

ECHO in TIME

A woman in a black leotard is captured in a dynamic running pose, moving from the lower left towards the upper right. She is silhouetted against a vibrant background of purple and white light rays that radiate from behind her, creating a sense of speed and energy. The background is filled with numerous bright, starburst-like light effects and swirling patterns of light, giving the impression of a high-speed journey through a futuristic or time-traveling environment.

Sector Guard 20

Viola Grace

Alara has spent her life under the radar, hiding her nature from the government and those around her. When it came to a choice of letting her cousin fall into servitude to their own government or live a life free in the stars, Alara stepped into the path of disaster and made sure that Tosha went free. Trapped and locked in a lab where other talents were incarcerated she meets a new friend and the man who has haunted her dreams for the last six months.

General Brodin has fought wars and when his talent surged forward, the government of Dhema sent him to the Sector Guard. He has waited patiently to find his true mate, and when he was told to get himself captured on Dalpha he did it without question. Seeing Alara for the first time, he knows why.

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ECHO IN TIME
SECTOR GUARD BOOK 20

BY

VIOLA GRACE

CHAPTER ONE

Alara J'tak watched her cousin whirled away by a member of the Sector Guard. The rest of her tour group stared at her as if she was a talent by proximity. She smiled tightly, she was a talent, but she wasn't going to divulge that information before its time.

"That was a heck-of-a-thing, wasn't it? Freak storms weren't in the brochure." Alara tried to huddle back with the others, but they moved away.

She sighed heavily and waited to board the shuttle. The rift that Tosha created was swallowing waves of homicidal bugs, but safety was not assured. Alara wanted to be behind metal before they figured out another way over the chasm, but this group of scared folks was not going to welcome her again.

Her quick conversation with her cousin had been all they needed to convince them that she was too close to a talent for their peace of mind. The apprehension corps was probably already on their way.

She was facing a life in a lab if her previous vision didn't come to pass. She smiled grimly as she waited for a Dheman from the stars to rescue her. It was an image that had haunted her dreams for the last two years and she wasn't sure if it was fear or anticipation that sent the curl of shivers down her spine.

Their pilot emerged from the confines of the shuttle and barred entry to the only means of exit from the moon of Dalpha. "I have been in contact with the government and they are coming to examine the details of this situation. We will remain here until they arrive."

Alara settled on a large stone and began braiding her hair. The green strands came together easily, but she started a repetition of weaving and unweaving her locks until the home shuttles were landing around them.

Her foresight had shown her images of her cousin in the embrace of the vortex and her own fate in the labs of Dalpha. It wouldn't be forever, but it was not going to be a pleasant interlude. Seeing the future really sucked.

The ground shook and the tourists scattered as the armed forces landed to question the only one of them to have contact with the talent who was swept away in the whirlwind.

The pointing fingers made Alara smile

self-consciously, but she got to her feet with her hands out at either side of her and in a relaxed pose. Three men swarmed behind her while others took statements from the witnesses.

“Citizen, please submit to restraint. By the laws of the Dalphaic council, I bind you.” The commanding officer stood in front of her while two of the three men gripped her arms and put the cuffs on her.

Searing pain shot up her arms and she fell to her knees. “Damn it.”

The soldiers looked at her with concern while their officer helped her back to her feet. “It is the restriction field. Don’t fight it and it won’t increase in strength.”

She gritted her teeth. “How do I make it stop?”

“Let us get you to the lab and we will remove the restraints. That is the only option open to you at this point.” The commander was speaking in tones that only Alara and his men could hear. It was a very small kindness that helped her relax.

“Then let’s get this show on the road. This isn’t really comfortable.” She shrugged her shoulders and wiggled her fingers to relieve the tingling.

“Come this way. What is your name?” The commander took her by one arm and walked slowly with her down the path to the military shuttles.

“Alara J’tak and yours?” The pain was down to

a dull ache as he helped her around rocks and up the gangplank to the shuttle.

“Commander M’nir. You seem very calm for what you are going through.”

“The moment that Tosha ripped the chasm, I was expecting you to show up. The Dalphaic guard are rather predictable. Having a talent in my bloodline was not going to end well for me.”

“Tosha?”

“My cousin, Tosha C’sar. We were on a tour when the flesh-eating beetles decided that we were tastier than any of the other wildlife. Tosh and I sent the others first and brought up the rear. She ripped a gouge in the ground and it was deep enough to contain and restrain those flesh-eating buggers.”

A special seat was elevated from the floor of the shuttle and her cuffed arms were tucked against the back of the armless stool while she was banded across her breasts and hips.

It wasn’t the most pleasant way to travel, but they could have used their stunners and knocked her out to transport her. This was not comfortable, but she was able to look ahead and watch the moon of Dalpha fade beneath her as they took her to her home world where she would face the sentence for being different.

The Dalphaic race had spent the last hundred years trying to stamp out and confine their talents

to useful veins of power. If the government couldn't channel it, it wasn't a suitable talent.

Alara tried to relax as her world took up the front view screen. Her doom was approaching at an alarming rate and she hoped that she had made the right choice in contacting the Sector Guard. If her call had contained enough information, she would be boosted out of her confinement. If not, she would have to be satisfied that her cousin was safe and in the arms of the man meant for her.

When they started through the atmosphere, Commander M'nir steadied her when she would have pitched against her restraints.

"Thank you."

"We are not trying to damage you, Ms. J'tak. Merely take you in for examination and assessment, as well as a debriefing of your cousin's talent."

"Oh. Goody. I can't wait." Her normal flippant tone was dull. She felt far more dread than anticipation at what was stretching out in front of her.

He shot her a look that she couldn't decipher until she remembered that she had seen that same look on her grandmother's face when she and Tosha were caught in mischief and her parent was trying to decide which one of them was at fault. It was a look of confusion with burgeoning judgement.

She returned her gaze to the front screen as they entered the open spaces that surrounded the lab where she would meet her fate. The small thud of the shuttle made her flinch, but her trembling was internalized as the commander and his men unstrapped her and herded her to the exit.

The lab techs were waiting for her and with her escort, they marched into the confines of the lab. The tingling intensified as she walked under the scanners and the moment that the gates to the building shut behind them, Commander M'nir removed her cuffs.

Released, she sighed and rubbed her wrists as a scowling lab tech approached. "What do you know of your cousin's whereabouts?"

"Wow, right into it. Interesting. She is in the arms of a vortex and hopefully far away from Dalpha." There was no reason to lie. The pale woman in the corner was a truth sensor. She had the calm and repressed demeanour of someone who was *feeling* a conversation.

"How do you know this?"

Alara grimaced. There were lights and scanners in every inch of the room, all trained on her. "I know it because I saw it. I told her to run with him rather than end up in a lab. She isn't the sort for confinement."

It was complete truth and as long as Alara stuck to the truth, she would be fine. And as long as she

kept her mouth under control, everything would be fine. It wasn't something she had seen in a vision, but sometimes common sense raised its ugly head.

Commander M'nir spoke in low tones. "And you are? You had to have known that we would determine your status the moment that you were taken into custody."

"I suspected, but Tosha needs to be out there and I am fine here."

The truth sensor shivered a little as the lie came out into the open, but Alara wasn't going to collapse into tears of fear. She had her family's reputation and her own personal dignity to uphold. Sometimes having an ego was a pain in the ass.

A physician came into the room and sneered down at her, his muddy brown eyes squinted in contempt. "Prepare for assessment. Let's see if you are of any use to your people or simply a drain on our resources."

Alara fought her response, but it slipped through her tense lips. "Oh goody. Let's get the probing over with."

CHAPTER TWO

Having a complete physical administered by complete strangers was not something that Alara had ever anticipated, but she thought she handled it well. She had only bitten two of the lab technicians and kicked the third in the groin. All in all, she was very proud of her behaviour.

By the time they were through with her, she was exhausted, bruised, pinched, prodded and feeling a new appreciation for her personal physician that she had never anticipated. They escorted her to a private cell, which included a bed, small shower and lav, with the view screen embedded in one wall.

"I can't help but feel the irony in being on my home world and no one knows that I'm even here." Alara continued talking to herself long after the techs had gone. She was sure her visions would continue as she slept for she was bound and determined to stay awake as long as physically possible.

Keeping secrets had never been part of Alara's

personality until she had begun to see through time. At that point, telling her friends and family everything that she saw went from being a good idea to a future-altering condition. It hadn't taken her very long to find out that people were terrified of the unknown and that if they found out about it, they would react violently in anticipation of pain.

Each time she had let her personal manipulation interfere in the plan of the universe, a ripple had been created that swept through lives and changed everything. When her parents and those of her cousin, Tosh, were ended in a transport accident, Alara stopped using her talent or at least telling her family about it.

Tosha would never know that because Alara gave her food poisoning with a sandwich, she stayed home and didn't break her arm. Because she didn't break her arm, her parents left her with their mother and took off with their siblings for a day at the beach, their daughter in good hands.

Alara didn't see the accident in time and the storm that swept her parents into a river came up out of nowhere. Alara lived with that guilt every day. Her decision to save Tosh discomfort had ended with both of them being orphaned and only their Gran was left. It had not been her finest hour.

The visions still came to her, still haunted her dreams, but she was able to determine what was tweakable versus what had to be written in stone.

Getting Tosha to the Sector Guard was a major tweak but one that she was very proud of.

Six months earlier, she had seen into time and met her match. At the same time, she had also seen Tosha standing next to a whirlwind and a group of uniforms. It didn't take much research to figure out that the Sector Guard was involved in Tosha's future. The skin-tight clothing was a dead giveaway.

Alara watched the news and the report that two talents had been spotted on the moon of Dalpha. The reporter announced that both of the talents had been taken into custody and Alara wondered idly if they had bribed or wiped the minds of the tourists who saw Tosha fly away in a column of wind.

Gran had told her granddaughters stories about the true purpose of the labs. They were not dedicated to researching the genes that caused power to surge. They were focussed on using it for the good of the Dalphaic people. Gran had laughed when she said that. "The good of the Dalphaic government is more like it."

Tosha had always pressed her for details, but Gran had replied, "If you keep it to yourself, you never have to worry. If you start to use it in public, not even your cousin will be able to see your way out of it."

They had nodded, never questioning their

grandmother's knowledge of their talents. It seemed right and proper that she knew what they were. It didn't occur to Alara until years later that their Gran was probably the origin of their little talent gene.

Smiling at the thought of her grandmother, she paced the length and breadth of the cell. Each step reminded her that she was locked behind walls designed to keep talents in and the normals out. Until those bugs broke free, she had been one of the normals. Suddenly, she was on the other side of the fence and it wasn't a horrible thing. She could still feel her future and it had nothing to do with the lab.

She checked the nodes that were radiating psi blocks into her cell. Her mind felt tight as the signal swept over it, but she knew her talent. Nothing was going to hold her back from a future dream the moment that she relaxed.

Alara rubbed at her neck with both hands, scowling at the pricks of pain left over from the tissue and blood sample sites. They had taken everything they could from her—brain scans, biological samples and ambient radiation measurements along with her height, weight and age.

Parting with her age had peeved her more than the tech trying to draw blood with four different punctures. Her arm was bruised all to hell now

and it was throbbing in an annoying beat.

A short crackle alerted her to the com system. "Alara J'tak, lights out in five minutes, please enter your bed for safety. A sedative will be pumped into your quarters in four minutes and thirty seconds."

"Crap." Alara shuffled to the lav and used the facilities, washing her face and staring into the polished metal with eyes that were dark with inner turmoil.

She had just dropped onto the bunk and tucked herself into place when the hissing started. The air took on the tang of medicine and the lights in her small cell dimmed. It took a handful of breaths and full dark, but she slipped into a grudging sleep, the forward echoes in time awaited.

She was standing on the future plane, images overlapping and stretching before her. Each choice she made would strengthen one future and fade another.

Everywhere in her future, she saw the image of the Dheman. His horns gleamed silver and the smile on his lips was everywhere she looked.

In every image, they stood together, side by side. In several images, Tosha stood next to them with her vortex at her side. Draï completed the image as they posed for some kind of group photo.

Alara wished for the thousandth time that she could ask questions of the images, but as she watched, she saw herself on foreign worlds with the Dheman at her side.

She focussed her attention on the nearer events and saw the lab techs and the peacekeepers standing aside to let her and the Dheman leave the lab. They weren't happy, but they did it. A shuttle with graceful lines filled with more folks in body suits waited for them. Mechs stood guard as they boarded.

The Dheman smiled and patted her hand as they took up seats in the shuttle. Their lab scrubs a shabby cousin to the flashy suit and implants of the woman plugged into the ship. They left Dalpha and beneath them, she saw a stream of talents leaving the lab to take places on shuttle after shuttle. Something was causing the government to free the talents and she had a feeling that it was the man next to her in the image.

Alara sighed and watched pieces of her future, blushing at some and cheering for others. The administered sedative must have been powerful, because she saw her own grandchildren in one image by the time she woke.

Jerking out of a sound sleep where she had seen decades into her own future was a bit of a shock, but facing the scowling peacekeepers caused her to cry out. "What?"

The younger of the two was examining her with interest. "You are needed in interrogation."

Alara sat up and checked her mouth for drool. She was pretty sure she had been snoring. "Fine, but I need to pee first and I really need a drink of water."

He reached for his stunner and pointed it at her casually. "Use the lav, but you only have two minutes. Water and a meal will be provided for you."

Grumbling and stumbling, she attended to nature, washed her hands and returned to her escort. "Shall we? I need to wash the taste of that sedative out of my mouth."

They prodded her out of her cell and she was taken down a hall that had escaped her notice the day before. They walked several minutes until she was herded into a large boardroom with one occupant. A physician was seated at a table, waiting for her.

"Patient J'tak, I am given to understand that you have an exceptionally high activity level for a sedated talent."

"I don't know about that, I was asleep. I don't know of many folks who know what they do in their sleep. I mean...I know I drool a little, but that is hardly something to be classified as activity." She shrugged and placed her hands, palms up on the table. The short sleeves of her scrubs displayed the bruises and punctures to great advantage.

"That is not what I was referring to and you are well aware of it, patient J'tak."

"I was promised water and breakfast. I really can't concentrate on your interrogation on an empty stomach." She propped her chin on her

non-bruised fist and fluttered her lashes at him.

He raised his hand and she heard a distinct click on the other side of the door.

"Your breakfast is on its way. What is your talent?"

She smiled and yawned, knowing her breath was hideous. His flinch was enough for her, so she answered his question. "I have a boring talent that revolves around my own life and those around me. Nothing more."

The doctor tapped his stylus on the table. "Do you have details?"

She kept her sleepy smile in place. "I can see forward in time while I sleep, but I can't always interpret what I see."

He blinked and made a note. "What about your cousin?"

"I can't see her anymore, she is too far away." His words sunk in. "How did you know she was my cousin?"

"We did our research. Now, where did she go?"

"She went with the wind. It was what I had seen her do in my visions, so when it happened, I knew it was her destiny."

"Is that all that you see? Simply the possibilities of your actions?"

She shrugged. "Yup. Nothing more, nothing less."

The door opened and one of the peacekeepers

came in with a tray while the other kept a stunner trained on her from across the room.

She ignored her audience and ate the toast, fruit and sausage that she had been given. The water flushed the last of the sedative from her throat and the moment she was finished with her food, the tray was removed.

The doctor was done playing. "What is your cousin's talent?"

"She can make holes in the ground. Nothing else that I know of." It was the truth. While Tosha had rumbled the ground growing up, nothing visible had ever occurred. It was one of Gran's rules. *Don't show your family what you can do and they can never be forced to reveal you.*

He looked frustrated and Alara couldn't blame him. He had captured the useless talent and the really good one was out of his reach. *Poor baby.*

"You will be assigned to regular monitoring and interviews to determine what you are seeing in your visions. Aside from that, you are free to enjoy the common areas as well as the commissary. Your days will be controlled with chimes and you will be required to get your requisite sleep. We may place monitors on you or have a telepath watching you while you sleep. On those occasions, you will be in a lab setting and sedated directly without gas."

She refrained from commenting on her

digestive frolics as she slept. He really didn't seem the type to appreciate her sense of humour and it was strictly a desperate attempt to keep control of the folks around her if she could make them laugh.

"The peacekeepers are to be obeyed at all times. They will take you to your appointments."

Alara nodded. "I understand."

"No attempt to escape will be tolerated. We have a high-security wing and you don't want to be consigned there. It is not nearly as pleasant as the low-security facility." He checked his notes and nodded. "Dismissed."

Bemused, she stood and walked to the door. It swung open at her approach and her peacekeepers took her from the interview room into a large, open space populated by an assortment of men and women in scrubs guarded by peacekeepers around the edges of the room.

Alara wandered over to the edge of a group of women and sat down at the table. "So... anyone have a deck of cards?"

CHAPTER THREE

“So, come here often?” A Selna with a wry grin turned to Alara as she got comfortable.

It was such a relief to see one happy face in the aura of gloom that Alara burst out with, “Oh, no. I just decided to summer here. The hot weather can be so dry. I was after a nice climate-controlled environment.”

“I know what you mean. This lack of humidity and I can’t do a thing with my hair. I am Isaro by the way.” The Selna extended her hand in greeting.

Alara took it with a grin. “Alara. What are you in for?”

“Vacationing on the wrong planet. I am a shapeshifter.” Isaro flickered and her features ran through nine different races.

“That is fascinating. I had no idea that my government was grabbing off worlders.”

“Neither did I. Perhaps if I hadn’t been intelligence gathering, I wouldn’t have been noticed.” Isaro sighed. “There are negotiations in place for my release, but they aren’t going well.”

"That's new. Who are they negotiating with?"

Isaro grinned. "They tried to barter with the Selna, but since my people have already tried to sell me once, they had no interest in paying to have me returned. I suggested that they contact the Alliance, but they resisted and are re-evaluating their options."

"Well, the Dalphaic government is known for their stubbornness, if not their good sense. How are you enjoying your time here?"

Isaro chuckled and leaned her chin on her fist. "Oh, I find it fascinating. I am merely waiting for my partner to catch on to where I was sent. He should have me out of here in two shakes of his tail."

Alara blinked. "He has a tail?"

"And gold eyes and pointy ears. He is feline in nature, but that is never a problem as long as I don't scratch too close to his tail."

They shared a laugh and a few of the other women drew closer. The sound of joy was not a common one, Alara guessed. They came toward it like they were seeking heat.

A stirring on the men's side of the room got Alara's attention. Her breath froze in her lungs as the man that she had been seeing in her dreams for the last six months was forced into the common area by four peacekeepers. Lights danced on his cuffs and anklets as well as the band around his

neck that was designed to dampen his talent.

"So, Isaro, do you know any Dhemens?"

The woman blinked her fabulous eyes in surprise. "Yes, I do believe I do."

"Good, because they just hauled one in on the far side. Is it someone you know?" She knew him by sight, but she needed her suspicion confirmed. She would bet her back teeth that Isaro was a member of the Sector Guard, one of the shadowy figures that Alara saw at the edge of her own future.

"It could be. Those guys with horns all look alike." Isaro dismissed him with a shrug and returned her attention to Alara. Her attitude of indifference was an act. She was paying attention to the Dheman across the way with a peculiar intensity.

"Of course. We don't get many aliens here, so I suppose you all know each other. This Sector is such a small place." She hoped that she was putting enough of her hint into her tone. When Isaro's eyes flared in surprise, she knew that the information had struck home.

The Selna nodded in acceptance. "You are right. I will take a closer look later. He does look rather familiar."

With the silent communication between them, Alara glanced at the other women. If one of them was a telepath, no sign was given.

"You seem to have an awareness of those around you. What was your talent again?"

Alara chuckled. "I can see into my own future. It is a fairly useless talent, but it is the only one I have."

"Did you see me?"

"Not in focus. You were an echo if that makes sense." Alara sighed and rubbed at her scalp under her hair. "You were in one of twenty possibilities that I could see. Some are stronger, some weaker. I am guessing that your decision to come to Dalpha was sudden, despite what you said. I know that the memo that I sent to the Alliance should have trickled down to the Sector Guard two months ago, with the action plan being put in place weeks ago."

Admiration flowed into Isaro's eyes. "You knew you would be taken and you still took the path that would lead you here?"

"I did. This is not forever and my cousin is now safe with one of your co-workers." The smile that spread over her features came from the inside out. Knowing that her last relative was safe was all important to her and she knew her joy was written on her face.

"You are sure that your fate does not lie here in the lab?" Isaro's face remained intense.

"I am positive. Thanks to the sedative in the air here, I have seen many likely paths for my future. None of them end here." Alara inclined her head

as the women next to her drew back in surprise.

Alara grinned as she chuckled. "It is rather nice not to pretend not to know what is going to happen to me. This is a freedom I have always wished for."

Isaro took her hand and squeezed. "Sometimes we find our freedoms in the most unlikely places. You have to take your joys when they come, no matter what form they take."

Alara was going to reply when a couple of peacekeepers pulled Isaro to her feet. They didn't explain, simply grabbed her by the arms and hauled her off.

Isaro yelled out a cheery, "See you later!" as she was pulled out of the common room and into the hall.

Blinking in surprise, Alara watched her new friend taken away and then turned to the other women at the table. "Does that happen often?"

The women were startled into laughter and a soft dialogue was begun. Alara peeked over to the men's side of the room and jumped when she noticed the brilliant blue and gold eyes staring at her from under dark brows and deeply red skin.

While her mind shrieked at the beloved familiarity of his features, she tried to keep her face straight. His burnt colouration was a stark contrast to her shades of green and the images in her mind of exactly how extreme that comparison could be

started a blush that she hid from him by turning her head.

"Why are you blushing?" One of her new companions whispered it in her ear. Well, it seemed to be a whisper, but the woman who spoke was across the table. It was her talent, speaking at a distance, a handy power that the Dalphaic government was trying to find a use for.

Alara gestured to the distance between them and quirked an eyebrow.

Chuckling, Dori came around the table and positioned herself next to Alara.

"I have seen him before. He wasn't wearing quite so much." Her words caused a flaring blush in Dori's cheeks as she caught the meaning.

"Oh, I see."

"I wish I didn't, but I did." Alara winked and Dori returned to her place. She didn't really regret the knowledge, but it made for a cute quip.

A sudden whisper in her ear brought her upright in a hurry. "He's coming this way."

A flurry of straightening her hair brought giggles from the ladies at the table as she turned to smile with bland curiosity at the man who lived in her dreams every night.

"Are you Alara J'tak?" His voice was abrupt and not at all what she would expect from a lover. She mentally slapped herself. He didn't know that they would be lovers.

“Yes. And you are?”

He drew himself to his full and impressive height. He was magnificent, his horns gleaming in the open panels of sunlight coming through the ceiling. “General Brodin of the Sector Guard Base Teklan. I am here to rescue you.”

Alara heard and felt the women at her table swoon, but she knew how this was supposed to end. She got to her feet and looked up at him with an expectant look. “How are you going to do that with your limbs encased in restrictors?”

He leaned down until they were almost nose-to-nose. His gaze warmed and his voice took on a distinctly sensual tone. “You’ve seen the future, you tell me.”

CHAPTER FOUR

The women at the table scattered while Alara scraped her mind for something witty to say, what she came out with was, "I have never seen you in action."

Her blush must have turned her skin a horrible khaki, but he laughed. "Fair enough. May I sit?"

She was flustered but gestured for him to take a seat across from her. Before he took the chair, he lifted her hand to his lips and pressed a kiss to the back of her knuckles. Bolts of energy shot between them and the spike in Alara's mind sent her images of an immediate future. As he released her, she sat back in her chair.

His lips were still quirked with amusement. "What was that?"

"A future shock. It has never happened to me before. My visions are so vague as to be made of mist, this was much stronger."

Brodin leaned forward, his horns gleaming ominously. "What did you see?"

"In three minutes, they will take me away and

have to restrain you. I don't know why, it is just an image that I see." She bit her lip and he reached out to tug her lip from the grip of her teeth.

The small contact sent another shock through her. "They will take you to an interrogation unit and try to get you to tell them something."

"They want to know why the Sector Guard is here."

She held her breath as his fingers traced her jawline. "Why are you here?"

His smile sent a glow through her skin. "Because you called us. Because you sent the right call through the right channels at the right time and Vortex was in place to recruit your cousin."

A nervous peacekeeper came up and cleared his throat. "No contact is allowed."

He placed his hand on his stunner, but Brodin just gave him a quiet look and removed his hand from Alara's face.

The moment he stopped the contact, the spinning images ceased to pile in on her. She blinked as his hands rested on the table and she quickly sent the recollections of those hands on her body to the back of her thoughts. It was far too dangerous to dwell on those echoes while she needed to have her wits about her.

In one of the futures, he had attacked the peacekeeper and after nine of them used stunners, he had been hauled off, not to be seen until the

Sector Guard reclaimed them. That was not the strongest outcome, but it was one of the options.

"Don't do anything to antagonize the peacekeepers, please. Your people will be here soon and we will manage to remove ourselves with a modicum of dignity." She reached for his hand, but pulled back when one of the peacekeepers went on alert.

"What did you see?" The depth of his voice rolled over her in a warm, dark wave.

"Violence and pain. Nothing that would leave you a lot of dignity." She shrugged. "Can I get you something to drink? The dispensers seem open to all."

"Yes, please. A glass of water. The Dalphaic flavours are something I haven't warmed to yet." He inclined his head and his horns seemed to flash.

Around the room, the peacekeepers went on alert the moment that she stood. She walked to the dispenser and eyed the selections, choosing an iced tea for herself and getting him his water.

The men on the other side of the room were huddled together, whispering in low tones, but the incessant drone was unmistakable.

Alara placed his drink in front of Brodin and sat across from him. "What are the boys buzzing about?"

He tilted his head and concentrated. "They are discussing why they never thought of simply

coming over here and starting up a conversation with a likely young lady."

"Good hearing. Nice to know."

"A Dheman trait." He sipped at his water and grimaced. "They are sedating us in the water."

"I know. Don't worry. It won't affect you when it counts."

His grin let her know that his mind had strayed down dangerous paths.

"Stop that. The peacekeepers might just stun you to get that look off your face."

He took his grin down to a smile. "I will ask you a few questions then that are completely off base. The first is why aren't you married with children already? A woman of your beauty and skills would have been snatched up in a matter of minutes on Dhema."

"Not without the requisite horns. I am pretty sure that it is a requirement for marriage on your world."

He propped his chin on his fist and grinned at her. "Not always. My cousin married a woman of Terran extraction and they and their offspring are doing quite well. The little ones even call me Unkie Brodin, much to their father's disgust."

She chuckled. "Really?"

"Really. Do you have any family aside from Tosha?"

"No. She is all I have and that is why I had to

make sure that she was safe before she was taken into custody. The geothermal talent that she has makes her far more of a catch than I would ever be."

"I believe that you sell yourself short. There is far more of an advantage in seeing the future than in shaking the ground beneath your feet." He reached out and touched her hand and that was the moment that the peacekeepers surged in.

"You are needed in the lab, talent J'tak. Come with us." The peacekeepers hauled her to her feet by her arms and pulled her away from Brodin.

"Where are you taking her?" His voice growled over them causing Alara to shiver.

"Not for you to know, talent Brodin." The peacekeeper on her left tugged hard and she stumbled into him. It was all Brodin needed to see. He surged to his feet and five of the peacekeepers rounded on him. Two held his arms while the others prepared stunners.

Alara shouted as she was hauled away. "Don't do anything stupid, Brodin. I will be fine."

She heard cursing and an occasional thud as her Dheman resisted his restraints, but after they rushed her down the hall, the noises faded.

The two peacekeepers escorting her kept looking back worriedly.

"He won't follow us."

"How do you know that?"

"I told him not to."

They didn't respond to that, simply took her to the medical centre and handed her over to the waiting staff.

"Come with us, talent J'tak. We have some more scans to run as well as some monitors that we need to put in place." It was one of the physicians from her intake exam.

Alara followed meekly and hopped up on the table that she was directed to.

"Hold still as the scanner tracks your brain activity." The physician was quick to start the scan and Alara cooperated as best she could, keeping her breath shallow and her head still.

A group of doctors gathered to one side of her and murmured together. The beeping of the scanner ceased and she sat up to watch the display of what went on in her head.

"What have you been doing, talent J'tak?"

"Nothing. I simply had breakfast and then spent time in the common room. Your scanners have seen everything I have said and done. Nothing out of the ordinary." She swung her legs from the edge of the bed and cocked her head. "What are we looking at?"

"A strange configuration in your temporal lobe. Your mind is radiating with energy. The odd thing is that this energy wasn't there this morning. It is the same sort of activity we saw when you slept."

The physician was speaking absently, but his view on the screen was intent.

"That is a little creepy, but you mentioned monitors?" Her visions had shown her several images of her with small dots attached to her temples and neck. It was one of the likely possibilities and she suspected that it was related to Brodin's peculiar effect on her senses.

"Yes, yes, of course." He waved absently to a technician who immediately approached and began to cleanse the areas where sensors were to be applied.

"Can I shower with these on? I really hate running around with bedhead." She held still as they were attached one by one.

"Yes, they will remain fixed to your skin until a mild solvent is used to remove them." The technician spoke in quiet tones as she carefully set each node in place.

Alara raised her voice, "Good. Can I return to my cell for a shower and a change of clothing or is that beyond my daily activities?"

"That will be arranged. Did you really outrun a horde of beetles?" The tech smiled softly as she set the last of the dozen small pods in place.

"I did, well, almost. Tosha opened the ground and created a chasm to swallow the little ones before they could get to us." She laughed and it drew the attention of the physicians.

One of the doctors asked, "If you can see your future, why did you not avoid the bugs from the beginning?"

Alara scowled at him. "If you don't know what the options are, your choices to avoid a small discomfort can lead to a large disaster."

He gave her a considering look. "You consider being taken into custody a small discomfort?"

"Given the option of having both me and my cousin in custody, I would say yes. Are we done here?" She kicked her feet idly while the doctors looked at her nonchalant attitude with suspicion.

She sighed and told them what they wanted to hear. "I am here because I am supposed to be here. Anything else will unfold with time or not. I have dozens of futures stretching before me and something as silly as putting my shoes on the wrong feet will make one sharp and the others dull. I never know what will change it."

The tech moved her tray to one side and helped her off the table. "Are we changing it now?"

"I won't know until I dream. For now, I want a shower." She touched the monitor pods and shook her hair back over her shoulders. "Can I get a hairbrush and toiletries?"

The tech smiled and threw her a wink. "I will gather them myself."

Wired for sound with a room full of physicians watching her go, Alara walked back to her cell

with the peacekeepers at her side.

Every thought she had was being reported in an electronic readout and she grinned to herself as she imagined the result when Brodin touched her again. Their little displays would light up and blow apart and she was really looking forward to it.

Now, she just needed a shower and the toiletries so she could get pretty for him. While he may suspect they were meant to be together, she knew it. In a thousand possibilities, they were always together. She simply wanted to look her best while their souls collided.

CHAPTER FIVE

The lab tech was right, the monitor pods stayed stuck to her skin no matter how much she scrubbed. She may have foreseen them on her skin, but that didn't make them comfortable.

With her hair finally washed and dried as well as braided into a monitor-concealing coronet, she felt ready to rejoin the common room.

Her peacekeepers were at the door the moment that she poked her face into the window of her cell. It seemed that her journey to the common room was something of an experiment. She didn't care. It was time for lunch.

Brodin was not in the common area when she arrived and her heart sank. He had probably made more of a fuss than she had hoped and been stunned into unconsciousness.

She bit her lip and got a tray full of food. She sat next to some of the ladies, but they didn't involve her in conversation and she was simply content to wait.

She thought of Isaro and wondered how her

new friend was getting on. The security was stiff and the doctors humourless, but Alara didn't think they would torture an off worlder for their own amusement.

She was sitting back and watching the news feed, the truth sensor of their prime minister standing out like a beacon now that she knew what to look for. She also spotted an illusionist who was most likely working to make the prime minister look far less like a sack of tubers.

Years of watching newsreels with the spectral characters in the background suddenly made a perverse sort of sense. Talents were everywhere in public service. Despite their being decried publicly by the government as dangerous, they were used in hospitals, public offices and quite possibly the armed forces. All of these positions were stealthy, but they were there.

Alara sat quietly for two hours when a tingling in her extremities alerted her to a new presence in the common room. Brodin came and sat next to her, sending her every nerve into shrieking awareness.

"So, those monitors are attractive, are they trying to find out what makes you tick?"

She blushed. "I believe I have figured that out already. They won't be far behind."

Sitting next to her on the couch, he brushed his fingers against hers and her mind spun forward

into her future.

Realizing that the lab was watching every firing neuron, she jerked her hand away. "None of that. No hand holding, no touching my face, no happy smiles, nothing. They are watching everything that runs through my mind. Literally."

He chuckled.

"No chuckling." Her lips twisted in a smile.

"So, what did you used to do for fun around here?" Brodin propped his feet up on a nearby occasional table and folded his fingers behind his head. The black waves of his braids with their metal bandings swung as he shifted and settled.

"Tosha and I would go on trips. Whatever took our fancy. We would try anything from tea parties to white-water rafting. After we lost our Gran, we did almost everything together."

"It sounds similar to my childhood with my cousin Kassil. Every day was something stupid." He chuckled and then sobered, "I grieve for the loss of your parents and those of your cousin. It is horrible to lose a loved one at any time."

"Thank you. I would hug you for that, but that would give the scanners another treat." She sighed and smiled at the memory of some of the hair-raising events that they had embarked on. Each season had been a new trip through the wilds and cities of Dalpha. A new experience was around every corner when they had been out and

about.

“What do you do for fun on Teklan?”

He shifted and narrowed his eyes. “Fun is a relative term. I hunt, am building a small lodge off to one side of the base and we occasionally have group events and dinners in the crystal castle that Esur built for Roxanne, but most of the events are held on base.”

“They live in a castle?”

“Yes. Esur is one of the sleeping Draï that woke when his mate was nearby. It is a fairly good method for finding your match, as long as you can survive the sleep. He built the house centuries ago and is still trying to convince Roxanne that living there is a better idea than living at the base.”

“How many people live at the base?”

“Enough. The Teklan Guardsmen as well as support staff.” He looked as if he wanted to continue, but the lights flicked on and off as the room flooded with peacekeepers.

“It is time to return to your cells for the night. Please leave in an orderly manner.”

Brodin got to his feet and extended his hand to her. Without thinking, she took the offer of help and let him assist her to her feet. Sparks whirled while time spun around her, extending beyond her own life.

Tosha’s career in the Guard spun out ahead of her, the tears, those she was unable to save, but

always with Vortex at her side.

Alara saw fights, children, an extended family that stretched far beyond anything she had ever imagined...and then Brodin was taken away.

"No contact between talents." A peacekeeper was standing where Brodin had been and her Dheman was walking with six peacekeepers and drawn stunners surrounding him.

She trailed her fingers over the contact point where he had touched her hand. A residual tingle remained in place.

Her peacekeepers jerked their heads and she followed them back to her cell. New packs of clothing were waiting as well as fresh towels in the lav. It seemed that her keepers were planning on keeping her comfortable.

She could barely wait for her new life in the stars to begin. What was taking it so long?

* * * *

Finder scowled at the assembled Guardsmen. "Why don't we just go in there and get them?"

The monitor flared to life and Relay's face filled the screen. "Because we are engaged in negotiations with the Dalpha. The moment that those negotiations fail, and they will, you have permission to go in."

Frost put his hand on her shoulder, but she

scowled and batted it away. "How did they catch Might to start with?"

Relay grinned. "He was in a malfunctioning vehicle. He was forced to land on Dalpha and seek repairs. Apparently, the sight of him lifting his own shuttle was enough to garner the attention of the local military."

Finder groaned. "So this is a tremendous setup?"

"Something like that. The people of Dalpha have been enslaving their talents without formal decree while attempting to gain entry into the Alliance. That one particular point is something we need to confirm before we go charging in. Might is trying to determine it, but he has backup. If either of them get confirmation, we will go." Relay rubbed her temple. "I don't like it any more than you do, but the tip came from Dalpha itself and has already added one talent to our ranks. It can definitely be trusted."

The other Guardsmen muttered and shifted with excitement. It was always nice to have another talent working to patrol the thousands of worlds that were under their purview.

Finder sighed while she tried to work it out. "Who sent the signal?"

"A woman with a talent for foresight at an untapped range, or so Commander would have me believe."

Commander and Pilot nodded. "We checked into her potential and the Dalphaic are so close to the Dheman's in physiology it is scary."

Finder blinked at Commander's comment.

"Are you saying that we have amassed a collection of war ships, the contents of Station 13, Morganti, Teklan and Udell, all to be here so that Might can get a date?" Finder's tone was approaching a shriek and she knew it.

Relay grinned. "In a nutshell, yes, now get to it."

Finder sat back and crossed her arms over her chest. "Fine then, but I hope we are invited to the wedding."

CHAPTER SIX

Brodin was at breakfast before she was and waved her over to join him at one of the tables. She nodded, gathered her food selections and slid into a chair across from him.

“Good morning, Brodin. Your horns are looking exceptionally shiny today.” She tucked into the items on her plate and grimaced at the flavour.

“Thank you and I agree. I thought it was just the foreign food, but it does seem to have a certain tang that shouldn’t be there, doesn’t it?” He poked at his fruit suspiciously.

“They are probably doping our food.” She shrugged and kept eating.

“Yet you eat?”

“It is this or starving and keeping alert fades in the face of a full belly. I have skewed priorities.” She grinned and finished her meal.

They were making polite chitchat over tea when a dozen peacekeepers surrounded them. “You will come with us.”

Brodin raised a brow. “Which one of us?”

"Both of you. You are required in the lab."

"We weren't touching."

"You are still needed in the lab. Come with us."

The peacekeeper pulled his stunner. "We will not ask again."

Alara got to her feet and muttered, "You didn't ask the first time."

The strike of the stunner made her scream as her nervous system overloaded with agony. She heard a roar from Brodin and the world went dark.

"Talent J'tak, wake up."

A light tapping on her cheek woke her from the spasming silence of the stunner.

Alara was strapped to a table in the medical facility, a heavy thudding coming from the background. The friendly technician from her sensor placement was monitoring her vitals and taking her pulse.

"How long was I out?"

"Two hours. The peacekeeper who stunned you has been disciplined. The recordings revealed that he reacted out of fear at his proximity to the alien, but that was no excuse for his stunning you for a simple comment."

The tech lifted the edge of the scrubs that Alara was wearing and checked the stunner site. "That looks nasty."

"Thank you. Nothing I like better than waking

up nasty. Where is Brodin? I heard him getting upset when I went down."

The tech grimaced. "Do you hear that thumping?"

"Of course."

"That's him. He said he won't stop until you are able to talk to him. The doctors were refusing, but since he has almost pummelled his way through the wall to the medical centre, they have reconsidered." The tech chuckled softly.

"Am I still wearing the monitor pods?"

"Not all of them, they were interfering with your recovery, so I removed most of them. Only the two at your temples remain in place."

A few keystrokes and the table gradually tilted into an upright position. The tech unlatched the restraints and took her by the hand. "Come along. I don't want him chipping through the wall into isolation."

The tech led her through an empty hall, which ended at a high security door. The tech nodded to the peacekeeper and he opened the door for Alara.

Looking at them suspiciously, she stepped into the room and whistled low. The rubble lining the walls showed the impact of powerful fists with a Dheman-sized hole leading toward medical. The rhythmic thudding was coming from that hole.

"Brodin! Knock it off!" She called down the hole and repeated her request.

The thudding slowed and she yelled again. "Brodin!"

It stopped and she felt him coming closer. He smelled of musk and sweat with the tang of blood in the air.

"Ah, Brodin, what did you do?" She lifted his right hand and pressed a kiss to the cut and bloody knuckles.

"I was worried. I was coming to check on you." His words were whispered in her ear as he bent toward her.

She looked up and found his face less than an inch from her own. She acted on impulse and leaned up on her toes, placing her lips to his in a kiss that took the variety of echoes in time and coalesced them into one line of possibilities.

He tasted right, spicy and wild. She kept her grip on his hand as she took her first kiss from this man from across the stars. Dazed, with a pulse that was throbbing through her from head to toe, she pulled back and he growled in denial.

Brodin pressed her against the battered wall and took her mouth in a kiss that was far less exploratory and far more intense than its predecessor.

Her lips tingled when he leaned away from her. His voice was low and had a husky tone that sent blood pooling into her centre. "That was educational."

She couldn't manage words for a long moment.

"I have finally found a way to quiet you. I will be sure to remember it."

She swallowed and licked her swollen lips. "I think they did this on purpose. They wanted to see what kind of bond we were developing."

"I hope I gave them plenty of data to observe." He lifted his fists and the cuffs he was wearing blinked rapidly.

"I bet you did, but I think they wanted to see how my mind focussed when we are together. The stunner was just a catalyst."

"How is your mind focussing?" His tone was low and he curled one of his battered arms around her waist.

She reached up and grabbed his locks, pressing her lips to his slightly pointed ear as she explained what he needed to do to get them off Dalpha and back to the Sector Guard.

The empty high-security cell was filled with peacekeepers and doctors when they emerged. Alara sighed, "Well, he has stopped his excavation, can we go back for lunch?"

The doctor who appeared to be the head of the facility stepped forward. "You were holding out on us, talent J'tak. You have far greater control over your abilities than you first demonstrated."

"I beg to differ. I have no control over it. Let

Brodin return to his people and I agree to whatever you wish." Alara spoke calmly to the physician and waited for the answer.

"That will not be acceptable. Your talent is linked to contact with him. You grow stronger when he is with you. That means that he is required for your talent to function fully. He will remain here. Indefinitely. "

Alara looked up at Brodin and noted his feral smile. "Is that what you needed?"

He looked into her eyes, smiled and made a fist. He slammed his right fist into his left hand. A short crackle broke free as something within his palm snapped.

The peacekeepers pointed stunners, but were unsure of what to do next when Brodin spoke. "As the commander of Sector Guard Base Teklan, I hereby charge the people of Dalpha with unlawful enslavement of their talents. Release the talents to our custody or have those who wish to leave removed by force."

The doctor went from pale green to ash grey with a blue tinge. "How long do we have?"

"The Guardsmen and the force of Udell base are on their way. I would start contacting your talents now."

CHAPTER SEVEN

Alara tried to keep her face straight as Brodin flicked the cuffs off his wrists and pried the collar from his neck. She stepped between him and the peacekeepers when he bent to remove the ankle cuffs. The moment he was free of the restrictive bands, he took a few steps toward the doctor.

"We need to get to the surface to contact my people. If they don't hear from me within the next ten minutes, this is going to get a lot more violent than it needs to be." He wrapped his arm around Alara and pulled her through the crowd of confused peacekeepers.

"What kind of signal are they waiting for?" The facility head followed closely.

"A verbal confirmation. Oddly enough, I don't think they trust you."

Alara wanted to laugh, but she was too busy viewing the future of the hallway she was in. Focussing on where she put her feet was an afterthought. The traffic of Guardsmen in their

tight and colourful uniforms was very distracting.

"What do you see?" Brodin's voice was low.

"Guardsmen, everywhere. They are going to scour the facility after we are gone."

"I thought you only saw your own future."

"So did I. This is all new." She rubbed idly at her monitors. "I wish I could get rid of these things."

"They will be removed as soon as we get to my shuttle. We have healers standing by."

She whispered, "What about Isaro?"

"You knew she was one of us?"

"There are not a lot of aliens here. For a Selna and a Dheman to show up in the same week defies likelihood." She chuckled.

"Isaro has already made her escape. She is around here somewhere." Brodin chuckled. "Alomar will find her."

"Her partner?"

"And her husband. He has an ability to find her no matter where she hides or what she looks like."

She chuckled. "That is a handy skill, especially since she doesn't seem the type to stay in one place for very long."

Brodin kept his arm around her as they entered a stairwell and made their way upward.

The doctor behind them was gasping, "We have a lift system."

"I would rather not be in a lift with you in case your folk decide that you are expendable."

Alara peeked behind Brodin to watch the doctor pale again. She grinned brightly at him. "Walking is good for you. Great for you if the power goes out."

He nodded and scurried up behind them.

"Where did the peacekeepers go?"

"I believe they are bracing for the attack. It won't do them any good. Fury and Beast will be in the first wave. Finder will be in the second wave with Frost. Pax and Guardian will sedate anyone in the vicinity after the first shock has settled."

"You have this all worked out?"

"We had it worked out before I floated in here on a crippled ship. Fixer will have my hide for what I did to that poor piece of metal, but it was all in pursuit of freedom for the talents of Dalpha."

"Did you know about me?"

He looked down and grinned. "Yes. My folk will be relieved. We have never considered Dalphaic genes before. Your folk are a surprisingly close match."

"Dhema needs women?" She snickered. "I thought your folk didn't go for blending genes?"

He was half-carrying her up the steps and the moment that she gasped and stumbled, he swung her into his arms. "We are a pragmatic people. There comes a time in every species life when it has to decide whether to stay as it is or take a step forward. My family is up for stepping forward."

Being carried like an infant was a little distracting, but she had to ask. "I thought your folk didn't like talents either."

"We don't, but we don't enslave them. When my talent developed, I was already a General. I informed my superiors and they placed me with the Sector Guard. Your people will be given the same options."

"What if they don't want to leave?"

"They will be monitored and checked on. If Dalpha refuses to allow them to be paid for their work, the planet will be sealed from all import and export as well as visitation."

A cold chill ran through Alara, counteracting the heat of his arms. "You would lock the planet?"

"It is not a permanent solution, but when Dalpha applied for entry to the Alliance, they agreed to abide by the regulations that are in place throughout. That means equal treatment for their citizens, no matter their talent or its lack."

They were on the upper level, the natural light streaming in around them.

"Director H'lworth, where is your communication centre? I need to send the message if you want this building to remain standing."

The gasping doctor pointed down the hall to the left and Brodin set Alara down next to the door while he slammed his fist through the lock.

The director stood with her as Brodin smashed

his way through the room until he reached the communication station. Several staffers made a run for it when her Dheman snarled at them and she waited with the director while Brodin made his call.

"You won't survive long in space, talent J'tak." The director whispered to her across the torn door of the com centre.

"I won't be in space, Doctor." She refused to allow him his title when he would not use her given name.

"You will be dead in no time, talent J'tak."

Alara started to laugh. She couldn't help it. She collapsed under the weight of her amusement.

The director was colouring with fury. "Why are you laughing?"

"I have seen over two hundred futures from today onward. I may not always come home without damage, but I always come home."

He hissed, "Your home is closed to you. This world will no longer welcome you after what you have brought to us."

She wiped her eyes and sobered a little. "I have not been welcome since my power flared up. I grew up knowing that the people of my own planet, my friends in school and my employers despised me, they just didn't know it. Your little threat has no purchase in my heart. Get bent."

The director spluttered and was going to lunge

for her when she stood up and moved out of his way. He turned and kicked out at her, but she knew where he was going to be and he never made contact.

It was a peculiar dance, but Alara managed to keep away from the director until he slumped in exhaustion on the floor.

A slow rhythmic clapping came from the doorway. Brodin was grinning at her. "I was going to help, but you had it well in hand."

"Thank you. What is the next step?"

"We leave and remove to the orbital shuttle so that you can get fitted with a uniform and get medical care for any residual effects of the stunner. The Udell mechs are on their way down as I speak."

He wasn't exaggerating. A shadow crowded over the door and a large metallic object nestled into the inner courtyard of the lab.

Alara looked down at the director who was staring at the foot of the giant bot with a sick horror. She grinned. "I am really hoping that the space under the mechs can take the load. You don't want them dropping into crew quarters."

He looked up at her with a completely blank expression in his eyes. She couldn't help but feel a little sorry for him until she remembered that he wanted to keep her as a pet for the future casts of Dalpha. "Get up, Doctor. You have guests."

CHAPTER EIGHT

Tech and Phase were charming women who helped guard Alara and Brodin as they boarded the small transport. The pilot grinned and gave them the command, "Buckle up, we are in a hurry."

Brodin helped her into the shuttle and buckled her in before sealing the doors. He slammed into his seat and buckled into place, giving the pilot a thumbs up that sent them straight into the air in a vertical takeoff.

Alara swallowed as the gravitational forces pressed her into the support of the chair. She was glad that she had missed lunch as the intensity of the climb caused black spots to swim in front of her vision.

She fought to breathe as the pressure built until she was suddenly free and only the tether of the harness kept her in place. Alara gasped for air.

"Breathe deeply, slowly. It can be hard for newcomers to get the hang of it." Brodin's voice was weary.

"Yeah, we had to do it on the way to the moon. It doesn't make it easier." She stilled her pulse and relaxed. "I am very glad they didn't feed me though. The pilot almost got to experience Dalpha cuisine firsthand."

Brodin chuckled and leaned back in his seat. "Thanks for the pickup, pilot."

"Not a problem, sir. Udell base is glad to be of assistance. This is the kind of action we love." He glanced over his shoulder and grinned before returning to the view screen. They approached a huge ship surrounded by smaller defensive outriders.

Alara listened to the pilot give the necessary clearances and she watched Brodin in concern as he listed in the harness. "Is there medical staff where we are going?"

The pilot looked at her in surprise. "There is."

"Alert them that Brodin isn't well. He seems to have blacked out." She reached out to take Brodin's hand and was only mildly comforted when his fingers closed around hers.

The pilot spoke urgently into the com and increased their speed. Instead of the large hulking ship, he aimed for a smaller ship only half a kilometre in size.

The lines of the ship they approached were more art than science, delicate grace with deadly function.

"Fixer and Reset are onboard. This is the Sector Guard emergency medical shuttle, also known as Fixer's motor home. It is a reference that Pilot uses, but I still don't get it."

"What race is Pilot from?" Nervous and worried, Alara grasped at anything she could to keep calm.

"Terran. One of the new races. Stellar Storm, Finder and a few of the others are Terran as well. The Guard also has Azon, Dheman, an Enjel and Draï. Not to mention the experimental and cloned races that have found homes in the bases. You will be adding the first Dalphaic to that proud tradition."

Alara smiled. "That sounds wonderful. Being at the start of a tradition gives a person the feeling of leaving a legacy behind."

"It does. Each member of Udell base stands tall knowing that we walk between the innocent and those who would take advantage of them." The pilot shifted their trajectory and slowed the engines.

She felt a lightening of spirit knowing that this was not a place that she was being dumped as a punishment, but she was joining a group that had pride in their work.

She kept her grip on Brodin as they docked with the larger shuttle. The moment that the seals were confirmed, the door opened and a team of men and

women swarmed them. Alara was unbuckled and lifted from her chair. Another swarm covered Brodin and heaved his muscled bulk out and into the larger shuttle.

A woman with rainbow hair put her body under Alara's arm and supported her as the gravity of the ship kicked in.

"Hello, Alara. I am Mala, or Fixer if you prefer. Come along and we will get those monitors off."

"Where is Brodin?"

"Reset is taking care of him. The Dalpha lab did not allow him sleep, so he has been suffering exhaustion for a few days. Reset will have him back on his feet and a good night's sleep will see him back on his feet." Mala was manoeuvring her easily through the ship.

"You are really strong."

"It is the bodysuit. It comes with extra reinforcement and minute motors to assist with lifting. I installed them when my twins were born. Lifting two at once was quite the effort."

Alara smiled and then the meaning kicked in. "You have children?"

"Of course."

"Both with rainbow hair, one with black skin, one with pale?" Alara was making sense of some of her visions.

"Yes. Isala and Mabi. Did Brodin tell you about them?"

"No, I saw them."

Mala stopped in her tracks. "Where did you see them?"

Alara chuckled softly. "I saw them in my future. They are alive and whole ten years and more from now."

"Oh. You are the seer."

"Not really. Maybe. I have no idea." Alara laughed again. Pain seared through her mind and she gasped.

"What is it?"

"Pain. Lots of pain." Alara's knees buckled as a second wave of agony rippled across her senses.

"We do it here then." Mala sat her down in the hall and pressed her fingers to the nodes on Alara's temples. As Mala worked to pry the nodes off, the pain spiked.

"I need you to hold still, Alara. In medical, we would have strapped you down, but they anchored these to your nervous system and I have to unravel them."

Alara hissed through the pain and held as still as she could. The moment that Mala succeeded, Alara felt it. The agony faded to nothing but the paralyzing spike at the back of her head.

"Now the last one. Bend forward and put your head on your knees."

Alara almost sobbed but moved into the crash position. "I think they are trying to kill me."

"That is a good guess. Hold still again, I am going in." Mala's fingers parted the hair at the back of her scalp and she worked on the last of the monitors.

Alara pressed her forehead into her knees and breathed in shallow pants as the pain began to build to the point where spots swam in her vision. It took three minutes of silent tears and holding motionless before the pain stopped.

Alara sobbed violently as soon as the pain was over. Mala removed the last of the monitor wires and cast them aside.

Alara felt the arms coming around her and let the memory of the pain recede. When her voice was under her control once again, she sat straight and told Mala, "They were trying to kill me."

"I know. The energy coming off the nodes was far beyond a therapeutic dose. If the pilot had not come here instead of the Udell launcher, you would be dead by now."

Alara leaned against the bulkhead. "It is something I am well aware of. I know that I survived, but I didn't know how. This does explain one thing to me though."

Mala sat on her haunches. "What is that?"

"How my children end up playing with yours." She grinned and let Fixer help her to her feet. She had a Dheman to check on.

CHAPTER NINE

Watching Brodin sleep was a habit that Alara wanted to take on as a full time hobby. His thick, dark lashes were surprisingly long, giving his blue-green eyes an intensity when he was awake and a boyish look while sleeping.

His chest rose and fell in a slow rhythm that she found soothing. The medics had placed him on a wide bed that had plenty of room for her to snuggle up to him. She was barely able to resist the temptation, but she managed to keep to one side of Brodin's bed.

Reset came into the room and smiled at her, her long navy hair swaying in a thick braid down her back, the chalky pallor to her skin a lovely contrast to her vivid eyes. "How are you doing, Alara?"

"Tired, but fine. How are things on Dalpha?"

Reset sat next to her and took her hand. "Things are going well. We have evacuated three hundred talents so far."

"Where will they go?"

"There is a line of colonies waiting for them."

Many of the Oefric colonies are pining for genetic diversity. They will be given the option of where to go and in what capacity they choose to serve."

Reset's hand was warm on Alara's. As they talked quietly, Alara felt a wave of well-being wash over her. Energy coursed through her as her aches and pains disappeared.

"Are you healing me?"

"Just the little aches and pains so you can continue back to Dalpha once the dust is settled."

That made her blink. "I have to go back?" She tried to tug her hand away from Reset, but the woman held fast.

"Not to stay, just to make a statement to your government as the first Dalphaic member of the Sector Guard. We will have you kitted out completely before then, so as soon as you are ready to let sleeping beauty here continue his restorative nap, we can find Fixer and have her customize a suit for you. What are you looking for in a suit?"

Alara blinked. "I get to choose?"

"Well, if you have preferences, Fixer is the woman to talk to. She has made all of the Sector Guard suits and is one of the most senior female Guardsmen you will meet. She can put armoured panels into your suit, small weapons, hydraulics or anything else you can think of."

She grimaced. "Does it have to be skin tight?"

"It helps with thermal control, but you can ask

for additional accoutrements. Are you feeling up to it?"

Alara looked at the muscular bulk of her Dheman sleeping under the sheets of the medical bay. "Let's go."

Mala was in a launch bay with a pile of equipment and the woman looked up with a smile. "Is it time for a uniform?"

Alara had a grin on her face. "Apparently. What are my options in accessories? I do so love accessories."

"And she wants a drape or something. Not a huge fan of the formfitting body suit." Reset smiled and popped herself onto a chair.

"That happens. We have options. Now, get out of those hideous scrubs and we will try to get you into something that fits your status as a Guardsman." Mala held up a blank black suit and offered it to her.

Against her better judgement, Alara went behind a pile of equipment and exchanged the lab scrubs for the bodysuit. It was a fair fit, but there were wrinkles that appeared whenever she moved that made her scowl. She may not have been a slave to fashion, but she did like to look tidy. Wrinkles vexed her.

"Come on out, Alara. Let's see what we have to work with." There was eagerness in Mala's tone.

Alara walked out and stepped on the podium

that Mala pulled from the floor. "You really enjoy this part of the job, don't you?"

"I really do. I loved playing dress up when I was little and now I get to do it with every new Guardsman. The requirements of each talent are very specific and I love matching the suit to the user." The woman with the rainbow hair rubbed her hands together and slowly moved around the podium.

It was the strangest girls' day out that Alara had ever had. At one point Mala mentioned, "I made your cousin's suit a few days ago, that was interesting."

"How so?"

"A suit that can withstand extreme heat and vibration is not something I have really had to do before."

Alara nodded. That did sum up Tosha's talent rather nicely. "Have you heard how she is doing?"

"She has been sent on her first assignment as a Guardsman. It is dangerous, but she and Vortex should be up for the task."

Alara focussed on thoughts of her cousin and saw images that she couldn't understand. Fire, wind, a low squat building and an open plain. Tosha was being held with something pointed at her throat and a man in a Sector Guard uniform was bleeding on the ground.

She raised her hand to her forehead and rubbed

as the battle commenced and the man who attacked her cousin tipped into a seething cauldron of magma. "They aren't doing well. They need help—medical attention."

Reset sat up and paid closer attention. "What?"

"They were attacked, he was cut up. They need medical help." Alara swayed and Mala caught her. She looked into the eyes of Fixer and blinked. "I have never seen the present before."

"It might have something to do with your blood ties. You can never underestimate your ties to your loved ones." Mala stepped back and nodded.

"Am I done?"

"Yes, and a lovely contrast if I do say so myself. I will change Might's uniform to match yours."

"Might?"

Reset answered. "Brodin. I am going to request permission to head back to Teklan. I want to be there when they get back and if Mist lets me do the flying, it should be feasible."

The healer was out the door in a moment. Alara didn't even have a chance to thank her.

"Okay, take a look and tell me what you think."

Mala moved her hand and a mirrored surface took over one wall.

"Oh, wow. I can't believe that you did this from just that simple black suit." Silver and black made up the base bodysuit, a crimson swath of armoured fabric ran from her neck to her ankles,

anchored with a belt carrying a small neural disruptor and a gas gun.

"Now, your suit has built in communicators in the neck region. They can be triggered manually or with extreme biological distress. Don't worry, sexual hormones don't set it off, so foreplay in uniform is a definite go."

Mala was so matter off fact that Alara almost forgot to blush. "I don't...I have never..."

The other woman laughed. "Don't worry about it. Most Dheman men are only attracted to virgins. It is part of their genetic urge to keep their race from STD's. They are also obsessed with bloodlines."

A baritone voice came from the doorway, "And that is why we have been slowly dying out."

Where Brodin's voice led was now Might, commander of the Teklan base and Alara was delighted that the suit was not hormone triggered.

CHAPTER TEN

To say that Brodin impressed her in his uniform was a gross understatement. Her heart pounded, her hands sweated and there was a tremor in her midsection that was very unsettling.

"You look lovely in that uniform, Alara. Have you chosen a name yet?"

She blinked as Mala receded behind her counter and Might approached. "I have to choose?"

"It is customary for a Guardsman to have a code name to delineate the barrier between work and home life." He extended his hand and helped her off the podium.

She stepped down and enjoyed the feeling of the deck under the boots that Mala had crafted. "Why are you awake?"

"As Reset's commanding officer, she had to get my authorization to haul ass to Teklan with Mist. We will attend to the duties left to us and follow them as quickly as we can." Might gave her what she needed without asking.

"Echo in time. That is my name. Echo for short."

"A most suitable name for an extraordinary woman. You do look wonderful. Would you like to check your hair before we head back to the planet?"

"Is something wrong with it?" She touched her braid and noticed that it had unravelled in several places.

"Nothing is wrong with it, but you seem the type of woman to like to present a certain persona when telling your government to kiss your ass." He waved thanks to Mala and walked Alara down the hall.

A small chamber was at their disposal and she quickly sat at the dressing table and took up the comb. "Thank you for letting Reset return to Teklan. I have never seen the present before, but if it is a truth and not a figment of my imagination, Tosha will need all the help she can get."

"Talents do not evolve if you do not use them regularly. Seeing your cousin in jeopardy would be a logical expansion of your sight." He absently helped her unravel her braid and took up a brush to match her work with the comb.

"Do you do hair often?" she looked up and saw the precise detail of his warrior braids and grinned. "I guess you do."

"It goes with being in the Dhema military. With the intense precision of our inspections, we quickly master the braiding of hair." His hands worked her

hair into sections and swiftly brushed it free of tangles.

"Would you mind arranging my hair for me? You seem to have far more speed and dexterity than I do."

He grinned and inclined his head, his horns gleaming brightly in the overhead lighting. "Of course, lady. Bear with me and you will be ready to speak to your people in no time."

A wave of nerves shimmied through her. "I am not sure that I am the person to speak for the talents on my world."

He paused with three hanks of hair held in his crimson fingers. "Who better? Out of all of the talents born to your world, you did the one thing that none have done before you."

She watched him resume braiding and arranging her hair into graceful and sensual twists. His mastery of the medium of hair care was truly impressive. She knew dozens of women who would still be fighting to unsnarl their hair.

She noted his pointed look in the mirror. "What was that? What did I do?"

He grinned, his white teeth flashing, the points on the canines comforting and menacing at the same time. "You called for help."

She took a deep breath and stood on the holo projector. Since a few riots had broken out on the

surface, it had been deemed too dangerous for her to attend the meeting on the surface.

Might had introduced her and then stood aside for her to address her own people. She had never enjoyed public speaking, but there was no getting out of this.

“Ladies and gentlemen of Dalpha, I was born Alara J’tak. Now, I am to be addressed as Echo in Time.” She hauled in another breath and remembered everything her Gran had ever told her.

“When talents on Dalpha became visible, the governing bodies assembled and decided what to do with them. One of the first talents was a truth seer and it became obvious that it was a useful talent to have in a judicial setting. As a few more talents became visible, the government worked at getting those talents to work for them.

“The talents did not want to go into government service. They simply wanted to live normal lives as normal citizens. That was deemed unacceptable and talents became illegal.

“It was not due to any actions on the part of the talents. Throughout our history, there has never been a recorded case of attack or abuse by any talent. The fear instilled was simply an advertising campaign to get folks to turn in their loved ones.

“Fear of the new and strange swept across the planet and talents were turned in for processing

and they were trained to use their talents for the benefit of the governing bodies. Those who would not be processed for use in public were locked in the lab and used as test subjects.

“These men and women are citizens of Dalpha, with the same right to protection and support as any of the other citizens. A rising genetic pattern for psychic talent is no reason to lock them away and sentence them to a life of slavery.

“It is slavery. These citizens are removed from their homes, lives and loved ones, processed until they have no thoughts beyond service to the government of Dalpha. They are not paid, have no vacation time or time away from their duties. They burn out and their minds snap and those who used them to the breaking point discard them.

“Removed from the only duty that they have been conditioned to engage in, they die soon after their forced *retirement*.

“I ask the population of Dalpha to think, is this a life they want for their children? Talents develop during puberty when the body chemistry is roiling. We are an evolving species on the brink of a surge into a predominantly psychic society. This evolution cannot be restrained or restricted in any way. The Dalphaic will be a proud and magnificent species within the next four generations with or without the government’s assistance.

“The Alliance has sent the Sector Guard here to release the enslaved talents and give them the option of normal lives at a variety of colonies throughout Alliance space. If they have family members who wish to join them, they may. This exodus will remove the majority of captured talents from the positions they are holding in government, law enforcement and medical centres.”

Here was the part that she had been worrying about, but she had to push on. “If the governments of Dalpha do not immediately begin an equitable treatment of their talents, the Alliance will have no choice but to lock the planet. This will cease any interplanetary trade and create an environment of hostility for the sum of one hundred years.

“During the period of the lockdown, the talents will be monitored from a distance and removed from the surface upon request. They will not suffer because of the actions of the Dalphaic governments. They will be given choices of where to live and occupations they may find suitable. This same offer will not be given to the standard citizens who will remain locked on their world for their lifetimes.”

Alara hated saying that last bit, but the general population had to be smacked in the face to get their attention. The threat of being locked on their own world while the freaks got to fly free might

just make a difference.

“The locking of the world will not go into play for six months and if in that six months, the government manages a training, job and retirement centre for the talents that choose to work with them, the lockdown will not occur.

“We are all citizens of Dalpha. We went to the same schools, the same churches, parks, events, weddings, funerals and trials as the rest of you. We are not different because we were born with active genes. We are different only because a politician says so. Tell your local representatives of your experience with talents, positive or negative. Those reports will be part of the assessment of the planetary access plan.”

Alara shifted from the planned words for a final plea. “I worked in a craft shop. My cousin was a receptionist for a construction firm. Until we were forced to show our talents, we lived quiet lives doing our jobs and taking fun vacations. In one moment of saving a tour group full of strangers, my cousin was marked for incarceration. It didn’t matter that she had never used her talent in public before or that lives were at stake. She was turned from a free citizen to an enslaved talent in that one moment. Because she was my cousin, I was right behind her.

“I had no plans for my life on Dalpha, but that was because I knew my future wasn’t there. I can

see into timelines related to me personally. That is why the Sector Guard is here. I called them. I realize that this will cause many folks to despise me, but all futures start with a sudden choice. I made the choice to save my cousin from a life of slavery and in that moment, I sealed your fates.

"I wish I could regret it, but I don't. Evolution is change and change is growth. You have before you a chance to make Dalpha into a bright new world. Talents are springing up every day and by incorporating their talents into your everyday lives in an equitable manner, you can all engage in a far brighter future than anyone on this planet could have imagined."

She took another deep breath. "I appreciate your time. I hope that the people will speak for themselves in this matter and defend the talents within their own families. You cannot choose your genes, you cannot choose your family, you cannot choose your world. Take steps today to make each aspect of your life better and thereby improve the lives of those around you. Talents, evaluate your personal desires and goals in life. The Alliance will have communication terminals standing by for any and all questions in this matter, including counsellors that will help you ease into public life if that is your wish."

Alara inclined her head with its elaborate coil of braids studded with silver clasps. "Thank you for

your attention. Be welcome in the Alliance when all of your citizens can stand together.”

She smiled and stepped off the holo projector.

When the lights flickered and the transmission sent to every city on every continent of Dalpha, the Sector Guard representatives in the com room began to clap.

Might extended his hand and when she placed her hand in his, he raised it to his lips. “Not only a woman of talent and a true beauty, but a powerful public speaker. Is there nothing that you cannot do?”

She grinned and slammed against him for a hug. “I can’t crochet. My fingers get all tangled.”

He chuckled and rubbed his chin along the wrap of her braids. “Let’s go home. I think you need to see your cousin.”

“I really, really do.”

“What do you see in our future?” His voice was low and it rumbled along her nerves.

“A huge wedding. Sadly, it is almost all of the Sector Guard with two tiny flower girls.”

“I will start making calls.”

He didn’t sound upset, there was a hum of anticipation in his tone. Alara had only the one cousin and she was also on Teklan, so that wouldn’t be too much of a problem.

“I think this will be the first large wedding on Teklan. We have to do it right.” His hands were

slowly caressing her spine and her breasts pressed against the hard wall of his chest.

She sighed happily and rubbed her cheek against his chest. "Do you have a lot of family?"

His chuckle was rich from her vantage point. "A few. They will be very happy to attend a wedding that has me as a groom. You will meet my cousin's wife Samantha. If there had been a Sector Guard in place, I am fairly sure that she would have been in the front line and my cousin Kassil would have been right behind her."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Alara was almost vibrating in her seat. Teklan Base had given its clearance and they were on final approach.

The other Teklan Guardsmen had preceded them. The governments of Dalpha had formed a council that wanted to ask pointed questions and the Alliance determined that Echo in Time was the perfect person to answer them.

“Are you excited to see your new home?”

“I am more excited to see Tosha. The last time I saw her she was being sucked into a swirling Vortex and taken away across the surface of the moon.” Alara wove her fingers together and sat tensely in the navigator seat.

The landing was far smoother than anything she had ever experienced. On the whole, she was very happy to have Brodin at the controls. He seemed to know what he was doing.

“Here we are. I will call them as soon as we return to my office.” He set them neatly on the tarmac and powered the shuttle down.

Alara was fumbling with the harness when his large hands covered her own. He unbuckled her swiftly and helped her rise to her feet. His kiss wasn't a surprise. He had taken every opportunity, hallway, dark corridor and quiet moment to experiment with their deepening intimacy.

When they parted, she grinned up at him. "Are you sure you aren't getting tired of doing that?"

"Ever since you informed me that we are having no less than three children, starting that wave of the future has been on my mind in the extreme."

He led her out of the shuttle and helped her down onto the tarmac. A flash of green caught her attention and she screamed, sending Brodin into a defensive spin. She left him behind and ran forward until she and Tosha were spinning in a hug.

When they stopped, Tosha asked her, "Alara, have you had breakfast?"

Alara looked at Brodin and he inclined his head for her to spend time with her cousin.

"I will be joining you for breakfast. You can tell me how your orientation has gone. Brodin said you were not on full duty yet." She smiled at her cousin and took in the protective hovering of her partner. It was nice to see him outside his whirlwind for the first time.

Tosha smiled "It has been interesting, but I think part of it has to be told to Brodin as a

debriefing. He can catch up when he gets back to his office."

Alara linked her arm with Tosha's on one side and Brodin's on the other. Tosha grabbed her partner and together, the foursome walked back to the base with smiles and a swing in their step.

Alara's cousin was back with her, safe and alive. Anything else could wait until after she was settled in.

"So, Alara, how has your talent been behaving?" Tosha asked quietly.

"It has been fine. Evolving every day and yours?"

"It is doing its thing with or without me." Tosh chuckled.

Alara looked at her cousin and focused. While Shake would take a beating in her life, being assigned to some very violent retrievals, she would always return to Teklan with her partner Vortex and help Alara with her little ones. Tosha didn't have children in the future, but she was ready and willing to help Alara with her little red and green monsters.

Tosha gave her a few peculiar looks and Alara realized that she was wearing what Brodin considered her *scheming* smile. "I will explain it later."

Tosha smirked. "You always say that."

Alara bumped her hip with her own, "And I

always do. It is good to see you, Tosh.” The truth of her words ran through her and it caused the smile to spread across her features again.

She felt Brodin watching her and turned to look up at him. He knew that she was enjoying her views of the future and let her have her moment.

She chuckled and resumed the conversation as they entered the structure that housed the majority of the base. “So, Tosha, will you be my bridesmaid?”

Tosh’s squeal echoed in the halls and caused several support staff members to freeze in their tracks.

* * * *

Brodin and Mix stepped aside and watched the cousins chatter. Mix asked. “Do you want me to tell Tosha about the planetary lockdown?”

“Alara will tell her. She was the one to deliver the initial announcement. She did an incredible job. How are you feeling? Alara said you had been slashed up.”

“I was. Thank you for having Reset back on base when we got here.”

“Don’t thank me. Echo in Time developed a real-time vision. She told Reset and she got her ass back here in no time.”

Mix looked over at the woman doing a peculiar

hugging dance with his mate and shook his head. Tosha felt that Alara needed defending, but Mix was beginning to believe that that might not be the case.

Echo in Time was an appropriate name and her grasp of the future might save more lives than just his own.

He looked forward to watching her in action, but first, it was time for breakfast.

He cleared his throat and the ladies turned to him with identical impatient looks. "We can continue this in the commissary. There are a lot of Guardsmen and you will need a data pad to work out their placement in the wedding ceremony."

Tosha grinned and snaked under his arm. "Don't worry, Mix. I will always give you my full attention."

"As I have noted, you seem to see to the heart of things, but I am still in the mood for food, so shall we?"

Brodin was carefully gathering his partner at his side with one arm around her waist. "A meal will be a good break. The chef's don't make Dalphaic food, but the Dheman equivalents are fairly tasty. I look forward to introducing you to them."

They resumed their progress through the halls and several support staff smiled and waved at Brodin and Mix.

* * * *

Alara smiled at the friendly atmosphere provided by the non-talented support staff. Here, she would be able to open her mind to all temporal possibilities and see if it could be used to save lives.

As she sipped at her third cup of Dheman tea, she couldn't keep the happy grin from her lips. Isaro had wandered in with the fabled General Alomar. His feline traits hadn't been exaggerated and his good humour was evident in his patient treatment of his mate.

When the Selna flicked into the medical tech who had treated her gently, Alara laughed. "I knew it!"

"I had to get all of those nodes off you somehow. I am just glad I was able to remove enough that they couldn't kill you outright."

"Thank you. It wasn't pleasant, but I survived it, thanks to Fixer."

"Pinky is good for that kind of thing." Isaro laughed and Alomar elbowed her in the ribs.

"Pinky?"

"My sister-in-law. My brother is Shade. It seems to be a family enterprise." Isaro sipped at her tea.

"You call her Pinky?"

"Not when she can hear me. She is surprisingly spry for someone so nerdy."

The table laughed together and warmth blossomed inside Alara. This was a new family for her, with all of its quirks and weirdness and she was settling in at an alarming rate.

As she focussed, her future stretched before her in a straight column and all of these faces as well as many others in Guardsman uniforms came and went in her life. There were deaths, births, battles and conflicts, but most of all, there was family.

It was a future she was going to run to with open arms.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Book 20 is upon us and only five more books loom ahead in the Sector Guard series. For those who are freaking out, that means that after that point, the Tales of the Citadel will begin wherein the Citadel Morganti will start training new psychics and sending them on assignment with the Sector Guard as necessary.

I hope that you enjoyed Alara's tale. She has the one personality trait that I value above all others. She asks for help. In a land of public opinion manipulated by media, she asked for help until she found the right person at the right time. It is an admirable trait and I wish I had it when I needed it.

Brodin is back after his first appearance in Deal with a Dheman as Kassil's flirtatious cousin. He made his mark and I knew that I had to bring him back eventually...that time has come.

Thank you for joining me in the Sector Guard,

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Viola Grace was born in Manitoba, Canada where she still resides today. She really likes it there. She has no pets and can barely keep sea monkeys alive for a reasonable amount of time. Her line of day job tends to be analytical which leaves her mind hopping to weave stories. No co-worker is safe from her character analysis. In keeping with busy hands are happy hands, her hobbies have included cross-stitch, needlepoint, quilting, costuming, cake decorating, baking, cooking, metal work, beading, sculpting, painting, doll making, henna tattoos, chain mail, and a few others that have been forgotten. It is quite often that these hobbies make their way into her tales.

Viola's fetishes include boots and corsetry, and her greatest weakness is her uncontrollable blush. Her writing actively pursues the Happily Ever After that so rarely occurs in nature. It is an admirable thing and something that we should all strive for. To find one that we truly like, as well as love.