matches when it saw them.

"What are the chances of finding a place to bathe? With your accurate sense of smell, I am quite sure you know I need one." She stood between the glowing

monoliths and looked into their faces expectantly.

Drioth laughed and took her hand again. “Just a stronger scent to enjoy, love. Come along, there is clean water this way.”

Hexar was chuckling as he brought up the rear.

A phosphorescent blue that allowed her to see a waterfall and a pool in the midst of a cavern soon eclipsed the glow from the men.

“As you wished, love. Into the water with you.” Drioth smiled and waved her on.

“Is there any wildlife I should know about?” She was almost to the pool by the time she thought of it.

“We will be right beside you, don’t worry about that,” Hexar whispered in her ear as she paused on the edge.

It was all the confirmation she needed as she stripped off her wrap and jumped into the icy water. Holding her breath, she explored the bottom of the pool, coming up with handfuls of sand. She started to scrub with a vengeance. Her hair and skin got a working over that left her body humming and tingling. She reached out of the pool and grabbed her wrap, sluicing it up and down, getting as many of the stains out as she could.

Her companions were swimming and watching the depths carefully. At one point, Nenita could have sworn

that she saw a tail on one of them. Her very own mermen had a nice ring.

They were her ideal matches. She knew it. What they thought of her was another matter entirely.

She finished with her wrap and rang it out, draping it on the rocky floor of the cavern. Tugging her hair over her breasts, Nenita climbed out of the pool and drip-dried on the edge. She watched Hexar and Drioth frolic in the water until they finished.

With powerful surges that started her heart pounding in her chest, they left the water and joined her on the side. Their boots and leathers were on one side of the pool and they were as naked as she was.

It was very hard to keep her eyes on the water as they sat to either side like bookends. “Thank you for the break. I needed that.”

Hexar leaned over and nuzzled her neck. “Nope, it didn’t wash off. You are the one.”

Drioth worked at her other side. “You are correct. This is the scent we have been looking for for ten years.”

Nenita shivered as their soft caresses caused her nipples to tighten and a soft pulse started between her thighs. “Are you sure about this?”

“We are.” Their voices bracketed her as their hands

started a slow pattern of caresses that made her arch to get full contact. She closed her eyes and felt the difference in their touches. Hexar's caresses were lighter, teasing her as he skimmed along her thighs, breast and belly, while Drioth used a slower stroke that left heat in its wake.

Her sighs echoed off the roof of the cavern and ran through her companions. She felt the fine tremor in their hands and opened her eyes to look into their faces.

Drioth leaned down and kissed her while Hexar cupped her breasts from behind.

With the burning blue-green eyes looking into hers, she leaned up and tangled her tongue with his. He tasted of the cool water and something that was distinctly him alone.

Her hands explored his textures and the heat from his flesh. How he could be so warm when the pool and the stone cooled her was a mystery, but it was one she was willing to investigate.

Hexar continued his slow exploration at her back while Drioth lifted her to straddle his hips where he knelt at the poolside.

She didn't even have a chance to investigate the cock that was prodding at her, but when he speared through the slick folds of her sex, she blinked in surprise.

He slid in to the hilt.

She leaned back to look him in the eye, but the feral grin on his features gave her pause.

“Don’t over think it, just feel.” Hexar’s voice in her ear focussed her on what was happening inside her.

What had seemed no thicker than a finger began to expand within her until it filled her perfectly.

Drioth’s grin expanded as he cupped her buttocks and began to lift and drop her on the pillar of his erection.

Hexar remained at her back, cupping her breasts, stroking her nipples and caressing her belly as she rode Drioth.

Her moans and cries came fast and furious as Drioth’s grip tightened and he slammed into her with determined force. She screamed as her orgasm came over her, sweeping her mind blank and sending her body into shuddering convulsions.

Nenita opened her eyes to Drioth’s slow smile and Hexar’s hands waking her body all over again.

A sharp tingling deep within began the moment that she was flipped from back to front and Hexar slid into her with the same ease as Drioth. There were definite advantages to sex with a shifter. She bit her lip the moment he started to widen within her, just as Drioth had.

She wasn't sure she wanted to run through that mind-blowing pleasure again so soon, but if he was willing, so was she.

Drioth nibbled his way down her spine and back again, his hands caressing the warming flesh with strict attention to finding every inch of sensitive skin.

Nenita gasped as Hexar swelled to a very filling proportion. He didn't lift and drop her, he simply began to twist and writhe inside her.

The friction against her front wall struck her g-spot, causing a sharp jerk. Hexar narrowed his eyes and repeated the motion until she was twitching with every inward slide.

Nenita reached out and dug her nails into Hexar's shoulders for balance as her body jerked and the inner tension became unbearable. She was sure that her eyes were crossing as her body tried to find release.

Hexar chuckled, sweat dripping from his brow as he took pity on her mewling cries and he drew his thumb across her clit. Her nails dug into his shoulders as her body locked in place to allow burning pleasure to rip through every nerve. She didn't scream, merely offered a choked cry as pulse after pulse of release ran through her consciousness.

She heard his own groan as he jetted inside her, his hands clenched on her waist to hold her on him.

Drioth nipped her shoulder and her channel clasped Hexar once again, causing another groan to emanate from him.

She waited until Hexar relaxed his grip on her before she spoke. "I think another bath is in order."

Drioth laughed. He lifted her free of Hexar and stood, taking a few steps before he pitched her into the pool, jumping in after her.

Nenita only had time during her arc to screech in shock before the icy water closed over her again. She swore to herself that she would deliver endless nagging to Drioth for that little exhibition, but she didn't have time to come up with a good plot. A merman with Drioth's eyes lifted her from the depths of the pool and carried her to the surface with a kiss that warmed her from the inside out.

When they broke the surface, he swam with her wrapped in his arms, his chest supporting her while his tail slipped between her thighs.

"So, what is your opinion of the Oefric?"

She laughed at Hexar who was in the merman form beside her.

She pondered an answer that wouldn't make her sound like a tramp. "I am thinking that your species has some advantages over most others I have met."

"Very politic. Shall we continue this discussion out of the water?"

She chuckled and nodded. "Parts of me are getting pruneey."

Chapter Seven

Dried, dressed and back in the dark, Nenita hung onto each of the Oefric in turn. She had learned more about multi-shifters in the last three hours than she had ever imagined.

She would have enjoyed it a little more if she didn't have a splitting headache.

"Do either of you feel a scrabbling at your mind?"

They looked at each other and shook their heads. Drioth was frowning, his skin glowing in the darkness.

"I need to get closer to the surface. This thought needs to get closer. Can we go closer to the surface?" She rubbed at her forehead.

Hexar lifted her chin on his knuckles. "If you are sure that there is no danger, yes."

"I am not sure of anything, except my brain exploding

if this continues.”

“Good enough. There is an air passage this way. If you simply need to get closer to the surface, that will do it.” Hexar turned toward the air passage. “Get on my back and ignore the shift.”

She sighed and jumped on his back wrapping her legs around his hips.

Drioth shifted into a snake form from the waist down and with the scales between her inner thighs, Hexar had done the same.

They slithered rapidly through the open channel and Nene had to admit that they were quite quick, if disconcerting.

The tingling in her mind increased until she got a few words in the scrambled thoughts.

Nenita Chase...rescue...Seeker...triangulation.

With a grin on her lips, she announced, “The Alliance is here. They are looking for me.”

Drioth asked, “How do you know?”

“They sent a Seeker attuned to my frequency. We just need to get close to the surface and they will come to find us.”

“Are you sure it’s a Seeker?”

“Well, since I can hear it and you can’t, it is set for

Terran frequency. It knows my name and is merely honing in on my signal for triangulation of my location.”

They looked at each other in surprise. “Why would the Alliance come for you?”

She felt her lips tighten. “Because lives were lost when they took me from active duty on the station. That makes me worth recovering.”

They sobered immediately. “How close do we need to get?”

“I have no idea. I am thinking they can—” She didn’t finish. A blast turned the wall of rock in front of them into vapour.

She coughed and when she finished, she completed her sentence. “Find me from the mental contact.”

Alliance uniforms were blessedly familiar as a ground crew came forward. “Nenita Chase?”

She waved from her perch on Hexar. “That would be me. Hello.”

“We have been sent to retrieve you and all Alliance members as well as liberating all other confined beings on this planet.” The male had Azon blood and captain’s bars.

“Thank you. Does someone have ration packs? We haven’t eaten in a while.” Nene slid down Hexar and

stepped forward to greet the Alliance personnel, her Oefric at her back.

The moment the pack hit her hand, she burst into tears. She was safe and her worries were over.

The Alliance Warship Neerin was in orbit around the planet where the raiders had made their base. Nenita had received a medical check-up, a shower and a jumpsuit that barely fastened across her breasts.

The Seeker's name was Ylsa Norwik and she was a Terran with a strange intensity. "I am very glad I found you. The death of your friend Mari confirmed that this was not an impulse attack. Since you were the target, you had to be retrieved."

"Where is Nishino?" Her anger surged to the fore now that she didn't have to worry about life and death.

"He and several others escaped before we were able to stop all space traffic in the area. He will be caught." Ylsa smiled grimly, "He is my next target as soon as we get you somewhere safe."

Nene ran her fingers through her hair. "Can't I just return to the station?"

"No, you need to enter a form of witness protection. If you go back to the station...well, Mari was not the only

fatality. Several of the fighter pilots lost their lives in the attack and the station crews are in mourning. Having you there might do more harm than good.”

It made a certain sense. She was now a symbol of loss. “Where can I go then?”

“There are several feelers out. Your limited genetic compatibility is a problem, but there is one planet requesting your attendance.”

“Which one?”

“You were found with residents of Mkara? Their colony council is begging for you to move in. The Oefric have been taking in every Terran they can get their hands on and I don’t blame them, we are fabulous.” Ylsa winked.

“Have you ever had sex with an Oefric? They are pretty fabulous, too.” She sighed in memory.

“Shapeshifters who can control every inch of them? I should say so.” Ylsa winked. “So, you will consider Mkara?”

“I will. This isn’t your regular job, is it?”

Ylsa laughed. “Caught on to that, did you? Your men didn’t want anyone from another species to put in a good word.”

“That sounds like them. They have waited for the

right woman for a while. Apparently, they had as hard a time finding a match as I did.” She propped her head on her fist. “Is there somewhere I can sleep?”

Seeker Ylsa winced. “You haven’t been to sleep yet?”

“I think I nodded off during my internal exam, but they were too polite to tell me.”

“You can use my quarters. I have some of the dignitary space.” Ylsa stood, her robes flowing around her. “Come along and get some restful sleep.”

“Fine, but wake me up if we pull up to Mkara. I don’t want to sleep through my arrival at my new home.” She grinned, but she knew that her eyes were lined by huge bags.

They walked together to Ylsa’s quarters. Nenita was pretty sure that she was unconscious before her head hit the pillow.

Nenita woke to strong hands lifting her into stronger arms. “Come along, Nenita. It is time to see your new home.”

Drioth smiled down at her while Hexar lifted the small duffel she had been given. They carried her out to the observation deck and watched the bulk of Mkara approach. Blues, purples, greens, browns, greys and

whites all fought for supremacy on the surface.

“The Oefric colony is in that valley right there.” Hexar pointed and the screen enlarged, showing a small town with neat roads and neater houses.

“It’s very pretty, also very small. A nice small town.” She smiled sleepily.

“A nice small town and your new home. Welcome to Mkara, Nenita.” Droith pressed a kiss to her temple and then they were off to the shuttlecraft.

Chapter Eight

Nenita was unsure and that was not a usual state for her. Ahzar, the head of the Oefric colony, was asking her to remain at his home until Hexar and Drioth could work out living arrangements for all three of them.

“It will be more comfortable for you to remain at my domicile while your men and others from the colony set up a home for you.” Ahzar was serving tea and he smiled kindly at her.

It was terribly odd to be served a cup of tea by a man who was still enough of a warrior to control a group of unruly men, keeping them in line and organizing the growth of their colony.

His wife and young daughter were also in the home, making it less of a peculiar thing for her to stay with them.

“How long do you anticipate it will take for them to get the house set up?”

Ahzar nibbled on one of the sandwiches his wife had prepared and delivered, leaving them to their conversation with a slow wink and a swish of her skirts. “Ten days or so. The kits are in colony storage. They simply need to get them out of the warehouse and prepare the construction site. Your men have the advantage in that they have an entire force at their command. I believe they are already out on the edge of town marking off the property.”

“What about the security of the colony?” Nene nibbled at a pastry.

Ahzar looked a little sheepish, “With your presence here, the Alliance will now guard Mkara much more closely. It isn’t why we wanted you here, but it is a lovely bonus.”

She chuckled. “That explains the shuttle and fighter ships when we landed. How large is the force?”

“Over a hundred. We are quite pleased with it. The Azon, Wyoran and Oefric peoples here will all bear the expense of maintaining them. We do it gladly.”

She fidgeted. “Is there nowhere I can stay on my own? I am not really used to being a houseguest.”

“It isn’t appropriate. We have many more males than females here and it is too much of a temptation to have you running around loose.”

“I am not that much of a temptation. I have made it this far in life without stumbling into men, why would strangers start now?”

Ahzar sighed. He had the look of a father about to have *the talk* with his daughter. “When a woman is agreeable to one Oefric man, she is very susceptible to be attractive to others of our species. Your pheromones change.”

She blinked before laughing. “I see, so I am giving out a come-and-get-me vibe?”

He scrubbed one hand through his tidy hair. “Something like that. If you go out, take Hista or Vikya with you and you will be fine.”

“So, your wife or daughter will throw them off?”

He sighed again. “Yes. They won’t misbehave in front of a mated woman or a young one.”

“Interesting. I suppose a colony run by scent is something I will have to get used to.” She mulled over her next words. “What will I be doing here?”

He looked surprised and bought himself some time by eating another sandwich. “I suppose you will be able to

choose your occupation. What did you do on the station?"

She grimaced. "I was a flight mechanic."

"Ah. Well, I am sure there is something for you to do around the colony."

"I am a master of getting things unstuck. It's my defining talent. Finding the right thing and the right spot."

"Perhaps you would like to participate in the manufacture of your home then? It seems that your skills may be of use in that venue." Hista piped up from the doorway where she had been lurking in the shadows.

Her husband scowled. "I don't think it would be appropriate."

"She barely knows them, Ahzar, and they her. Building together would be ideal." His wife stood behind him and placed her hands on his shoulders while she met Nenita's gaze.

"Could you take me to the site, Hista?"

"Of course." Her golden eyes twinkled. Her black hair was braided into a halo and with a sudden snap of logic and a flash of talent, Nenita knew she was looking at the woman who would be her sister-in-law.

"I believe we will wait until we finish the snack. Please bring Vikya here so that we can share a meal before you take our guest out for hard labour." Ahzar

knew that he had lost and Hista brought her ten-year-old daughter in to sit and join in the conversation.

It was a nice afternoon with Ahzar pouring tea and Vikya peppering Nenita with questions about life on a space station.

“...and then there was the day that the gravity engines stopped. Everything was everywhere and we couldn’t restart the gravity until we got the folks off the ceiling in the arboretum.”

“Nene, what happened then? How did you get them down?”

Vikya was looking at her with wide eyes, but it was Hista who asked the question.

“I think the answer will have to wait for another day. I want to see the plot that the men have picked out. Hista, would you take me?”

“Of course, Nene. Did you want to change into standard colony togs or remain in your jumpsuit?”

“I will keep to the jumpsuit.” She stood and bowed to Ahzar and Vikya. “Let’s get out there before I need to rip their efforts back to nothing.”

“Good point.” Hista linked her arm with Nenita’s and led her out of the house and past dozens of other neat homes. Each had room for a kitchen garden and a small

yard. Hista's house was larger, but she was wed to the head of the colony council. It made sense.

They walked to the edge of the growing town and Hista tugged her down a small dirt lane. When they turned past a tall hedge, Nene stopped and gasped. A massive pile of lumber took up a good section of a huge lot and an army of men were flattening and clearing the ground.

Hista grinned, "I am thinking that it will be less than a week."

"I would say so." Her talent was going bonkers, pointing out errors in the grade that were corrected before she had a chance to say a thing.

All of the men were working shirtless and based on Hista's knowing grin, it was an appreciated view by all of those watching. Nene stifled a smirk when she noticed the gathering of women in the shade, sipping beverages and watching construction.

"Shall we join them?" Hista quirked her brow.

"Not quite yet. I want to talk to Hexar and Drioth before they build me a palace."

Hista nodded and wandered off to join the observers while Nenita turned and walked into the phalanx of sweaty, swearing men.

She found Drioth and surprised him when she tapped him on the shoulder. “I need you and the other one.”

Arms wrapped her from behind and lips nuzzled her neck. “The other one? Not very flattering.”

She walked with them to the edge of the lot and turned to face them. They both looked so proud of themselves.

“What the heck are you building?”

They looked hurt. “A home for you and us. It has to be twice as big as the others because it will hold twice as many people.” Drioth’s logic was unassailable.

“Couldn’t you have started small and left room for expansion? I get the feeling folks will be expecting me to have triplets or something.” She bit her lower lip and looked to the crowd of workers who were staring at them as they spoke.

“Ignore them. We want to start so that you are completely comfortable and have everything that you need right from the beginning.”

She smiled and went up on her toes, kissing Hexar softly on the lips before turning to Drioth to do the same. “I already have everything I need to start a life here. Now, can we discuss the grade of the foundation?”

She was sandwiched in a hug that covered her ship suit with sweat. Oddly enough, it ranked in her top-ten

favourite hugs in her lifetime.

Chapter Nine

Jikya walked in front of her, Hista slightly behind her daughter while Ahzar held Nenita's arm and approached the grooms waiting at the end of the pathway. She kissed each of her suitors on the cheek and knelt with one on either side to wait for the official to begin the ceremony.

Nenita hummed happily to herself as she waited for the wedding to get underway. Their house was ready and she only had to sneak into the raw construction phase twice to change the positions of the bearing walls.

The ladies of the colony had embroidered her dress and Hexar's and Drioth's shirts while they watched the house go up.

The official tried to combine as many Terran traditions as she could and what ended up happening was that they had hours of silent meditation with an

occasional exchange of vows and declarations.

Nenita was in a happy cloud as the celebration began. The colony loved a good party and with the co-operation they had already received in building, their union was attended by everyone just to confirm their efforts were worth it.

Games began, shifting contests that worked out fastest time and best mimicry.

“How are you enjoying the games, Nenita?”

“We are married now, Drioth, call me Nene.”

He inclined his head. “Nene then. How are you enjoying the competitions?”

“I have had the pleasure of seeing two multi-shifters up close, so this is a pale imitation.”

Hexar grinned. “It is practice and a method for the younger members of the community to strut their stuff.”

“Why are there no women competing?”

They both blushed. “While female Oefric can and do shift at will, they don’t disrobe in public. It is a peculiarity of our society.”

She laughed at the shy note in Hexar’s tone. “Hista used to give you hell for that, didn’t she?”

“And my other two sisters. They hated not being able to compete. They were highly competitive and always ran

shifting trials at home. As soon as they became grown women, they had to stop and resented the hell out of it.”

“I can see why. It would kill me to stop using my talent. It is as much a part of me as my hands and feet.” She smiled at the colony elder who stopped by to give them a gift and his well wishes.

“We understand that, but having a female near oestrus shifting into an animal in front of a crowd tests our control beyond bearing.” Drioth’s dry observation had her lips quirking.

“Okay, that is a fair point. It isn’t really something for public consumption.”

“Hence the rules against it. It is something that is merely recommended to the females, not enforced.” Hexar perked up as music started at the far end of the square.

Drioth kissed the back of her hand. “Hexar wants to dance. He’s a dancing fool.”

Her other husband grinned. “He’s right. Shall we?”

“I haven’t danced in years. Are you prepared?”

“I will deal with it.” He hauled her to her feet and out from behind the head table onto the dance floor.

She was swung against him with a thud that got the collection of Oefric laughing and Hexar’s foolish grin

made all the silliness worthwhile. The dance was a cross between a waltz and the tango and Hexar was a wonderful instructor.

Nenita found herself laughing as she was whirled and spun around the dance floor, around other couples who dodged the wedding couple with good humour. When Drioth joined them, they took turns whirling her around until she was laughing so hard, she needed to sit down.

The third moon of Mkara was bright and full. All around the gathering, couples were sneaking off to take advantage of the bright light and the summer warmth.

Weak and smiling like a fool, Nenita slumped against her mates and sighed. "When are you going to take me home?"

Before she could blink, they swung her up so that she was sitting on an arm from each of them and the other arms formed a backrest. "You guys worked this out, didn't you?"

They laughed, Drioth grinned. "We had some time while we were assembling the house. We worked out all number of logistics."

Her face turned hot pink as they carried her past the villagers and toward their home. It was time to start their honeymoon.

The bed that they had created was enormous. All three of them could fit on it quite comfortably and that alone made her pause.

“What?”

“Logistics. While each of us has a room for a study, to sleep, we will be joined here.” Drioth grinned at her with a wink.

They sat her on the edge of the bed and took off their clothing. Anticipation started pounding in her veins as memories started running through her in waves.

Her dress was one long piece, laced into place under her arms. A vaguely medieval design, she was very pleased with it. It was pretty but easy enough to move around in.

She laughed at finally being able to see them completely. Their cocks were stiff, erect and twisting in a most disconcerting way. “How did you learn to do that?” She was biting her lip as the hypnotic motions kept her fixated as they approached.

“This will go a lot more smoothly if you are out of your finery as well.” Drioth chuckled and took her right laces while Hexar took her left. They worked the gown up and finally had to lift her to her feet to get the gown off.

She raised her arms and let the long black curls of her carefully arranged hair fall around her again. She was only wearing her shoes and a blush and a moment later, only the blush.

“We don’t need to take you at the same time most of the time, but for the formal link to be created, we need to come at the same time. For that, we are about to cheat.”

She smiled up at both of them. “I trust you.”

Her words seemed to be an unintentional aphrodisiac. They dropped to their knees, Hexar to the front, Drioth behind and their mouths set about feasting on her.

Her breasts were thoroughly ravaged as Hexar’s normally careful technique was thrown to the wind. His hands were still moving up and down her ribcage with a gentle fluttering, but the long, slow strokes of Drioth’s hands and tongue had her shivering in under five minutes. When fingers slid into her channel, she sighed and went up on her toes, trapped there when two more fingers worked their way into her ass.

Something slippery was at work as Drioth moved his fingers inside her, spreading them slightly until she was pushing back against him with every move.

Hexar’s fingers caressed the front wall of her channel and she was mewling at the contrast in sensations with

each stroke.

When the hands left her, she cried out, opening her eyes in disappointment. Sweat was beading Drioth's brow as he lifted her to the bed to place her over Hexar's reclining form.

Hexar's cock slid into her with the same stealth as it had the first time, but he kept immobile until Drioth's pressure on her ass placed him inside her with his belly against her buttocks.

At some secret signal, they started to swell inside her. They went just past the point of comfort and started to move.

Hexar's hands on her hips rocked her onto him while Drioth's cock inside her ass rubbed against his through her tissues from within.

As sensations overloaded her body, a prickling in her mind became a buzzing hum. She reached out to grasp the sound on the psychic plane and the moment that she touched it, her body bucked and she screamed as her orgasm took her over and they rode her in a twisting frenzy.

Hexar's voice sounded in her thoughts. *There you are. I thought my balls would blow before you joined us.*

Drioth rebutted, *Your balls? Do you have any idea*

how tight and hot her ass is? I think I bit through my entire face.

We are seriously talking mind to mind?

Hexar laughed. Of course. That was the entire point to this exercise.

Drioth pitched in, Well, that and finally getting to press against you from top to toe.

Nenita turned bright pink. I can tell. Will I always be able to feel what you are feeling? This is very odd.

As Hexar can tell you, it can be awkward, but it means I share your pleasure as well as his. It makes for a far less jealous relationship than would otherwise be in evidence.

Nenita squirmed, pressed between them. "Can we separate? This isn't something I am used to. I will have to ease into it." The dual penetration was still in place and while it felt too titillating for her peace of mind, she had had a long day and she couldn't imagine falling asleep in that position.

They touched her mind and nodded. With slow and careful movements, they pulled away from her. Drioth went through a door at one side of the room and returned with a bowl of water and several cloths. He dampened one and tossed it to Hexar, he took one of the others and after he dampened it in the warm water, he cleaned the

cum from both of her entrances. His erection was back in full force the moment he finished and he placed a swift kiss at the base of her spine.

What is the obsession you have with my back?

You have a lovely curve to your spine and I love the dimples above your ass. For some reason, it's a view I never tire of.

She blushed while secretly enjoying the ability to ask questions too embarrassing to voice.

Hexar lay back and grinned at her as she started to crawl to the head of the bed. His face going blank as a stunner struck him.

A sharp thud sounded when Drioth hit the floor and turning to the doorway, she saw the last person she had expected to see on her wedding day.

“Nishino. Why are you here?”

“I still want you as my breeder, Nenita, though now it will have to wait until I can confirm you don't carry the Oefrics' bastard.” He was there, his golden handsome face curled in a sneer at her unconscious husbands.

“I will never have a child with you, Nishino.” Her talent was going mad, calculating and working out every vulnerable point on his body.

“You will, even if I have to have your mind wiped to a

blank slate. There is a Minder who has come over to our clan's way of thinking. He has agreed to do it. Now get out of that bed and get on your knees." He kept the stunner aimed at her, but his other hand was working at the closure to his trousers.

She stepped away from the bed, the slow rise and fall of Hexar's chest comforting her as she moved to face the beast who had ripped her from her life, her job and one of the best friends she had developed since she left her home.

She didn't kneel. "I will not get on my knees. You can keep that worm to yourself." She was counting on his temper and she wasn't disappointed when he rushed at her, gripping her hair and bending her head back. Her glare was complete contempt, but when her hands started to move, he let go with alacrity.

Nishino looked surprised as she used her fingers to jab at the painful pressure points that would lock his nervous system.

He collapsed to his knees, his fingers twitching as his nerves screamed in agony.

"Mari wanted to love you, have your children and live life in a bubble of happiness. You killed her. Now, I will return the favour."

His mouth opened to scream as she struck the nerve bundles that would shut down his breathing. She watched him slowly suffocate and die, fixed on his knees and staring at her in shock. Her anger drained with his life.

The moment his eyes were empty, she ran to Drioth's side and stroked his face, willing him to wake. The instant he stirred, she went to Hexar's side and did the same. The moment that Hexar opened his golden eyes, she burst into tears.

Drioth came and sat behind her, wrapping her in his arms as she sobbed. Hexar cuddled her from the front and when she calmed, they put her to bed and summoned the watch.

The body would be removed and the Alliance notified.

Tomorrow, Nene and her mates would start all over again.

Chapter Ten

Hide and seek after age twenty-five would normally be considered silly, but on Mkara, it was foreplay.

Nene couldn't help but feel a shiver of arousal as she sprinted through the woods behind her house. She had been given a fifteen-minute head start and she was making the most of it.

It was bizarre how much running through the woods and hiding played on long-dormant instincts. Her heart pounded in her chest while she looked for a hiding place.

She had waded through water, jumped over rocks and was debating climbing a tree when she heard her first stalker.

The long skirts that the Oefric favoured were too easy to tangle on a climb. She had to burrow.

A small crevice in the side of a hill invited her to hide,

so she took it up on the offer. She pressed back against the side of the incline and crouched. As she heard footfalls closer to her, she covered her face. If she couldn't see them, they couldn't see her.

She screamed when arms gripped her and tumbled her into the clearing. Drioth's blue-green eyes were looking at her out of a distinctly feline face. "Cheater!" she punched him in the shoulder and shrieked when he lapped at her neck with a tongue close to sandpaper.

Hexar bounded into the clearing an instant later and howled in disappointment.

Drioth made a purring chuff in his throat and Hexar stalked off. He had lost the day and consigned to do dishes for the week.

Drioth busied himself with her shirt and the ties of her skirt. She was allowed to keep her boots on when she saw the flare of lust in his mind at the contrast of bare skin against the leather.

He was naked and he had the sense of consideration to retract the fur into his skin in the groin area. When he prodded at her with the blunt head of his cock, she blushed to find that the heat in her body was translated to an easy entrance for him at his standard width.

His first stroke took him into her halfway and the

second pushed him into her completely. His snarl rang through the forest and he withdrew, flipping her over.

She caught the image in his thoughts and drew up on her hands and knees while he stroked the curve of her waist with devoted attention. He slid back into her and widened slightly before working her hips back against his with a heavy pulse of steady thrusts.

Nenita balanced on one hand and reached between her thighs to stroke her clit, squealing in release as the short touch started an echoing wave of pleasure that struck her hard and fast.

His howl of triumph was unmistakable, as was the clench of his clawed hands on her waist. She slumped to the ground in a heap and the moment he withdrew, she rolled to the side. "I can see why your people enjoy playing that."

"It is a fun pastime." He lay next to her and trailed his fingers over her hip. "Have you decided?"

"Well, the council has asked me to go on retainer for any jobs that need tweaking, as well as all new builds, but the blacksmiths and engineers have made a good case, too. I don't want to turn one down and make an enemy."

"Nene, the only way you could make an enemy here is to go after one of the mated males and if that were the

case, you would have to get through Hexar and myself first.”

She laughed. “Which would you recommend?”

“Both. Go on retainer with both. Create a schedule for building and work with the engineers to spot flaws in their designs.” He kept up the peculiar stroking that was warming her blood again.

She tumbled him to his back and straddled him. “Caught yah.”

“And you didn’t even have to chase me. Excellent conservation of resources.”

She laughed and took him inside her, riding him until she was howling her satisfaction and he followed her a moment later.

It was a good day to spend in the trees with one of the ones she loved.

“Come with me.” Hexar was scowling, but she could feel eagerness in his mind.

She was having tea with Vikya and Hista. “Why?”

Her companions looked less than surprised at Hexar’s abrupt order. Hista nodded, “Go with him, Nene, it will be worth your time.”

She got to her feet and took his hand, “I am going with

you because I trust you, no other reason.”

“Good enough. Now get on.” He shifted into a horse-like creature and she used the steps to boost herself onto his back.

He shook his head and pranced down the street, showing off for the folks on their daily errands.

Knock it off, Hexar. Take me where you want me to go.

Yes, Nene. On my way.

She hung on as he picked up speed until they cleared the village and were heading for the supply field. A shuttle was sitting in the middle of the field, several elders and Drioth were waiting for them.

What is going on?

You have a visitor.

No matter what she asked him, he wouldn't say another thing before they arrived. Apparently, it was a surprise.

She dismounted with Drioth's help and stood with her men, blinking at the elders expectantly.

“There has been an application to join our colony. We have given it some consideration and we have decided to allow her application. Please welcome the newest member of our colony.”

Ahzar was gesturing for her to go into the shuttle, so with a few long looks at the men around her, she took the steps and looked at the new colony member.

Tears started to drip from her eyes the moment she saw Sarcothra. "You made it."

Her friend's arms closed around her and held her tight. "I did, thanks to you and that sneaky trick you pulled with my beacon. Will you show me around the colony?"

"Of course." She swallowed. "I didn't know he was going to kill Mari until it was too late."

"I know. You would have done what you could to prevent that eventuality. She will be missed, but she also had little to no self-preservation instinct." Sarcothra got to the heart of the matter, as she always did.

Her friend wiped her tears away. Nenita took a deep breath and waved Sar to the door. "Oh, you can meet my mates while you are out there."

Nene started to laugh as Sarcothra walked straight into the doorframe while looking back in surprise. She followed the newest colony member out onto the tarmac and introduced her to the elders first and then she turned to her men. "Sarcothra, this is Hexar and Drioth, my husbands."

“I thought you needed the Alliance’s authorization.”

“I got it, but the truth was that I had gotten the all clear to screw whomever I wanted, I don’t have a good blend for most species.”

Hexar wrapped on arm around her waist. “What is bad for other races is good for us. We have been having a problem locating women for some of our linked members. Nene is a light in our minds that brings us closer every day.”

Drioth came up on her other side and did the same. “While we regret we were not able to get to her sooner, she was more than able to handle herself on the day that we met.”

Sarcothra grinned. “Yeah, she is good at that. So, when are you three having kids? Any offspring of Nene’s would be cute as a button.”

Hexar grinned. “I have no doubt, but we will have offspring in good time.”

Nene chuckled. “I wish you had told me that earlier.”

The elders laughed out loud as Hexar and Drioth sat down heavily, taking her with them.

Sarcothra squealed and clapped her hands in delight and Nene squirmed for freedom.

Nenita Chase Om’Mkara of Terra was going to bring

a halfling Oefric into the world and she had no idea who the father was. She looked forward to finding out.

Author's Note

No tricks on this one. Simply a cute story with a little murder, revenge and some mayhem on the way.

This book marks the fourth in the Chain, Charm, Chaos, and now Chase and has no relation to any other books in my collection with the exception of the *Champions of Terra*.

The races are the same as those in the earlier books, but no shared characters...sorry. I know there are some folks out there who like that.

Thank you for joining Nene on her journey,

Viola Grace

Viola@violagrace.com

<http://www.violagrace.com>

<http://www.extasybooks.com>

<http://www.devinedestinies.com>

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.