



LOST in
TRANSFORMATION
TERRAN RESET

VIOLA GRACE



Mutation or death are her only choices, so she splits the difference and becomes something more than a dragon's bride.

Life on Earth offered her a slow death by one of the many cancers that riddled her body. The Terran Avatar and the Reset Project have offered her a new life. Any life is preferable at this point.

Liona accepts that she will be torn down and rebuilt, and as long as she gets to sleep through it, she is all for it.

The mail-order bride factor is odd, but it is a traditional way to get a compatible woman long-distance. She supposed that aliens weren't much different.

After being reset, she looks at the specs of her destination species and is shocked. He was different. He was very different. It never occurred to her that space dragons were a real thing.

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Lost in Transformation

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Lost in Transformation
Terran Reset, Book 8

By

Viola Grace

Chapter One

Liona Kix, head of Kix Construction, smiled at her board members. “So, in conclusion, Amy, you are in charge. My estate has already been settled, and I am out of here.” She ran her hand over the fuzzy surface of her nearly bald head. Her fingers shook, and exhaustion was with her every day lately. She had barely enough time to take care of things.

Amy Melford, attorney and now CEO of the company, asked, “You are serious? You are leaving?”

“Yeah. The last round of treatment couldn’t push the cancer back. Heading up and out is my chance at survival, so I am taking it.”

Jack Trust frowned. “Most cancers can be cured nowadays. What makes yours different?”

“Well, it had a firm hold before the ambassador and the new equipment landed, and it is in my entire body. It is aggressive as fuck, and I only have a few months left. If this doesn’t work, I get to die in space, which is pretty cool.”

She used her canes carefully and got to her feet. “Now, if you will excuse me, my ride is here.”

Liona walked to the elevator, the last bit of her estate scattered and her earthly legal matters settled. She got in the elevator and exhaled slowly. She was exhausted beyond description. Her body was killing her. The ambassador’s wife and Terran Avatar had offered her a chance to negotiate for the life and wellbeing of a bunch of frozen refugees that needed a world to live on. There was an old being living there who had absolute rights to the entire world, but he wasn’t feeling chatty or cooperative. Liona was being sent to change that.

She was really hoping that the more advanced treatments made available off-world would help. Minerva was confident that they could. The Earth representative had sought her out, bringing up the old application that she had signed for the Volunteer Project. To Liona's shock, her application had been brought up again because she matched certain criteria. Even cancer didn't change the fact that she was the person for the job.

The bell chimed, and doors opened. Liona stepped out using her canes. She nodded to the security guards and slowly made her way to the door. James moved quickly and opened the door for her, smiling. "Have a good day, Ms. Kix." She smiled and thanked him as she moved her protesting body toward the woman who stood out on the sidewalk. Minerva was waiting next to the vehicle when Liona left her office building.

"Ready to go, Liona?"

Liona nodded. "Now or never. You sure you are good to be next to me? The last radiation treatment was a doozy."

"I am fine with it. My husband is radioactive."

"Sentences I am guessing I need to get used to."

Minerva helped her onto the comfortable seat of the SUV, stowed her canes, and then got around to sit next to Liona for their drive to the spaceport, where a shuttle would take her to the lunar base for her treatment, and from there, she would be put under full medical treatment for the duration of her travel to the world they needed her to negotiate for. The images of the style of life support made her grin. Those poor bastards were going to have to stare at her naked, shrivelled body for months.

Minerva kept her entertained while chatting to her, and then she let something slip that Liona hadn't heard before.

"So, when you have been reset, you should feel just as good as you did in your early twenties." Minerva smiled.

"Reset?"

"Yeah, we find some unaffected DNA, and we reset your body to its health and wellbeing from your twenties then

alterations are made to keep you from being affected by the same illnesses again.”

“How did I miss that the first time we spoke?”

“You were recovering from a treatment. You were vomiting as I talked.” She smiled. “Your body will be whole, it will be changed, and there will be some new genes in the mix that will keep you stable and healthy. But you will live a long and interesting life.”

“I have had interesting moments, as I am sure you have.”

Minerva laughed. “Yeah, you could say that. My daughter will be helping you with your medications, and my mate will be transporting you to your new home.”

“You don’t mind him missing?”

Minerva chuckled “You aren’t going alone, and he is doing this as an assist to a friend of ours. She needs humans out in space, so he is taking some of those who applied for the volunteer program years ago. You might not have been able to go then, but you can now. Things changed.”

“I am glad for it. Your contact gave me a flicker of hope a day after I got the news that my treatment wasn’t working.”

“My timing wasn’t for your benefit; it was for mine. The request for assistance came through, and I hit my files hard. Your file came up, and your status was identified later. It meant that I had to do the hard sell.”

“Letting me live? That isn’t a hard sell; it’s a rope. I can either hang myself with it or start climbing. I have always been a climber.”

“And you have a thick file for negotiations, so you will know how to make sure that everyone gets what they need so that things can move forward.”

“Do aliens negotiate like we do?”

Minerva laughed. “Oh, sweetie, when you are out there, *you* are the alien. They are just looking for and trying to keep their own home, respectively.”

“What do I do after I complete this negotiation?”

“That is up to you. You can work and earn enough to travel the star systems, or you can call me, and I can arrange another assignment.”

“Oh. Nice. Do you mind if I nap for the rest of the drive? It has been a tiring day.”

“Rest all you like.” Minerva took her hand.

Warmth came up from her hand, and the heat from Minerva made Liona sleepy.

* * * *

Minerva looked at Liona’s sunken features, frail appearance, and the cancers that still pulsed in her body at a frequency that was obvious to Minerva’s enhanced senses.

Liona had weeks left. That much was certain. There certainly wasn’t a month left in her. Her body’s fight was over. Either she could take this chance and throw herself into it, or she could die. There wasn’t another option. Being reset was going to be taxing to her system, but it was her only option to back her body up to a healthy state before the genetic cancers activated. It wasn’t going to be easy, but Liona was a fighter. She wouldn’t make a good mate for a Draï otherwise.

* * * *

Aw, fuck. I missed the lunar station. Liona sighed, and bubbles traced past her.

An enormous and very scary man stood in front of the tube she was in, and he tapped toward a keyboard on the inside of the tube.

“Hello, Ms. Kix. I am Minerva’s husband, Imbolt-Zanican. You may call me Imbolt. I am in charge of this vessel and the

resets that are transforming as they travel.”

She nodded, and her hair floated around her. A lot of hair. It was down to her knees.

She sighed and typed. *Hello, Mr. Imbolt. Why is my hair so long?*

“Ah, that is the default for females, so it was what you were reset to.” He was amused. His grey face, with markings moving under the skin, was grinning.

She paused and looked down again at what she had ignored on the first pass. *Scars gone?*

She had had surgery and a full mastectomy six months earlier. She shouldn't have been seeing breasts and a flatter belly and long legs, and she even had all her toes again.

How long was I out?

“You have been in the tank for thirty-eight days. You have received the nanites to rebuild your body. Complementary genetic programming has been injected into you, and you are responding well to it. Now, you should also be able to access languages and documentation in your mind.”

She closed her eyes and thought about the patterns she saw on screens behind Imbolt, and she blinked as she got information and languages. She opened her eyes wide as it felt like part of her brain was unfolding.

“The tablet can get you any information you need on Neevath and the being you need to negotiate with, as well as the Tremori refugees.”

She frowned, typed the name Neevath, and laughed at the image on the screen.

“You are amused?”

My screen is showing me a dragon.

“Correct. That is Neevath.”

What?

“Look up the Draï, and you will understand. I will leave you to it.”

A little bit nervous, she looked up information on the Draï and scrolled through images of Draï with Terran mates. The specs for the ladies were remarkably normal with one exception. Lïona put her hand on her belly, tried to measure, and just blinked. Nope, that wasn't going to fit.

She read biographies and reports written by the mates of the Draï and felt less nervous. They all mentioned the same thing, a song in their mind before they met their dragon. They had to approve of their dragon's home, and the song meant they were psychically compatible. Physical compatibility was worked out later.

Lïona looked at the dragon Neevath and tried to imagine what his two-legged form looked like.

Well, she had time to imagine it.

Now, she had to look into the Tremori and their needs. She already had their language. Now, she needed to focus on their society.

On Earth, she had spent her time figuring out what her clients actually wanted rather than what they thought they wanted. Now, she had to do the same with fifty thousand aliens stuck in orbit around a planet claimed by a giant winged lizard.

Once she figured out what they were after, she looked at Neevath's objection. *Ah. Territory claim.* The colonists wanted his valley, and he wanted to keep it. There was a structure already in place, and it was his. He wasn't letting some tentacled freaks kick him out of his home on his own world.

With Draï being highly territorial and him being alone on the planet for an unspecified period of time, his inclinations could be worse. So, now, she just had to look at the scans and find a location with the same physical and environmental attributes to satisfy the colonists.

She didn't know how long she would be in the tube, but she could do a geological assessment with the best of them. She

now had a new project, and she loved a new project.

The day that she was decanted came after watching other women in the other tanks heave fluid out of their lungs and leave the med centre, not to return. Today was her turn.

Imbolt was there to help her out. She purged her stomach and lungs the moment she was laid out on the grill above her tank. The medics started a barrage of injections, and then she was wrapped in a blanket before being carried to a med bed.

The scans were going well until Imbolt spotted something, and he pointed toward one of the results. “Look into that.”

Liona huffed and sat up. “Cancer is still there?”

Imbolt snorted. “No. You have an unanticipated adaptation. You were supposed to be lightly altered to be compatible with a Draï. This is something different.”

She was nervous. “What is it?”

“Wing buds. You have wing buds forming. That is exceptionally odd.”

Her hand groped between her shoulder blades. “Why?” She could feel something under the skin that wasn’t normally there.

“Draï females don’t have wings. None of them. They evolved from a captured society with extreme sexual dimorphism.”

She remembered the giant dragons in the images. “Very extreme.”

He chuckled. “They interdicted their home world when the males lost the ability to transform into full dragons. The ones out on different worlds escaped before their world was locked.”

“Escaped?”

“They had not found their mates, which meant their genes would be lost to the universe. The supposition is that it is why the Draï lost their ability to beast-shift. They were using

politics to form unions instead of instinct, and it hobbled them in four generations.”

She nodded. “Wow. That’s quite an effect.”

“It takes a lot of energy to change into that huge form, so it is something that the beast breeds for.”

She paused. “And that is why I am here. I am bait?”

“No, you are one of the only beings he will speak to. He refuses to speak to males. I believe he is attempting to increase the likelihood of finding a mate.”

“How many of the Tremori have tried?”

“They are not compatible.”

“Oh, right. No, they aren’t.” If she was compatible, there was no way the Tremori were. There were tentacles involved.

“When do we arrive at Neevath?”

“Six days from now. You are going to spend this time getting used to your new body from today until you land.”

Liona sighed and flexed her hands. “Yeah, I think I need some time to get used to it. I had just gotten used to the lack of breasts, and now, they are back, and I had forgotten how... they stand out.”

Imbolt laughed. “The clothing that has been prepared on the station is in Tremori formal for your time on the world so that he has no doubt who you are representing.”

“Right. Where can I get dressed?” She swung her legs out of the bed.

“First, the medics will help you to a shower then you will be dressed in a loose tunic and trousers while you get used to moving around. You have gone through most of your transformation, and the rest will happen with environmental stimulation.”

“What does that mean?”

He chuckled. “You will rise to the occasion; of that, I am certain. Now, Liona, get showered. You have to learn to eat

again as well.”

“This day just gets better and better.” She moved slowly, and her body responded without the stiffness and pain she associated with doing everything in her life. Her nerves weren’t shrieking, the heavy weight of burning tissues that had been irradiated to a ridiculous degree. “Hey, my knees and hips work!” Somehow, that was the most astonishing thing about being on an alien ship... in space.

Chapter Two

Liona worked out every day while she prepared for her time on the station around Neevath. There wasn't going to be a direct drop. She had to wait until the beast below issued an invitation. In the meantime, she was going to spend her time on a space station with species she had never imagined. Imbolt was a bonus to just being alive without pain. He was a real live alien and had seen worlds and stars rise and fall. Talking to him was amazing. She was actually getting to live a little.

Imbolt kept her company and helped her wrestle with the information in her mind. He also added insight into the species she would be dealing with. There were quite a few.

“So, basically, I am a custom-made mail-order bride.”

He nodded. “Correct. The Tremori are nearly extinct, and the Nyal Imperium wishes them to continue to thrive as they have valuable skills as artisans, and they are mate compatible with a number of species, creating interesting combinations.”

“They make guardians.”

“With tentacles. Yes.” He chuckled.

“Ah. Right. So, is anyone down there now?”

“There is a guardian training centre. They can practice their skills and not injure anyone.”

“How am I going to get to the surface?”

“You will be invited. The station has your quarters, you can come and go as you please, but you cannot leave the station unless you are heading to Neevath.”

She paused in her push-ups and knelt. “How did he let the guardians down there?”

“They offered something that he couldn’t get on his own. Textiles, furnishings, communication units.” Imbolt chuckled. “He is making a comfortable home for his mate.”

“But he doesn’t have a mate.”

“Not that he knows of. You are going to be dangled above his head until he agrees to the Tremori’s arrival and settlement.”

Way above his head. “So, he’s going to be... looking forward to me arriving.”

Imbolt leaned forward to reassure her. “He will not be aggressive or violent. He isn’t going to make a move until you approve of his beast and his home and listen to his song. His beast won’t let him take a step toward you until you have gone through those stages. After you vocalize approval, you are on your own.”

“Until then, I can call for help?” She snorted. Help was going to be in orbit.

“Absolutely. As long as you are on the station. To arrive on the surface, you will be in a drop vessel. It cannot fly on its own. It just drops in a controlled fall.”

“Delightful. So, I wait until I hear the song, let the administrator know, and they send a message to the surface.”

“Correct. From there, you will have correspondence with him, and when he agrees to your demands, you can go on the drop ship.”

“What if he doesn’t agree?”

Imbolt chuckled. “You will have to make an executive decision. Also, other species have been sending candidates to the station, so you will not be alone in your pursuit of his attention.”

“Wait, so the Tremori aren’t the only species trying to get down there?”

“Oh, no. The place is rich with exotic minerals.”

She nodded and returned to her workout; she was humming again. She hadn't stopped humming. Anytime she wasn't talking, the humming was in her mind.

Imbolt grinned. She paused again. "This isn't... it's not his song." He didn't answer. "Is it?"

Imbolt laughed. "You will have to find out."

"When do we arrive?"

"Within the hour. You have enough time to shower and dress. The station staff will be waiting for you."

"Me and the other females trying to catch the Draï."

"Correct. I have reason to believe that you have a better chance than some."

"Is that Imbolt's guess or Zanican's?"

He chuckled. "You researched me?"

"The crew are big ol' gossips. So, Minerva is Gaia as well?"

He nodded. "She is. You missed meeting our daughter, Alyla. She's our pride and joy and so much power potential."

"Why was Neevath named after a Draï and not something else?"

He grinned. "You will have to ask him that."

"If I get a chance. So, if he doesn't allow me to the planet, what happens then?" She cocked her head.

"We can have you reassigned to a world with a Draï on it. It won't be a perfect match, but you are pretty much good to mate with any Draï who can court you successfully."

"So, my dating options have been stuck."

"Yes. It was in the contract that you signed with Minerva. Alteration into a Draï mate. Draï genes do not support the cancers that you were a victim of, so you agreed easily."

Liona sighed. "Yeah, I remember that. I was a wreck. I would have signed on with Satan himself if it meant a chance to be healthy."

He nodded. "You had nothing to lose."

"Yeah. I feel great. Don't get me wrong. But now that the smoke has cleared, I am a little hesitant to fling myself at a stranger. I have no problem with the negotiating, but I feel a little nervous. Draii are rather large."

Imbalt laughed. "Most of the resets have been looking at me and wondering about how Minerva manages."

Liona waved that away. "Not my business. If I don't have to deal with it, I don't want to know about it."

"A refreshing attitude. Now, shower and dress. We are on final approach."

She got up. Stretched and nodded. "Right. In case I don't have a chance later, thanks for the companionship for these few days. It was nice to have someone to talk to."

He nodded. "It was my pleasure. You have a quick wit and a serious mind. It is an honour to help you put the pieces back together."

She extended her hand to him, and he shook it with a grin, his eyes swirling softly.

Liona smiled and headed back to her quarters to get into the loose tunic and trousers that she got to wear with loose slippers. She was comfy from head to toe, and she waited for the docking chime from the safety of her quarters.

When the chime sounded, she got to her feet and was greeted by two crewmen at her door. "Madam Kix, please come this way."

Liona smiled and followed them to one of the docking ports. Imbalt was waiting there and speaking to the man who would take charge of her. The uniform was a giveaway. This was one of the Nyal Guardians and probably one that was stationed on the planet.

She waved. "Hey. How are you doing?" She used Nyal Common.

The guardian jolted. "Oh, my. You are a Terran."

Imbolt chuckled. “Just like the empress.”

“Damn. She looks a little quiet for the Draï.”

Imbolt laughed. “Just let her get her wings. She will astonish you.”

The guardian held out his hand. “Liona Kix, please come with me. I am Rothnar, your guardian for your time on this station.”

Imbolt grinned as Liona reached out. “I do not expect her to be with you long. She’s already begun humming.”

Liona gasped. “So it *is* his song.” She narrowed her eyes at the very imposing avatar.

Imbolt laughed. “Remain here and find out.”

She got a surprising hug from the ambassador and avatar.

“When you get to a com unit, keep Minerva informed. She has been desperately curious about how this is going to end up.”

Liona patted his cheek and smiled. “Will do. Now, go drop off some of those other ladies.”

The guardian blinked. “There are others on board?”

“They have not completed their transformations and are not out of their tanks yet.”

Liona smiled. “I was a surprisingly easy fix.”

They left the ship, and she waved farewell to Imbolt.

“You have no clothing?”

“Only what I am wearing. It will be up to the Imperium to clothe me if it is necessary.”

“Of course.”

“Don’t worry. I am not fancy. As long as I don’t break any cultural taboos with my clothing, I am fine wearing something like this.”

“I see. Would you like to see the wonders of the station?”

“Sounds expensive, and I am definitely not dressed for it.”

He laughed. “In that case, we should get you clothing that you can use to visit some of the wonders.”

“Again, I am not trying to run up bills.” She said it absently as they entered a gallery that overlooked a huge internal structure filled with layers and levels going downward filled with people, creatures, and beings she had to get used to looking at. Her time on Imbolt’s ship had gotten her used to three different species aside from Imbolt. Now she was on a station with dozens, if not hundreds, more, and she wanted a sketchbook to draw what she was seeing to commit it to memory.

Rothnar smiled. “There is an extensive budget for you.”

“Just the minimum amount.”

“Fine. The other candidates have not been so frugal. A few are still here. Are you prepared to run into them?”

“Sure. I am not here for my own purposes. This wasn’t my idea, and I don’t benefit from the process of being here, only the process by which I was brought here. I am here. I am fixed. I am ready to figure out what happens next.”

He nodded. “Right. We will order off the delivery system then. You have a scanning plate in your room, and I will show you how to use it.”

“All right. How bad is my accent?”

He chuckled. “Not too bad. You are understandable, but once you meet with the Draï and form a link, it will get better.”

She nodded. “Good. I am always wary of a product that comes too easily.”

Rathnar laughed. “You and Neevath will get along very well. He has the same attitude.”

Liona nodded. “Good. How many others are here waiting for his song?”

“Four. They are all sponsored by worlds that want the mining rights or minerals directly.”

“Okay.” She rubbed her temple as the humming got louder.

“Headache?”

“Sure. We’ll call it that.”

He explained their path, the VIP quarters, and her biometrics opened her door before she even stepped to the metal panel.

Rathnar showed her two bedrooms and indicated which one was hers. He was in the other as bodyguard and guide.

“So, did you do something wrong to get assigned to possible mate duty?”

He grinned. “I am on medical leave. I got a little crushed in the line of duty. I am nearly recovered, but I volunteered to see another one of your kind way out here. Terrans adapt to power very easily.”

She smiled as she checked out her room, and he waited in the doorway. “That is what my avatar told me and Imbolt. And Zanican actually.”

He shrugged. “I have met a few who are mated to either current guardians or retired ones. They are doing very well.”

She chuckled. “Well, I am not going to be paraded in front of guardians. I am just here to be rejected by a Draï because he doesn’t like my qualifying restrictions.”

“You are really not going to give in until the Tremori have a home?”

“That is my purpose. They don’t overbreed. They replace population via lottery and accomplishment and require some of the minerals on Neevath for their reproduction. It isn’t onerous to have a colony of a few thousand living, studying, and researching.”

Rathnar grinned, and she saw the movement behind him.

“And you are a Tremori.”

“I am indeed. You have a good grasp of what the colony’s needs are, and you don’t look nervous.”

She shrugged. “It is in your best interest to keep me in one large, functioning piece.”

“Correct. Now, let’s get you changed so we can go for dinner.”

She nodded, and he showed her to the fitting station. She had to stand with her arms away from her sides, and the machine scanned her.

“Now it will display the catalogue.”

A dizzying array of clothing made her head spin, but Rathnar prodded at the display, and the options kept reducing until there were six very elegant dresses in a variety of colours but all in the sexy range.

Liona hid a grin. So, men were men across the universe. Good to know.

He looked at her and tilted his head. “This one.”

It was black and beaded and looked like it was made of liquid metal.

He tapped it, picked some matching slippers that were surprisingly flats, and nodded. “Do you wear your hair loose?”

“Not usually. Not with it this long. The brushing would take all night. It is pretty thin and static-filled stuff.”

“Pity. Can you do anything with it to make it more elaborate?”

“You are asking me to fancy it up?”

“Yes, please. Two of the other candidates favour the restaurant I chose, so I want you to scare them.”

She grimaced. “How long do I have?”

“Your clothes will be here in thirty minutes. Can you do anything by then?”

Liona muttered and stomped into her bedroom, sitting at the dressing table. “Bring the dress and shoes in when they get here, and leave me to this.”

She unravelled her braid and started to make smaller braids around her face that she joined into one large braid, caging her locks.

Her arms ached and her fingers stung by the time she finished her hair. She put on the dress that Rathnar had delivered and wiggled her toes in the shoes. She was as fancy as she was willing to get.

Rathnar blinked. “Oh, that’s perfect.”

She grimaced. “I am hungry now. When is food?”

“Interesting phrasing. Food is now.” He held out his hand to her, and she used formal contact with her hand on the back of his wrist.

He was wearing a fancier skin-tight suit, and it had thin threads of glittering black. He had made them match.

They walked through the station. He pointed out interesting places and species, and soon, they were at the restaurant.

The hostess saw him, and he inclined his head. “Guardian Rathnar. It has been too long.”

“Yes, Jenula. Is my table ready?”

The woman, who was lovely shades of purple and blue, smiled. “You have a candidate?”

Liona smiled. “Either that or I am a growth on his wrist.”

The hostess looked at her and dismissed her by her appearance. Liona didn’t blame her. She was still Terran-coloured. Shades of brown and beige didn’t stand out in the rainbow of skins, fur, and scales all around. “Ythera and Lorqui are already here and seated.”

The way she said it indicated that Rathnar often ate with the other candidates and guardians.

“Well then, this mate candidate is hungry, and she wishes to be seated as well.” She batted her lashes.

The hostess blinked. “This way.”

Rathnar chuckled. “She might put us at the worst table.”

“I am here to eat, not as a display item. I am just waiting for the song to get louder, and then I can discuss things with

Neevath to get the Tremori onto the planet.”

“Louder? You are really already hearing it?”

“Yeah. I mentioned it on the ship with Imbolt.”

He laughed. “I thought you were just bluffing. Wow. What does it sound like?”

“A headache.”

They arrived at their table, and he held her chair for her.

He chuckled. “Headache?”

“Have you ever heard something that is just on the edge of your hearing and you lean in so hard your neck hurts?”

Rathnar nodded. “Yeah, I have.”

“It is like that. Something in me wants to hear more, but it is just on the edge of my hearing.”

She looked at the menu and asked Rathnar, “What’s good here?”

“Put your hand on the scan plate, and it will show you.”

She sighed. “Right.” She put her hand on the plate, and choices decreased by more than half. Things she could digest were on the roster with little pictures.

She made some modest selections, and Rathnar smiled. “Still holding back?”

“Yup.” Gorging on iffy food wasn’t her idea of a good time.

Liona folded her hands on her lap and looked around the restaurant, where two other highly decorated women were seated with their escorts.

Rathnar talked to her about holidays that the Tremori had, how they celebrated when they had a new citizen, and how they included a few extra children who were given to the guardians as recruits every few years.

“Is that how you became a guardian?”

He nodded. “It is. I was one of three extra children in my generation. One died in the line of duty, and the other is still in

action. And then there is me.”

“So, are the tentacles useful, or are they just there?”

He blinked. “They are used for heavy lifting or mating. Not a lot in between.”

She blushed. “Oh. Right. I think I get the idea.”

He grinned. “Oh, but I want to give you details.”

Water arrived, and he filled a glass for her while explaining ovipositors and lengthy couplings.

She closed her eyes, and the music got louder. “Yup, Rathnar. Got it. Thank you for skipping the diagram.”

He chuckled. “You are humming.”

“Yeah, the volume just got turned up.” She sipped at her water. “It’s a catchy tune.”

He stared at her in stunned astonishment. “You really can hear it.”

Her mind was starting to paint colours to go with the music. “Oh, yeah, definitely.”

Her meal arrived with Rathnar’s, and she was just finishing the first dish when there was a clash of beads. A woman was standing in front of her on the other side of the table. She flicked the woman a glance and kept eating.

Rathnar smiled. “Lady Ythera, you have not met the newest candidate, have you? Lady Liona, this is Lady Ythera of the Harnoth trading collective.”

Liona lifted her head and nodded. “Hello.”

Ythera looked her over. “Why did they bring you?”

Liona shrugged. “Because I was altered to be a Draï mate, as other Terrans have been before me. Once they are brought close to the Draï, they have invariably been the only match.” She smiled. “Plenty of little Terran-Draï half-breeds out there flying around. They are kinda cute.”

Ythera blinked, and then she tried to act cocky. “Such a dull little thing as you will never hear the song.”

“If you say so. Nice to meet you. My dinner is getting cold.” Years of hospital stays had made her possessive over hot food. She knew good food when she had it, and this was very good food.

She hummed as she ate, and Rathnar grinned. The song got louder, and she looked over at her guardian. He tapped his shoulder, and she saw a small com unit built into the suit. He was playing her humming to someone.

The song was intricate, and she found herself relaxing as she finished her meal.

The woman was talking, but Liona didn't hear her. When she was grabbed, Liona acted on instinct and surged to her feet, grabbing the other woman and holding her by the neck above her. Ythera choked and tried to support her weight with her hands. Liona was surprised by her own strength, but this little twit had just touched her. She wasn't allowed to touch her.

Rathnar took Ythera and touched Liona's arm. “Let her go. She didn't know you couldn't hear her.”

Ythera stared, and her companion came forward. “What do you mean she couldn't hear me?”

Liona tilted her head and smiled. “Can't you hear him singing?”

Rathnar took her by the arm, and she smiled at him. She was so relaxed. The song softened, and Rathnar led her through the station and to a com centre. “I think you should talk to him.”

He got a private cubicle and dialled up the surface. He gestured for her to sit.

She nodded and sat down in front of a screen, and Rathnar opened an audio link.

“Liona is sitting here, Neevath.”

“*Hello, maiden.*” The low and gravelly voice rolled toward her. “*How do you like the song?*”

“It is very relaxing.”

He chuckled. *“That is the idea, maiden. Now, when can you come down to me so I can sing to you directly?”*

She heard a happy and sleepy sound come from her throat. “When you let the Tremori colony have the valley against the northwest coastline and the jrethan mineral when they need it.”

“Maiden? You are negotiating with me right now?”

“No. No negotiation. That is what it will take to get me down there. Simple.” She sighed softly as his song grew seductive. “I wouldn’t waste that song. You are down there, and I can do amazing things with my own fingers.” She blinked at the words coming out of her mouth, but he didn’t seem to take it harshly.

He paused and chuckled. *“Rathnar, I will send the agreement to your negotiator. The moment it is signed, send her to me.”*

“Yes, Neevath.”

“Maiden?”

She gave him a breathy, “Yes?”

“We are going to discuss your authority on Neevath.”

She chuckled. “I am sure we will. Enjoy your evening. I am going to get some rest. Good night.”

He growled. *“Rest well. You are going to need it, maiden.”*

She got to her feet, and Rathnar gave her a gesture to indicate she should wait. She sighed. Neevath’s voice had rolled along every nerve ending, and his song had soared in her mind.

Rathnar came out of the com centre with a grin and offered her his hand. “My lady. You are going to need to get some rest.”

“Yeah, I know. I am not going to get much when I land.”

“That doesn’t upset you?”

She chuckled. “No, I think it will actually be very interesting. My old body wasn’t up to much.”

Rathnar blinked. “So, you are really...”

“A maiden in this form. Yeah. Since he is creeping around in my mind, I am not surprised that he noticed.” She hummed and kept her mind relaxed. Tomorrow was going to be a very busy day.

Chapter Three

Tremori formal wear was weirdly rigid for such practical beings. Liona sat in her small drop ship and tried to find a comfortable position. She studiously did not think about dropping through layers of atmosphere until she hopefully thudded to a landing near the valley.

She checked the scans, and there was no large predator in the area as the ground rushed up toward her. Her teeth jolted as the thud rattled the ship, and it gradually slid to a halt. She exhaled slowly.

Liona unbuckled the harness that had kept her from splattering inside the cockpit and stretched. This ship was her bath house, walk-in closet, and bed and breakfast all in one. It was home until she made a formal agreement with Neevath.

She hummed as she picked up her weapons and checked the scans again. Oh, there he was. He was a big bastard.

Liona checked the air. It *was* breathable. She opened the airlock and walked out to bring an end to this weird dream. Part of her mind hoped it was real, and the other part was fairly sure that she was in a hospice somewhere and that when the dragon crushed her, it was going to be the end of her.

She stepped out onto the alien landscape, the grasses tinged with purple and the sky a dark pink.

She had heard all the stories of seeing their mate for the first time, and few of the ladies had tried the direct approach. Mind you, they hadn't realized what they were up against or about to be up against.

She stepped away from her ship with her weapons in her hand. The main part of his torso was bigger than a city bus.

His neck and tail tripled the overall length. He flew circles around her, a body made of brick red and dark honey.

She continued to pace into the open as he assessed her.

A voice rumbled through her head. *Tremori rep. Go! You are not what I wanted.*

She pulled her helmet off and then kept walking as she dropped her armour. “Actually, no. Not Tremori, but I do understand their need.”

She was standing in nothing but her ridiculously long braid and her reset body.

The dragon thudded to the ground. His eyes were wide. *Naked!*

“Yeah. I just thought to prove that I wasn’t Tremori. I believe this proves it.”

He looked at her again, and the brick red spread in a heavy wave down his body. *Proved. Put clothes.*

She chuckled and walked back toward the ship.

A clawed foot descended in front of her. *Where you go?*

“To put clothing on. It’s in the ship. I will be right back.”

His huge head lowered itself in her path. *You stay.*

She cocked her head. “Am I staying, or am I getting clothes?”

The dragon snorted, and the large claw wrapped around her. He was warm, dry, and not as rough as she had anticipated. His other claw cupped around her, and she felt the heavy surge as they streaked skyward.

He carried her to the far side of the valley where the structure had been built out of lightly opaque crystal. It was a castle that any fairytale princess would envy, and it was enormous.

Neevath gripped one of the towers with his hind claws and tipped her delicately into a wide door. She rolled along the floor and blinked at her surroundings. It was a bedroom.

Soft silk billowed on the posts surrounding an enormous bed.

Wardrobe. Clothes.

She looked back and saw she was being watched. She walked to the wardrobe and opened it. Neat silk gowns hung next to each other, all loose to fit a variety of figures. They were designed to be cinched into fitting with ribbons, and some had buckles. She grabbed for something that looked mostly opaque, and she laced it up until she was comfortable and her body was outlined around the midriff, her cleavage gently confined by the folds of fabric.

Dressed. Come here.

She found a set of soft boots that fit and walked over to him. “Neevath, I am here to ask you to ratify the agreement with the Tremori. They need a place to live, and your world suits them perfectly.”

Neevath snorted. *Trade?*

“What would you like them to trade?”

You. You are Draï mate.

She clutched a hand to her chest. “Oh, no. How can that be possible?” She did her best job of fluttering her lashes.

He snorted. *You know.*

She grinned. “I know. I was reset and reshaped for you, Neevath, but if the Tremori don’t stay, neither do I.” She nodded. “You have agreed to the alternative site for their colony. All that you will have to provide is some of the mineral that was used to make this castle.”

Why? He gripped the edge of the balcony, and he started to shimmer.

“They need something in the mineral to help them hatch their young. The passive radiation is what is required for hatching.” She swallowed as he started getting smaller.

Where will you have them land? His speech patterns were smoothing out and less basic. *Refresh my memory.*

“In a valley off the north sea. Same environment, just missing the mineral deposit. If you agree to supply the minerals, they can move in and begin their colony.”

Neevath finished his transformation, and while he was one-tenth the size, she found that his beast form was less terrifying.

She swallowed as the naked male took a step toward her. “They can start their breeding program when I have begun mine.”

Liona’s eyes bugged out while she tried to figure out where to look. His face was broad and handsome, cheekbones strong, and his eyes a glittering black.

His body was a lighter shade of the brick red, more on the golden shade of his belly scales, and the wings were a rich red. He was definitely naked, definitely made of muscle and wings, and mating was on his mind if the erection was anything to go by.

She heard music in her mind, and she remained still. He walked up to her and stared down. A column of spicy air moved with him. He smelled like cardamom.

“You are small.”

She put her hands on her hips. “I am to species spec.”

He chuckled. “I have read your file. You took to the Drai genetics thoroughly.”

He reached behind her and stroked the part of her back that housed the wing buds. His hand was slightly calloused and warm. Very warm.

“Oh, that. Yeah, apparently, they just showed up.” He was stroking her spine between the buds, and her head lolled on her neck. Fuck, that felt good.

He was smiling softly and easing her closer to his body until his erection made contact. “You have avoided looking at all of me.”

“Well, you made me get dressed. It is only fair that I request the same.”

He inhaled deeply, and the song in her head soared. “Fair. Hm. I had not considered that when acquiring a mate. Clothing will be a concern.”

She had the feeling that he was memorizing aspects of her appearance and scent.

He came to a decision. “Kiss me, and I will get clothing on.”

She snickered at the reversal of the normal procedure. “Fine. A kiss and then clothing. Agreed.”

She looked up at him and said, “You are a little tall. Either you can lean down, or I need a boost up.”

His eyes narrowed, and she could have sworn she saw swirling in his eyes. He bent his knees, wrapped an arm around her hips, and stood upright so they were face to face.

She didn’t let herself freak out. She put her hands on his shoulders and pressed her lips to his, waiting for his response. She softened her pressure and nipped softly at his lips. He was completely still.

Liona blinked. His song was quiet. His body was quiet. She pulled back and looked at him, feeling rejection tumble through her. It wasn’t the first time. Her scars, infertility, and constant illness had driven off more than one man. It looked like she could add an alien to the tally.

Now, what the hell was she supposed to do?

She leaned away from him and swallowed. “Sorry. I guess I have to find a way off world. I am sorry to have wasted your time.”

He frowned, and his arm on her tightened. “What do you mean?”

She blinked. “Uh, I kissed you, and you didn’t respond. Hell, you didn’t even move. Your song went silent.”

He smiled. “I am trying not to fling you to the floor and mount you. Try the kiss again.”

She scowled. “If that is the response you are going to have, I think I might want to try leaving this world.”

He chuckled. “Try it. I promise not to pounce.”

She leaned in again and brushed her lips across his a few times before settling against his mouth. She flicked her tongue against his lips, and he shuddered.

His mouth molded to hers, his tongue slid into her mouth, and she moaned and opened her mouth to his. She wanted to wrap her legs around his hips, but his grip stalled that. She slid her arms around his neck and continued the kiss as her blood heated and her legs got weak. Neevath pulled his head away, and she gasped then made a disappointed whine.

He grinned. “Don’t worry. You are not leaving. Now, I will dress so we can continue this discussion.”

He set her down, and she felt the wet spot on her bodice and blushed. Right, so the attraction wasn’t one way. *Whew.*

She moved to lean against a wall near the large window, and he put on a kilt made of silk with a hardened leather flap on the front, which kept things from being more obvious than they were.

She wrapped her arms around herself and looked out over the landscape and the moons visible in the sky alongside the suns.

Neevath walked up behind her and wrapped his arms around her waist beneath her breasts. “There. Better?”

She shivered as he pulled her snugly against him. “No, but at least I can look you in the eye when we talk.”

He chuckled. “I am struck by your appearance as well, dear maiden.”

She swallowed. “The Tremori get their colony with no obstruction?”

“They do. And the mineral that they require. Rathnar is organizing them right now, and the ships will fall in a few days.”

She jumped when his lips grazed her neck.

“A few days? That’s good.”

“Yes, then comes the civil engineering and the part that I hate.”

“Um, I am actually good at that part.”

She felt his lips curve into a smile. “You are? You surprise me, maiden.”

“My name is Liona.”

“I know. But you are my maiden until you are not, and then you are my mate.”

The song, in her mind, took on orchestral intensity.

“I have had sex before.”

He laughed. “Not with this body.”

She blinked. “You know quite a bit about me.”

“Imbolt-Zanican was very informative. He also has much affection for his Terran mate and the child they have together, and he wished me much luck with you.”

He lifted one of her hands and sandwiched it between his own. “So, what did you think of my beast?”

His hands were warm, and his touch was firm but gentle.

“Um, he was... large but polite? He’s very pretty.”

Neevath chuckled. “Thank you. I am glad you like him.”

She shivered. This was faster than she thought it would go.

“And this house made of crystal?” He stroked her arms.

“I am sure it is nice. It looked pretty from a distance.”

“Would you like a tour?” He chuckled. “I can give you a tour for a very reasonable price.”

She swallowed. “What price?”

“One kiss for each room.”

She kept her focus out the window. “How many rooms in the house?”

He chuckled wickedly. “Fifty-three.”

“So, like a kiss on the cheek?”

“No.”

“Is this like self-inflicted foreplay?”

“Yes.”

She chuckled. “So, what if I say no?”

“You are welcome to do so, but it will take longer, and my song will grow more intense.”

“How intense?” Part of her mind was roaring with music, but she was very calm.

“Oh, I have never heard of a female lasting more than two days.”

“What would happen after two days?”

“Ah, you would find me and tear my clothing off.”

She grinned. “You are particularly fond of that clothing?”

“Oh, yes. I would be devastated if you tore it off.”

She sighed. “That is quite the decision that I need to make.”

He moved her hair and pressed a kiss to the base of her neck. His lips moved on her and teased her. She went up on her toes for a few moments when he hit something ticklish.

“Um, so we have one down?”

He moved her hair from the other side of her neck and licked and nibbled at her skin. “No, new agreement means we start from zero.”

She exhaled an, “Oh.” She had a thought. “So, do you practice a lot? You seem to be pretty good at this.”

“Well, my beast is insisting that I learn the taste of you, and it is keeping him quiet for now.”

She blinked. “It’s a separate entity?”

“A symbiote that we are born with. The wings denote our infection.” He chuckled. “The beast manifests when he wishes, and some of us are more aware of it than others. I have been here for quite some time, and he and I have spirited discussions about what we want in a mate.”

She started to sag in his embrace, and her breathing came faster when he found a spot behind her ear that she had no idea about, and it caused a rapid heartbeat and a nervous feeling in her abdomen in a line down to her sex. Her knees forgot what they were supposed to be doing.

Her body gave a ragged exhale, and she swallowed. She had her knees clenched together, and she felt the flush on her cheeks and chest.

Her voice was husky when she asked, “So, when do we start the tour?”

“I think tomorrow may be soon enough for a full tour. Today, I will show you where you will be resting, the dining area, and the restrooms and necessities.”

“So, six different rooms.”

“Correct.”

“What is this one?”

“The dressing room.” He chuckled. “This is where our clothing lives.”

She swallowed. “Okay. Great.”

His hands were still outwardly polite on her, but she wanted them not to be.

Liona tried to step away from him, and he pulled her back against him.

“Don’t walk away. I have waited a long time for you, and I am enjoying holding you.”

She swallowed. “It’s a little bit of torture for me. My legs aren’t going to work much longer.”

“In that case, I will help you when you need it.” He kept one arm around her and started to walk.

She scrambled to gather the wits that scattered at his touch. “So, what made you agree to a mail-order mate?”

“Ah, well, I agreed to consider the side of any species that could find me a woman who could hear my song.”

“Wow. That’s... cheap.”

He chuckled. “I have been waiting for over six hundred years on this rock for a compatible female. The Tremori were desperate and appealed to the Imperium. They knew where to find a woman who could be shaped to this purpose. My purpose.”

“So, you ordered me off a menu.”

He chuckled. “If you wish to describe it like that. Adding the Draï aspects to your genome was their idea, and I must say that the strong reaction to my song has been gratifying.”

She blushed. “Strong reaction?”

He nodded as he showed her the bedroom. “Based on your scent, if I slid my hand between your thighs, I would find you nearly ready with only one kiss. Oh, speaking of that. I believe the toll for this room needs to be paid.”

Liona blinked and looked around. The bed was large and had only a single sheet folded on the end of it. The mattress appeared to be leather or some kind of hide. There were no pillows. She twisted her lips.

“Not to your liking?”

She shrugged. “With this many rooms, I am sure I can find somewhere else to sleep.”

Tension filled him. “What’s wrong with it?”

“I will get very cold. If you aren’t here for some reason, I won’t be able to keep myself warm.”

He paused. “You need something warmer?”

“Just the option of warmth. I am not as physically dense as you are, and while the air here is warm now, I am guessing that it chills a little at night.”

“It does. You think I will leave you here alone?”

“Knowing that there are training guardians as well as an incoming colony, I am guessing you will be rather distracted from time to time.” She smiled at him and then paused. “What happens if there is another woman that hears your song?”

“My song is now only for you. Nothing will induce me to someone else. My beast has assessed you and declared you ideal for us. The psychic link is the hardest part once physical compatibility is assured.”

“Which the lunar station took care of.”

“Indeed, now about that toll...” He turned her to face him and bent toward her.

Liona leaned up and went up on her toes to pay the toll for the bedroom. Her lips touched his, and he held her against him, her feet dangling off the ground. After a thorough kiss that had her blood rushing through her veins, he set her down.

“How big are Draï women?”

He laughed. “Around the same height. We do a lot of bowing. Fortunately, we have a few more vertebrae than your species.”

She blinked, and he stroked her lips with his thumb before he tapped his forehead gently to hers. “So, more bedding for you. Easy fix. Now, on to the other facilities.”

Their tour continued, and she knew how to work the shower tub and toilet in a few minutes. Why he had put them in three separate rooms was a mystery, but her lips were tingling when he escorted her to the lower levels. There were a lot of them, and she was going to have calves she could crack a walnut on if she had to go all that way for a sandwich. Three floors were near her threshold for climbing.

Chapter Four

After the round of introductions to the food dispensers, he showed her the fresh meat stores in case she didn't want something that had been packaged and preserved.

She looked at him and smiled slightly. Of course, he would be eating food he obtained himself. "Does the beast eat while it is out and about?"

"He does. There are plenty of large edible species here. Several are predatory, so you will need to learn how to take them down or avoid them."

"Do any fly?"

He chuckled. "No, just me there. And now the guardians. Some of them fly, but they do not hunt on my world."

"How is it that you ended up with an entire world to yourself?"

"Research and luck. I went looking for a world with no inhabitants. I thought it would be easier if I could check each and every being that landed on the surface. It would increase my chances, and at the same time, I could stop this world from becoming cluttered."

"And the result?"

"Mining corporations and other governments have lined up women. Some confident, others sobbing. None could hear my song."

She looked at the hand he was holding. "Ah. I see."

"And then the Imperium contacted me and offered me a guaranteed mate, but I had to take on a population. I was intensely skeptical, but across the stars, I felt you the moment

the reset was complete.” Neevath laughed. “I confess I was startled, but then you kept getting closer, and I quickly had to clean the place up and get ready for a mate. The guardians found it highly amusing.”

Liona smiled. “I hadn’t thought about it from your side. On mine, no one would tell me why I kept humming.”

“Now, how does the song make you feel?”

She blinked. “When? Normally, it relaxes me.”

“And when it isn’t relaxing?” There was a heavy rumble in his voice, and the song was throbbing through her mind.

She bit her lip. “It isn’t relaxing.”

He laughed and rubbed her hand with his thumb. “Good. The textile storage is up a level. Are you up to go pick some bedding?”

She swallowed. “Another toll?”

He laughed. “Of course.”

Liona blushed. “Well, I don’t have to wonder what you are thinking about, which is rather refreshing.”

“Oh, maiden, you don’t have an idea what I am thinking about. I certainly look forward to sharing it with you at a steady and controlled pace over many, many years.”

Her voice squeaked, “Years?”

Liona hadn’t thought of years. The last three decades had been looking six months forward at a time, and usually, there was a new diagnosis of a new growth inside her that had to be cut out or chemically shrunk or irradiated.

“How many years?” She frowned at him.

He blinked in surprise. “Drai live centuries after they find mates. You look confused.”

“Yeah, my condition was not good, and time was something I took control of in pieces.” She smiled. “I was dying by inches, so I divided time into small segments that I savoured. I knew it was precious.”

He frowned. "I read the documents, but it didn't make sense. They removed portions of your body?"

"Yup. Whittled me away a piece at a time." She shrugged.

"To lose any part of you is a crime." He stroked her cheek.

"There wasn't a choice, and I am here today because of it, though I would never recommend it as a hobby." She sighed. "Sorry. That killed the mood."

He smiled. "It was your reality, but that has changed. Your growing resistance to radiation was one of the key items that brought you to Minerva-Gaia's attention. That was key to survival on this world."

"Oh. Right. That is what the Tremori need."

"Correct."

"So, what do you need?"

Neevath's eyes glowed, and gold spun slowly in his irises. "I need a mate of a compatible species. A woman who hears my song and responds, and a partner who will help me care for this world."

"I don't know where to start with any of that."

"I can show you. First, would you like to see the valley?"

Liona had been convinced that he was going to drag her to bed. "Yes, as soon as we pick out some bedding."

He smiled. "Good. Another toll."

They walked together and up a level to the textile room. She stared at fabrics from across the stars and walked around touching things until she found something soft and plush that would do for a throw large enough to cover her.

He took it from her. "How large does it need to be?"

She gave him the dimensions and added, "Large enough to cover all of me and so I can wrap myself up like a burrito."

"What's a burrito?"

"It's a flat bread wrapped around meat, cheese, and beans, all heavily spiced."

He chuckled. “So, when I do this...” He pulled her to him, and his wings flexed and wrapped around them both, plastering her against him in a warm, dark confinement. “It is like a burrito?”

She felt her heart thudding in her chest as the warmth of the wrapping seeped into her muscles. He was really warm, and she blinked when she realized she was nodding off in the wrap of warmth.

“Hmm... yeah. That is how I would describe it.”

He chuckled. “You are tired.”

“I have been tense.” She swayed against him and pressed her forehead to his chest.

“Ah, I see the reason for the throw on the bed. You need to be relaxed to sleep.”

“Yeah. Relaxation has been in short supply.” The spicy-scented warmth was just what she needed after the fall through space.

“The tour can wait. If you wish to rest, I can help you with that.”

She sighed and felt herself slipping into soft shadows. “A nap might be nice.”

He caught her, and the music in her mind was soft and soothing. Sleep was inevitable after that.

She woke up on the bed with a very firm pillow under her head, more darkness, the feeling of the wing over her, and soft breathing next to her.

She was tucked next to him, and his forearm was what she was resting on. She was hungry and had to use the bathroom. Not in that order.

Liona squirmed, and he chuckled, slowly letting light and the cool breezes coming into the bedroom touch her. She sat up, yanked her braid out from under her butt and stretched.

She froze when she saw the night sky outside the windows.
“Oops.”

Neevath stretched. “You really needed rest. Now you need a meal.”

“The necessities first.” She scooted to the edge of the bed first and then walked to the restroom first, getting the right door out of three on the first try.

She finished, washed up, and idly wondered where the waste was processed as that was always a concern in buildings, and you wanted to know your plumbing and electrical. A lifetime in construction had coloured the way she saw buildings.

Her braid was a mess, so she unravelled it and tied the loose hair in a knot. She washed her face and headed back into the bedroom, now seeing why she wasn’t going to need a blanket when Neevath was home. He was just the right temperature.

Liona returned to the bedroom, and Neevath was stretching his wings. *Holy shit. Those things are huge.*

She sighed. He was also naked again. So was she. Damn it.

She found her clothing and was wrestling with the laces.

“You are still tired. Come back to rest.”

The song lulled her and made her sway.

“Naked?”

“No clothes allowed in our bed.”

She looked at his silhouette. His wings were still out, and he was intimidating, but his song was a lullaby. She swayed.
“Why the naked rule?”

“Skin is easier to heat than clothing.” His voice was amused.

“Oh.”

“And your wing buds need attention. Normally, you would be developing them as a child, but their growth will require

nutrients, calcium, collagen, and proteins. And rest. Plenty of rest.”

“Which means curling up next to you and you supervising.”

“Of course. I take my position as guardian of this world very seriously.” He moved close to her.

The music continued its sweet, low tune, and she swayed toward him. He helped her back to bed and settled her against him. His wing folded over her, and she was in a warm, spice-scented cocoon a moment later.

She tried to fight sleep, but his song lulled her into resting. Her back got warm, and she sighed as he rubbed the buds where her wings were going to be. Wings. She was growing wings. Her dad would have been so proud.

Liona was showered with her damp hair hanging down her back and eating a few of the selections that were suitable for her species. Neevath was eating his own meal, which consisted of shredded meat that he ate precisely with something close to chopsticks.

He offered her some, and she shrugged, opening her mouth. The meat tasted sort of like beef and sort of like pine. It was odd.

“So, when do I get to see the animal species it came from?”

“After we have completed the tour of my home.” He smiled and continued eating.

“Right. My mouth may get a bit bruised.”

“I will be careful.” The look in his eyes was calculated. “I promise.”

She snorted. “Pardon my suspicious nature.”

“I would pardon you anything. You need only to ask.”

Liona had never been on the side of being actively pursued by someone. She had been into short relationships when she had been mobile and between treatments. They were less relationships and more hookups.

“So, Neevath, why are maidens your thing?”

He paused. “What?”

“Maidens and Draï. What’s the deal?”

“Maidens just refer to young women. It is the translation that means untouched. Any woman made over for a Draï is a maiden by default. Next to one of our kind out here, any female we find is a young woman or maiden.”

Liona shrugged. “And usually Terran.”

He chuckled. “There is that as well. Your species is very malleable.”

“From what I have learned, we are still evolving, and our genetics welcome diversity and alteration. Same reason I got so many different cancers. All my muddled-up ancestry had its own brand, and they all manifested in me.”

He cocked his head. “So, you were really about to die.”

She finished her breakfast and put her dishes through the washer. “I was really about to die. My time was measured in days and hours. I set my affairs in order, passed my company on to my chosen successors, and went to meet Minerva and get myself to the lunar base. My transformation was underway the moment I signed the reset contract.”

“Did it hurt?”

“Not really, but the spec sheet was hilarious.”

“What?”

She paused. “Oh. Crap. I mean, I got the list with the languages and stuff.”

He finished his food with a grin. “Those aren’t the specs that you mean.”

“Ah. No. Maybe. Is it insulting?”

He shrugged. “No. Not really. I am a bigger species, so any possible offspring will be larger. You needed more room.”

She blushed. “That is blunt.”

“It is you and I. There is no reason to stand on etiquette.” He turned and changed the subject. “Do you get airsick?”

“Not that I know of. Why?”

“Do you want to ride on my neck or in my claw?”

“Uh, which is warmer?”

“My claw, but we will make sure you have a cloak or wrap.”

“Okay. Thank you. Are we going somewhere?”

“I thought you would appreciate seeing a bit of your new world, so the guardian base is somewhere you need to be aware of. They frequently land here, so it is only fair that we visit them.”

“They fly? There are flying vessels?”

He smiled. “Some of them fly. The vessels are saved for trainees who do not quite have control over themselves.”

“So, it’s a training base?”

“Yes. There has been no population to impact, so I let them train here.” He shrugged. “That may change.”

She cocked her head. “Really?”

“If we start a family, the airspace around this home will become restricted. Penalty of death.” He smiled.

“Wow. You say that so cheerfully.”

“The thought of a family makes me very cheerful.”

“And the thought of murder?”

“That too.” He chortled. “Now, shall you see a bit of your new world?”

She hesitated and then nodded. “Yes. Don’t be mad if I barf on your claw. I don’t remember how I feel in the air.”

He grinned. “Let’s go find you a cloak. I will take my chances with the air sickness.”

He held his hand out to her, and she slid her fingers along his before gripping three of his fingers. He closed his hand

around hers. They walked up the steps that she knew she would grow to hate over time.

She got bundled up, and he smiled as he walked them to the wide window, where he stepped out with his wings flaring. He flew away from the window, and where the winged man had been, a dragon was suddenly flying. Her inner nerd screamed with excitement, but her grownup self cooled her jets. Time for fawning over him later when the song in her head hadn't gotten smug.

Liona stepped toward the edge of the window and stood centred as the dragon approached. When his huge claws eased past her, she relaxed as his digits closed around her and plucked her out of the tower.

His grip covered her from under her arms to below her toes. She braced her arms over the edge so she could hold his scaled knuckle, and the song in her head took off.

The song was becoming part of her life, part of her mind. She wished she could be more nervous or excited or just appalled, but it seemed perfectly natural to hear the song in her mind.

He began to fly toward the dawn light, and his wings created a heavy pulse that rang through her body. It was interesting, but she ignored it; the landscape under them was incredible.

The flora had green with a bluish cast, and the flowers were bright and mainly purple with splashes of yellow.

Liona looked out at the horizon and watched the suns rise together. The air was cool, and her lungs were breathing easily. She was standing on the equivalent of his pinkie and held against his chest. She felt very secure.

They flew for an hour, and the guardian base was ahead of them. Neevath began to descend, causing a reaction in the buildings below.

The inhabitants of the base spilled out and stared up as Neevath descended and slowly landed in an open area that was probably a shuttle landing.

He settled, slowly lowered himself into a crouching position, and set her on her feet. He changed and stood next to her with his arm touching hers.

“How did you keep your clothes?”

He winked. “Practice.”

The variety of species in front of her made her blink. Men and women and others were staring at them. Neevath remained standing, and the others walked toward them.

Rathnar grinned. “Lady, you are looking lovely today.”

“Thank you. Lord Neevath was taking me on a tour of the area and decided I should see the training base.”

A man made of dark blue with grey highlights but rather humanoid features walked forward. “Lord Neevath. It is good to see you out on this gloriously sunny day.”

“Captain Welon. This is my mate, Lady Liona Kix of Terra.”

She nodded and gave a slight smile.

The captain stepped toward her and gave her a low bow. “Lady, it is good that you have come. Neevath has been alone for too long.”

She grinned. “So he tells me. I think he would survive without me.”

There was a chuckle through the guardians.

Neevath gripped her waist and turned her to face him. His song roared in her mind, and she went limp. As she was overwhelmed, he whispered, “I would survive, but I would not live.”

She was held against him as she tried to ignore what had just happened. She was aroused, and her shoulders itched. “That was uncalled for.”

She was in the shadowed protection of his wings bent around them both for some privacy.

Liona tilted her head back to look at him, and he came down for a kiss. “You said I would survive without you. Once we mate, that will no longer be the case. You will be as much a part of me as my wings, and I, you.”

She met his lips with hers, and they kissed slowly, gradually deepening until she clung to him and held onto his neck with both hands. His hair was silky against her fingers, and she found herself petting his skin.

Their kiss was leisurely and in front of about twenty people, but Neevath wasn't in a hurry, and neither was she.

When he finally lifted his head, her lips were numb and tingling at the same time, and his expression was fierce and gentle. She smiled. “You look smug.”

“Pleased and impressed with myself?”

“Yes.”

“I am. Very. Perhaps we should rejoin the guardians.”

“Oh. Right.” She blinked. “Don't do that thing with your song.”

“Why? It worked.” He stroked her cheek. “And it won't have the same stun effect when we have mated.”

“Why not?”

“I will be in your mind constantly. A fixture. To use the song on you would be to use it on myself.”

“Ah. Well, I guess we should rejoin the guardians.”

He kissed her lips, cheeks, and forehead before he straightened and folded his wings back.

She saw Rathnor's smirk and slowly slid her hands down to Neevath's chest. It was quite a bit of bare skin, and she wasn't complaining. The muscles that let him fly were bands that moved from the centre of his chest and massed around his back. He was ripped.

As she thought it, he let out a trilling sound and nuzzled her temple. A hand moved to cover her wing buds, and she

shuddered at the delicate exploration. She hissed. “What’s going on?”

He chuckled. “When we mate, it looks like you will be either on your knees or on top. Your wings are coming in. They have grown a handspan since you arrived. We will have to alter your clothing to accommodate them.”

“I am not going topless. Not even here.”

One of the guardians cleared his throat. “My mother was a tailor. I think I can help.”

Neevath nodded. “She will need your assistance in two days. Can you come to the tower then?”

“Yes, Lord Neevath. At noon?”

“A nice, safe time.” Neevath chuckled. “We will see you then, Dorren.”

The guardian nodded nervously and smiled. “It will be my honour.”

The captain smiled. “Lady Liona, may I be allowed the honour of introducing the other guardian trainees?”

She nodded. “Please, Captain. I have always enjoyed meeting neighbours.”

Neevath kept his hand protectively over her wing buds as the guardians walked up to her for introductions. No one made physical contact with her. They all just bowed to her. One by one.

Liona looked at the collection of beings that could snap her like twigs, inclined her head, and repeated their names with Neevath keeping her close with a song in her mind.

Chapter Five

Liona was bundled up after getting a tour of the base, and Neevath showed her where the water met the sea. They flew north for an hour until he circled slowly around a wide valley protected by hills and spilled into a wide plain that would be excellent for crops and little kids.

Smiling, she relaxed in his grip, and the song took a heavy throbbing sensation. She settled against his claw and rubbed her growing wings against the rough skin holding her. They were starting to itch, and she was getting hungry.

He leaned his head down and crooned to her, nuzzled her, and then whirled, covered her head with his other talons, and his wings began to pump hard.

She heard wind rushing over his body, but she was snug and protected. She didn't have much opportunity to calculate time but guessed it was close to an hour, and they were back at his home.

Neevath settled on the ground and didn't let go of her as he resumed walking on two legs into the house. The air got warm around her as he transformed, but his skin was toasty against hers as he carried her into the building.

"You are shaking."

"I am. Hungry." She flexed her shoulders. "The buds are getting bigger."

"I will check your progress at the medical chamber Zanican had me install."

"Zanican, not Imbolt?"

"Long-range communication is easier for the stellar presence." He walked through the halls, and a door swung open at his approach. He chuckled. "And me. That is why my

home is made of crystal. It allows for enhancement of connective frequencies.”

“Wait.” She was figuring things out, and it explained the itchy wings.

He set her down in a full-body scanner calibrated for him. She put her hands and feet into the right position, and he set the scanner for her. “So, you have all my specs.”

“Correct. It was considered an interesting avenue of research. The project was very thorough in documenting your transformation.” He smiled at her. “Hold still.”

She exhaled slowly to keep still, and the hum and lights moved across her skin and through the fabric.

He paused the scan and unwrapped the cloak from around her. “Let’s try this again.”

He nodded. “Keep still.”

She exhaled and froze as the scanner tried again. This time, Neevath smiled at the result he was reading. “Perfect. The resonance of the castle is working.”

“It’s increasing the speed of the wing development.” It wasn’t a question. She could feel the sprouts between her shoulders and the itch that went from neck to mid-back.

“Yes. It is stressing your body a little, so you are going to be on five small high-protein meals per day. If this continues, you should have flappable wings in a week and will be able to gain muscle from then on. You should be in the air very soon.”

“Oh. Wow.”

He chuckled. “You can exit the scanner. The crystal is doing what it is supposed to do. It is making the cells in your body reproduce and repair at a rate about fifteen times normal.”

“So, that’s a good thing?”

“It is. Growing wings can be painful, so this is the easiest and least painful way to achieve the goal.”

“Is it really the goal?”

“They are six inches out of your back, so it is now.” He reached behind her and pressed on the spurs. “They are soft and flexible now. They will gain rigidity when they are fully grown. Until then, they are springy.”

She shrugged and felt movement. “Huh. This is not what I thought would happen when they reworked my body.”

“What did you think would happen?”

“I don’t know. Perhaps get a bit taller or bigger breasts?”

“Your height has been adjusted, and your breasts are precisely proportioned. They will shrink slightly as your wing muscles develop around your ribcage. If you develop like I did, slabs of muscle will strengthen under the skin. What you look like right now is immaterial.” He stroked her breast gently. “Perhaps having children will bring them back once your musculature changes.”

“Wow. You are fixated on that.”

He shrugged. “Not to be cruel, but that is the reason you are here. You give me a chance to have a mate, a family, a legacy. Your breasts are not my primary concern.”

Liona thought about all the nights where she had mourned her lack of family. Making her own family out on a world she had never imagined was a bit of a stretch, but she had managed to work with whatever her clients wanted to see in their construction. Sometimes doors ended up in stupid places. That was just part of the process.

Wings were part of her new process, with everything that came with them. She smiled and gripped his wrist, steering his hand away from the breast he was petting like a kitten. “Are you trying to console them?”

He smiled. “I haven’t seen anything that cute on this world, definitely nothing as soft.”

She blushed. “Too bad; I wanted a pet.”

“We will find something for you.” He smiled.

Liona snorted.

He slid his fingers along hers and held her hand. “Now, we need to deal with your appetite.”

As they walked toward the kitchen, she was pretty sure he meant her hunger. Fairly sure.

Liona went through two ration packs and one serving of whatever Neevath was eating before she was satisfied.

“That was a lot.” She sighed.

“Your appetite is good. You are going to be sleeping and eating more than normal until your wings are in and operational.”

“Like a toddler.”

“Well, you do have to learn to balance and embrace your new limbs. It is difficult to go from four limbs to six limbs. The extra brain for working the wings is an adjustment. You may have some heartburn.”

She stared at him in horror. “Extra brain?”

Neevath looked at her with calm seriousness for twenty seconds before he burst out laughing. “You believe too easily.”

Liona sighed. “So, I am not going to grow an extra brain?”

“No. A lobe is being reshaped to accommodate control over the nerves.” He chuckled.

“That explains the headache.”

He frowned. “You have a headache?”

“A bit of one. Probably tension.” She shrugged.

He gripped her waist, set her on the counter, then slid his hands into her hair. He frowned, and his fingers began to massage her scalp.

Fuck, that feels good.

Her body went limp as he massaged her, and she tried to breathe slowly and evenly, but she happily groaned as he worked from her skull down her neck.

“When was the last time you let someone take care of you?”

“Before I was shoved into the tank?”

“Yes.”

“I think I was seven. Maybe twenty-one.”

“Aw, a veritable baby.” He growled softly near her ear.
“Well, fledgling, I have plans to be attentive.”

She felt heat spilling through her from his hands and felt like warm, heavy honey. She shuddered and moaned softly as his fingers moved down to her wing buds.

Liona clutched at his shoulders as he stroked and massaged the new tissue carefully. She felt the warmth inside her growing until it managed a light trickle. She heard him inhale.

“Liona...”

“Yeah?”

“Medical was a new room for you.”

She blinked and then chuckled. “It was.”

“I believe that we also went into fabric storage.”

“We did.” She nodded and guessed where he was going.
“Can you tear a hole in the dress to let the growing struts free?”

The sound of shredding fabric was sudden, but she sighed as there was now nothing between her forming wings and his careful fingers.

“Oh, damn, that’s better.”

He chuckled. “So, your debt for the two rooms?”

Liona lifted her head. His face was very close to hers. “Ah. Right. We are still doing that.”

“We are.” He smiled.

“Fine. One.” She leaned toward him and parted her lips. When the kiss started, it got hot fast.

His fingers continued to stroke her new construction, and she gasped, sucking the air out of his lungs. She leaned back.

“That was one.”

His expression was unfocused and intent at the same time. She pulled him in closer and wrapped her legs around his hips. The second kiss involved her using his shoulders to pull herself up to his level. She wrapped her arms around his neck and rocked her hips against his abs.

It was less a kiss and more gasping as his teasing of her wings brought her to a delightful wave of pleasure that was expressed in a soft moan.

He kept one hand behind her and slid the other up her inner thigh. “Well, Liona, how much more of the castle do you want to see today?”

She pressed her forehead to his neck. “Let’s pace ourselves.”

“You will drive me mad if you insist on a slow pace.”

“I just want to settle in a bit. You know. Be able to do more than eat, sleep, and fuck. I want to have a life here, not just be stuck in the castle. I am planning for my new reality.”

He gave her a wry glance. “You are very wet for someone who doesn’t want to fuck, as you say.”

“Oh, I definitely do, but that isn’t the only thing I want on the agenda. Get it?” She patted his cheeks.

He frowned, and she could almost see his brain cells getting together. “But it is on your agenda?”

“Correct.”

“Now?”

“Yes.”

She had no sooner said it than his wings flared wide, his arms wrapped around her, and he took off, flying through the halls and up to the bedroom.

She didn’t know how his wings cleared the hallways, but she wasn’t exactly in a position for the best vantage point.

When he started walking again, he took two steps and set her on the bed.

“You are sure?”

She took stock of what her body was feeling. She was slick and humming with arousal. “Yeah. I am sure.”

He closed his eyes and shuddered. “Thank you.”

He shredded her outfit and lifted her high before settling her against his thigh while he used one hand to remove his skirt.

She looked, blinked, and looked up at him. “The diaries of Draï brides were fairly accurate. If that were a surprise, I would panic.”

He paused. “But you are accepting?”

“I am.”

Neevath shuddered in relief. “This is going to be awkward until your wings are in.”

She ran her fingers along his arms. “Okay. I trust you.”

He shuddered again. “Oh, Liona. You give your trust easily.”

“Not really, but I am a good judge of character.” She reached up and grabbed his jaw. “And you are very attractive.”

He blinked and gave her a slow smile. “I like you, too.”

Liona leaned up and kissed him. “Good. That will make this easier.”

He slid his fingers into her, and his lids fluttered. “And harder all at the same time.”

Neevath withdrew his hand and lifted her, settling her over him and holding her as she sank onto him.

When she was as far as she could go, she felt... something else. Her eyes widened, and she looked up to see two minds looking out at her through his eyes.

“You’re... not alone in there, are you?” She looked at her hands on his shoulders and then back up at his slowly swirling eyes.

“We are Neevath, and now, you are ours.” He moved her over him, and pleasure spiralled through her. She dug her nails into his shoulders and hung on for the ride.

Lying next to him, sweaty and panting, she asked, “How did you two link?”

Neevath chuckled. “I was flying through space and ran afoul of a meteor shower. I dropped to the surface of this world and waited to die. The being found me and offered me survival for a little favour. It wanted the use of my body so that it could defend itself more effectively. We became Neevath.”

“Ah. Right. So, I am going to be absorbed?”

He stroked the thigh that was draped over his hip as he was still buried inside her. “Not absorbed, but a mate and companion. We have been waiting for both for centuries.”

She closed her eyes as her body hummed with satisfaction. “Well, you have the mating down.”

Neevath chuckled. “Good. We took the techniques from your species’ files.”

“You researched sex?”

“Of course. Not all species are built like you. While I would fit, I would miss the nuances of this little protrusion and its internal counterpart.” His finger worked between them and rubbed her clit.

She sighed as her body twitched and clutched at him. “I think I am done for now.”

He chuckled, and when she fluttered around him, he grunted in response. She was warm, she was desired, and she was done.

Chapter Six

Her thighs were warm, and she ached elsewhere as she ate her meal standing up. Liona's new wing buds were now full-on struts. The parchment-thin membrane was gold.

Neevath was sheepish. "I should not have kept at you that long. You are sore."

"I am sore, and I didn't object at the time." She sighed. "Still don't, but I have to ask a question."

"Of course. What do you want to know?"

She stood straight and stared at him. "Where did the tail come from?"

He coloured and ducked his head. "My beast wanted to get involved. You were very enthusiastic."

"Yeah, but now I am just sore all over."

Neevath smiled as he walked up to her and wrapped his arms around her. The song took on a soothing tone in her mind. Warmth crept through her, and she leaned into him as he rubbed her back below her incoming wings.

Neevath murmured, "Once we get used to each other, things will be easier."

"Yeah, yeah. I don't know how I am going to get used to that tail. Can you just bring it out for special occasions?"

He laughed and continued to knead her spine and the muscles of her back. "I can."

"Does your beast really have an independent mind?"

"Yes. It is why you had to approve of him before we could continue."

“Ah. That makes sense.” She looked up. “Does he approve of me?”

“Oh, yes.” He leaned in and kissed her softly and then with more determination.

She moaned and wrapped her arms around his neck. The aches and pains were fading, washed away on a warm wave. There was more than just contact there, more than his mind singing to hers in a seductive tone. She leaned back and gasped. “The planet didn’t have a name.”

He grinned, and his eyes swirled with colour. “You are very quick on the assessments.”

“I got through college doing home inspections. I have to see what is in front of me, and I have to do it quickly.” She sighed. “I have to admit that if I had made more eye contact, I would have figured it out earlier.”

He chuckled. *“You are correct. I had no name. I am very young... for a planet. I accepted Neevath when he arrived, and he warned me of what would come. He explained what an avatar was and how he could be of use to me. I agreed, and he has defended my surface for centuries. I was very excited to learn we had a mate on the way.”*

She looked at him and remembered something Minerva had said. “I have a resistance to radiation.”

“It was very exciting that you had resistance to radiation naturally. My world is full of it. Neevath is full of it.”

“And I know they bumped up my resistance with the Draigenes.”

“Correct. So, dearest Liona, would you consider carrying my child after Neevath’s?”

Liona scowled. “Wait, what?”

He smiled and rubbed a thumb across her lips. *“Neevath’s body can have children, and through him, I can create cells that can also create children.”* He kissed her forehead. *“But his beast would like two if possible. I would like one, please.”*

She stared at him. “I am not a vending machine.”

He blinked. *“We know, but we will have centuries together. There is no hurry, but this is what we would like.”*

“Write a letter to Santa.”

“Is he your representative?” Confusion was firmly in place.

She snorted. “I wish. No, he is the embodiment of generosity, compassion, and gift-giving. He’s an idea, not a living entity.”

He blinked, and his eyes returned to Neevath’s. “He is puzzling over whether he needs to institute one in local society.”

She smiled. “Ah. So, he’s a full consciousness inside you.”

Neevath inclined his head. “He is. He was inside you last night at some point.”

She blushed. “I did wonder why things went back to the exploration stage right when I could have ridden you until I screamed.”

He smiled. “That was a wonderful sound. The whole building vibrated to your tone.”

She wrinkled her nose. “If you want to hear it again, don’t remind me too often.”

He nodded. “Understood. On a different subject, your wings have bloomed during the healing. He didn’t know that it would work, but he did appreciate that you didn’t go into shock when he said he wanted a child of his own.”

She stared and then tried to flex her wings. She could see them moving in her periphery, and she twisted around and around to try and see them.

Neevath caught her arms and held her. “Easy. Come on; let’s go to the bedroom and set up some mirrors. The first thing you will learn is what you did already, how to flex them.”

She wiggled and moved the wings. “They are lighter than I thought.”

He grinned. “When you get them strong enough to lift your weight, I will take you flying.”

He turned her, and they walked up the steps. Her wings fluttered a little, and while she was a little unbalanced, it wasn't too bad.

In their bedroom, he set up a set of mirrors, and she smirked as she guessed why they were there. Surprisingly, it might be because of her wings.

She faced a mirror, he set one behind her, and she gasped. “Wow. That's... I thought they would be red.”

Gold and blue waves of colour moved down the wings. She flexed them, and they spread out. She giggled. “Oh, my god.”

She folded them in tight and wiggled the spurs at the top of them. Channelling a memory, she moved the wings up her shoulders, wrapped the spurs around her collarbone, and latched them. She laughed again at the cloak she had just created.

He looked at her. “What did you do?”

“There was a cartoon way back when that had creatures like this. This is the way they wore their wings when they were walking around.” She smiled at him. “I thought I would try it.”

“It suits you. Your wing colour is surprising, but it suits you as well.”

She smiled and turned from side to side. “There. Almost invisible.”

“Tomorrow, we are going to start working your muscle groups.”

She met his gaze in the mirror. “Here, I thought that was what we were doing last night.”

He grinned, but then his head lifted as if he heard something. “Dorren is arriving.”

Liona blinked. “Right. The clothes.”

“Yes. Your wings came along much faster than I imagined.” He stroked the spot between her wings, and she plastered

herself to him. Her sex started throbbing insistently, causing her to glare at him.

He laughed. "Yeah, that happens when your fingers graze me as well."

"You get wet? How embarrassing for you. No wonder you wear a kilt."

He kissed her and put his hand on her back below her wings. "Come on. I am interested to see how Dorren works around your new attributes."

They walked back down the stairs, and Liona smiled. Her wings were holding in the fold around her collarbone. The joints were tense, but she was confident that they would eventually be what she envisioned when she thought of having wings.

Dorren's eyes widened when he saw the room of fabric. "What may I use, Lord Neevath?"

"Whatever she likes. I also want to commission another portrait of her." He chuckled. "The first one was very useful."

Liona blinked. "Portrait?"

"Yes. There is a Genaran bride who draws depictions of partners for guardians. She made an exception for me. Oh, she's originally one of your people, Liona."

"A Terran?"

"Yes. She is lovely and was able to produce an image of you wearing ancient Draï warrior armour with a classic spear."

"Where is this image?" She looked at him while Dorren walked through the room in wonder.

"In my private study." He chuckled. "Where I have been looking at it for two years."

"Wait. No wings?"

"No. Armour but no wings. A weapon but no wings. I am guessing that Destiny cannot foresee everything after all." He

chuckled.

Dorren had a stack of bolts in his arms. He looked to Neevath. “My lord, where can I set up a workshop?”

“This way.” He held her hand and walked to the next room, where all the tools Dorren would need were in the space.

Liona blinked. “Wow. You thought of everything.”

Neevath hugged her. “I called everyone I could think of, and they sent what was needed.”

Dorren was setting the fabric on the cutting table and looked at Liona. “If you have a moment, I can take your measurements and set to work.”

“You know how to go around the wings?”

The guardian grinned. “I do.”

“Nice.”

“Lord Neevath, let me get your lady scanned for sizing.”

Liona snorted. “Oh, by all means. Let’s.”

Dorren blinked and coloured. “Ah. Apologies, Lady Liona. Can you unlock your wings?”

She nodded and focused on moving the claws. One moved, and one didn’t.

Neevath tutted and gently untangled her spurs. “You will need to work on that.”

“I just got them, so yeah. The tips don’t move like yours do yet. The large flex is all I can manage.”

He cupped her chin and kissed her. “We have all the time in the world. Promise.”

She licked her lips and flexed her wings a little. “If it takes forever, I am going to go nuts.”

“It will not take forever, and I can always fly you.”

She nodded and turned to Dorren. “Ready when you are.”

It took an hour to get every measurement he wanted, right down to her fingertips and toes.

Dorren nodded. "I have four hours a day to work on your wardrobe. If you are comfortable leaving me to it, I should have something basic for you today. Most of the clothing will fasten behind your neck and waist. Is that acceptable?"

"It seems appropriate."

Neevath said, "I don't mind tearing your dresses in the meantime."

Liona laughed. "Thanks for that. I will take you up on it."

He hugged her, and his song was happy, tripping through her mind.

Dorren nodded. "May I return tomorrow? Same time?"

Neevath nodded. "As long as it doesn't interfere with your training."

Dorren chuckled. "You are the highest priority. Getting your mate settled and comfortable is vital."

Liona smirked. "Interesting."

Neevath chuckled. "We will let you in and then go on a flight."

Dorren smiled. "I will putter around for a while, if I may, and stage items for tomorrow."

Neevath nodded. "As you like."

They walked back to the main floor and had lunch. Liona got to practice settling into a chair with a thin support in the centre.

Neevath chuckled. "That is how you can tell if a winged species frequents an area. When you have fabric protecting you, the skin between your wings will be less sensitive to leaning on it."

"Oh. Good. How are you doing it without coverage?"

"Practice. My skin is more sensitive to energy than contact."

She shivered and finished a bite of the food selection compatible with her biology. "So, what is on the agenda?"

“I thought we would see some of the islands.” He took her hand and ran his thumb along her palm before dropping a kiss against her skin.

“Uh-huh. Why do I think we are going to see more than just the islands?”

“How are you feeling?”

She frowned. “Fine. Why do you... oh. How am *I* feeling? Right. Still fine but a bit sensitive. It hasn’t gotten out much recently.”

“Well, you are about to have a social life with one devoted companion.”

She pressed her free hand to her cheek. “Swearing I can deal with. Courtship and flirting are new.”

He grinned and leaned in to kiss her, leading to a make-out session that ended with her astride his lap and his hands under her wings, caressing gently.

Liona clutched at him as her arousal built and built until a ragged cry gave way to a short gasp as her slick sex pulsed and throbbed.

Shuddering in his grip, she closed her eyes and thudded her head against his chest. “Please tell me that I get less sensitive in time.”

He gave her the lightest caress down her spine, and she whined as her hips flexed. She groaned. “I am not a fan of the new noises.”

Neevath smiled. “I like the first notes of your song.”

Liona pressed against him. “I can tell.”

He sighed. “But you need to see more of your new home.”

“Oh, okay. Back into your fist?”

He chuckled. “If you can hold your wings in, you can ride my neck.”

“I think I can manage. My wing thumbs have gotten longer.”

He grinned. “Is that what you are calling them?”

“What are they called?” She wiggled them. “They move like thumbs.”

“They are spurs or struts. That is how the Draï refer to them. The males use them for close combat.”

“Oh.” She wiggled them again. “I am going to use them for covering.”

He chuckled. “Wing thumbs for you then. Ready to fly?”

“As long as you are doing all the work, absolutely.”

Neevath smiled, and they checked in with Dorren before walking outside, and Neevath transformed.

Liona had her cloak and her wings. She looked at his neck and walked toward him. He let her stand on his forearm and lifted her to his neck. She settled, got her wings comfortable, and then held on to some spurs at the base of his neck.

“Are you secure?”

“As secure as I can be. At least with the wings, I can glide if you drop me.”

“Don’t insinuate that. I will not drop you.”

She chuckled as he shifted to a more upright posture, and to her surprise, he ran along the ground with his wings flapping until he took off. The moment he got enough lift, it went from a rocking motion to a gentle lifting and falling. It was delightfully hypnotic as he headed toward a distant coastline, and then they were over the brilliantly coloured water, bands of submarine life giving it different tints.

She huddled against his neck but looked out over the expanse of ocean around them. The scent was clean. This world had never known industrial development, and it showed. A huge something jumped out of the water and splashed back into its home.

“What was that?”

“I haven’t named it. It is a large sea beast that eats shoals of small fish.”

She smiled. The creature had a ring of tentacles around the gills. “It must be very effective as a predator.”

“It is. We are very proud of its development.”

She snorted and continued to bend low over his neck as they cruised above the ocean.

Islands began to appear in the distance, and the steady beats of his wings got a little faster.

Neevath flew over a charming island and then passed it, approaching a larger island with a familiar structure.

“Do you have another house?”

“Of course. I was bored. There are many houses like this across the world, but the largest is on the continent. Our home.” The happy purr in his thoughts made her smile.

Liona looked at the structure made of the crystal that was the same as that back at his castle. “It looks lovely.”

“Thank you. It took me five years to get it just right.” He slowed, circled, and then carefully settled onto an area that seemed designed for his claws. “Can you get off?”

She took stock and groaned. “No.”

He shrank, and she ended up wrapped around him. “Hang on. Your muscles aren’t used to this.”

She had her arms wrapped around his neck as he walked into the building. There was a bed that was big enough to support him and his half-stretched wings.

He turned and said, “Slide off.”

She nodded and let go. She thudded to her back and was surprised that her wings were flexible. “I thought that would hurt.”

He turned and smiled. “I told you they are flexible. When you start to fly, your tendons will make them rigid. They do need to have some play to manage wind.”

She bent her knees and flexed her legs. “You have a wide neck.” Her hips ached.

He chuckled. "Remove your cloak."

She sighed and unfastened it. He nodded, grabbed her ankles, and flipped her over. Her squawk was lost in his laughter as he moved his hands up under her skirt, cupped her hips, and began a slow massage.

She groaned and went limp. His fingers were digging into all the right places. After the previous night, her body was a little sensitive.

He murmured, "Wings out."

She spread her wings, and he massaged the muscle groups that let them move. She dug her hands into the sheet and lay still. He found spots she didn't realize were tense.

She panted and groaned as he sought out all the tension in her limbs. When he had taken care of her shoulders and arms, she had to ask, "So, did you take a class or something?"

He chuckled. "No, but I remember the early days with my wings. I also have always wondered if I would have a mate to share my days with. If I did, I promised that I would take care of her. So, I learned what I could, not expecting to be on a world that was inhabited." He ran a finger down the centre of her back, and she gasped. "I had to count on doing it all myself."

Liona shuddered as he worked down her legs to the soles of her feet, and when he was down there, she winced when he said, "Flip over."

She pulled her wings in and tried to roll. Didn't work.

She looked at him over her shoulder, and he smiled, moved to her side, and forklifted her over.

He flipped her up, and she landed on her wings. It was like landing on an air mattress.

Neevath was having fun. Based on his erection, this massage was going to have a happy ending.

He started at her ankles and moved up, massaging as he went. "How did you enjoy the flight?"

She groaned as he made it to her inner thighs and then moved to her hips, lifting and easing the tension out of her. He set her back on the bed and asked, "Liona? How was the flight?"

She sighed. "Good, but can you carry me on the way home?"

He grinned and moved over her. "I certainly can. I wouldn't want you to suffer an injury on your first day as the most ancient of Draï."

His erection was nudging her. She struggled to focus. "Most ancient of what?"

Neevath's eyes glowed and whirled. "I will tell you later."

She reached for him. He caught her hands and pressed them above her head. He slowly eased into her, and her body made it a slick entrance.

Liona gasped, and her hands clutched at him while he folded himself slightly to reach her lips with his as he moved slowly inside her.

Liona had seen enough newlyweds to know what was happening. Around her sighs and groans, she muttered, "How many other buildings have you crafted?"

He grinned. "Four that you have not seen."

"You want to fuck in all of them?"

He chuckled. "You are very smart."

He thrust into her, sliding in to the hilt. "And very right."

She grunted, and he began to move faster.

When the suns were setting, the dragon wrapped her carefully in his talons and flew home. Liona took a nap. She had earned it.

Chapter Seven

Liona yawned and looked at Neevath. “Dorren is back.”

Neevath kissed her softly. “He is. I will go greet him.”

“Put clothing on.”

He moved away from her. “Fine, but don’t move.”

“It’s time for breakfast.”

He chuckled. “I will bring it back with me.”

“Why is he so early?” she muttered as Neevath put his kilt on.

“It’s nearly noon. You were sleepy.” He leaned over and kissed her.

He flexed his wings and walked to the balcony, dropping easily and meeting Dorren on his return to the castle.

Liona pulled the sheet up and over her shoulder, using her wing thumb to tug the fabric into position. She snuggled in and closed her eyes.

The scent of food made her eyes open, and she looked at Neevath through sleepy eyes. “You made it back.”

He laughed. “You moved.”

She rose up on her elbows and found herself in a face-down starfish. “I guess I did. The wings are warm.”

He laughed and tugged the sheet away. “They are. Come on. Time for your first meal of the day.”

She groaned. “Seriously? You are making me get up after yesterday?”

He chuckled. “If we don’t keep you fed, you won’t be able to do that again, and I am definitely a fan of a repeat.”

She sat up slowly and glanced down. A variety of light bruises covered her body. He had his favourite spots, that was for sure. Weirdly, he focused on the top of her hips. There was a red-purple arc that followed her hip and formed an arrow on either side to the top of her sex. He was turning her skin into a wrap made of hickeys.

“Well, aren’t we creative?” She narrowed her eyes at him.

He was at the table in the corner, arranging things. “You enjoyed it at the time.”

“I remember.” She gritted her teeth and moved slowly to the edge of the bed. Everything ached, but it wasn’t bad. Memories were swamping her, she was warming up, and her limbs moved more easily until she stood up. She tried to get her legs under her, but they quivered.

Neevath extended his hand to her and steadied her as she walked to the table.

She settled slowly and sighed as she evened her weight on sensitive skin.

Neevath smiled and set her meal in front of her. “I would have pulled you onto my lap, but you might suffer from slapping the hell out of me. I lost control last night.”

She sipped her tea. “And this morning.”

He chuckled. “I would say I am sorry, but I am not.”

“I should have known better than to hook up with a guy who hadn’t had a chance for sex in centuries.”

“Your bad judgment is my blessing.” He lifted her left hand to his lips and kissed her palm.

She ate with her right hand while he was kissing her wrist and nibbling at her fingers. When her meal was done, he smiled. “So, do you want to see the new site where we will put the refugees?”

“Sure, but I am not getting on your back again. That got you all worked up.” She snorted.

He grinned and kissed her. “Your wings get me all worked up. I am watching the thin pulse in the membranes as they thicken enough to fly. The increasing strength in your *wing thumbs*. Your evolution keeps me watching you to see how you will develop next. I am delighting in it, and as the world beneath us feels the same, I do not think that seeing you will never fill me with delight.”

She frowned at his phrasing. “Wow. So, you have a crush on my wings?”

“Of course, and the curve of your hip and the dip of your belly are in my mind whenever I am not looking at you.”

“Since last night?” She looked at him with sarcasm apparent on her face.

“No, since I saw the image of you in the tank. Imbolt was very forthcoming with imagery when I told him what the guardians had forwarded.” He smiled. “It is definitely you, but you look ready for battle.”

She sighed. “It must have been during my last cancer treatment. I was feeling militant at that point.”

He kissed her palm again. “You can feel militant, outraged, and frustrated as long as you remember you are safe here, and the ground under your feet will rise up to protect you.”

“And the cancer won’t return?”

“It will not. Your body is no longer hospitable to disease.”

Liona nodded. “Right. Let me get dressed, and we can go see the site. Finally, something relatively familiar.”

He nodded. “Do you need assistance to the dressing room?”

“Please. My thighs aren’t under my control.”

He looked smug but helped her up. He walked her to the dressing area and helped her get some of Dorren’s new clothes on. It was a long-waisted halter top with a gentle strip that

went from waist to neck. The bottom was a skirt that swished around her ankles.

Neevath said, “You will need boots for this environment.”

She nodded and stepped into the boots he presented to her, holding her skirt out of the way so he could lace them up. She was too achy to do a lot of bending. She supposed she could ask the consciousness for more of that healing warmth, but that would end up with her getting more sore, not less. There had been three minds in bed last night and this morning. She was only one of them. It was a good thing that the other body was now familiar.

When she was dressed, they headed down to check on Dorren. He stared at her wings and the fit of the top. “I made you a cloak last night. It has warming tech in it.”

Neevath took it and looked it over. “It looks light and comfortable. We will test it today and let you know how it works.”

Dorren nodded. “It will take her temperature as standard and heat her to that level if her skin begins to cool.”

Neevath smiled and looked at Liona. “Thumbs.”

She locked her wings down, and he put the cloak around her shoulders, clicking the closure with a smile. “There. All dressed up so I can remove it all later.”

She laughed. “Nice to know you have planned our evening.”

He smiled. “I have to. You slept our morning away.”

“You were holding me down with your leg and arm. It was easier to sleep.”

He chuckled. “We can argue later. Let’s go and check the site.”

Dorren looked at them. “It is on the other side of the globe.”

Neevath nodded, and the world spoke, “*I am aware; I put it there.*”

Dorren blushed and bowed. “My pardon, Lord Neevath.”

Neevath led her out via the pedestrian entrance, and he began to shapeshift the moment they passed the doorway. He held out his claw, palm up, and she stepped into his scaled hand, and he wrapped the other around it. She was safe and snug, and when they were cruising, she took another nap. Evolving was hard, and the cloak was nice and toasty.

Liona looked over the valley and smiled. “This is going to suit them, I think. When will you give them the mineral?”

Neevath wrapped his arms around her from behind, pinning her wings between them. His hands flattened over her belly. “When our project is started, they can start.”

She sighed. “Right. How about their agriculture?”

“Over there. It is a rich plain with minimal grazing beasts that will be suitable for growing many of their crops. Their ships with trees and botanists will land next week. The Avari have contributed materials to create their first city.”

She looked up at him. “It’s going to happen quickly, isn’t it?”

“It is, but no one breeds here until we do.”

“Right. Why so stringent on that?”

“They need to remember that this world is alive, and it chooses whether they thrive and survive.”

She sighed and leaned against him. “Can I see the designs for the city?”

“Certainly. They are at the guardian base.”

She rubbed her hands together. “Excellent. Can I see them?”

“Of course.”

“Today?”

He laughed. “If you insist.”

“I don’t insist, I request.”

“Your most humble request becomes an order when I hear it.”

Liona smiled. “Hm. How is the water table?”

“Artesian spring coming out of that mountain. The city will drill down through sand and limestone. Water treatment lagoons are going over there.” He pointed between two mountains.

“Is it a stable area?”

“Yes. The mountains are old, and the bedrock is solid.”

Liona chuckled. “I should ask these questions after I see the plans, right?”

“I like that you are taking an interest in your home. You are the lady of this world, after all.”

“I am still getting used to the idea. Frankly, the wings are easier to adapt to.”

“You will be a wonderful example of your people.”

“My people don’t have wings, dumbass.”

He laughed, and the sound rippled through the air around them to be tumbled by the wind.

She smirked. “Are you ready to head to the guardian base?”

“Of course, my treasure.” He bent and kissed her before letting her go and changing into his far more massive form.

She stepped into his grip and curled into the small, cozy space he created between his claws.

He let out a weird crooning sound and took off.

She napped again until she heard voices.

“Lord Neevath, is something wrong?”

He rumbled low.

“What is in your claws... oh!”

Liona swung her legs out when Neevath let her go. “Hello, Captain.”

A polite hand was extended to help her stand. “Lady Liona. To what do we owe the pleasure?”

“I want to see the projection of the new city.” She smiled.

Neevath huffed.

“Oh. Uh, sure. This way, lady.”

She turned and looked at the scaled head. “Are you coming?”

“No, vrasuuli. *I will remain here until you see what you need to see.*”

“Vrasuuli?”

“*I will explain it when we are home, alone, and lost in each other.*”

“Fine, but since one of the ladies is blushing, I am guessing she heard that.”

He crooned and nudged her with his enormous head.

“Right.” She flipped the edges of the cloak over her shoulders and stretched her wings. “Captain?”

“Of course. This way. We keep it on the main floor so it is accessible.”

Liona smiled and folded her wings tight to her back.

The viewing was very quick. The model was in the centre of the first floor and detailed all the information she wanted.

The captain asked, “He is really letting them come?”

“He is really letting them come. The mineral deposits are another matter.” She grimaced.

“So, he is holding fast to that?”

“Yup. Don’t worry. He is trying to get his own project going. When it has started, they will be clear to begin their reproductive program.”

“How long do you think that will be?”

Liona stared at him. “I have no idea, but he isn’t wasting his chances. Before I lost my ovaries to disease, it was a twenty-

five percent chance every twenty-eight days. I don't know what these new ovaries are up to."

His eyes were wide. "Your... ah. Right."

"Princess of my heart, do you have the information you need?"

"Uh, I think so. We are doing this now?" She was referring to speaking silently.

"Now that we have mated, my mind is yours, and yours is mine."

"I don't recall agreeing to that."

"Oh, darling, you definitely did."

She paused as he replayed her begging for everything he could give her. *"That isn't fair."*

"I got what I want. Fair doesn't come into it, light of my soul."

"What is with all the flattery?"

"My beast is insisting. Our mate must know that she is treasured at all times. You are our mate, after all." The heavy and smug amusement made her snort.

She nodded to the captain. "Thank you. That is what I wanted to see."

"May I ask why?"

"Back home, I used to coordinate builders. I am interested in how cities are built out here." She started back to the bulk of the dragon in front of the building.

She wrapped the cloak around her and pressed her head against Neevath's jaw.

He let out that croon again, and she smiled as music soared in her mind. He held his forearm out to her, and she climbed up astride his neck again. She settled and gripped the spines.

"Hard takeoff. Hold tight."

She crouched low and pressed her body against him. When she was flat, he crouched and then launched skyward. He got

to a safe height, and his wings scooped air, moving them toward home.

When he landed, she dismounted, and he transformed next to her. He slid an arm around her, and they walked into the building as the suns set.

“So, dinner?”

Liona agreed. “Sounds good. Should I grab the dishes from this morning?”

“The bots would have gotten them and cleaned the sheets.”

She blushed. “That was more your fault than mine.”

“And I will do it again as soon as that ache leaves you. I am surprised that you didn’t ask the other for assistance.”

“I don’t want to bother them, and they really need a name of their own.”

He smiled. “A name you give them. Just for us so that we know which one of us you are clinging to.”

Liona blinked. “Um, Veth then. It is close and easy enough to carry forward after you are no longer with him. Also, gender neutral.”

Neevath nodded and lifted one of her hands to his lips. “Why would you think that was necessary? Some worlds pick the same gender of avatar over and over.”

“I didn’t want to put them in a situation where they were confined by a title that they would wear after I was gone.”

He paused. “Are you going somewhere?”

“Realistically speaking, if I keep my original lifespan, I have about forty years left.”

“You are on a Draai lifespan now,” Neevath said. “Imbolt promised.”

She blinked. “I am not sure what that entails.”

He smiled. “Longer than forty years. We will warn you when you are getting within decades of the end.” He squeezed her hand. “Promise.”

Liona sighed. “Fine. I have lived watching the calendar and clock for a while. You will let me know?”

“I absolutely will.” He smiled.

They had dinner. She asked, “How long will I be eating from the rations?”

“As long as you like. Imbolt’s people will keep you supplied if you want to keep consuming familiar food.”

“I am not finding all this stuff familiar. It is edible, and I can digest it, but it isn’t really fun.”

He took a chunk of the meat he was eating and held it to her lips. She reached for it, and he pulled it back. He smirked, and she exposed her teeth to take a bite.

He chuckled. “Just checking to see if you were extending your canines. They are a little sharp and slightly longer.”

She tore off her bite and mumbled as she chewed. “Teeth, wings, back... you have very niche areas of interest.”

He smiled and held out the meat again. “I believe I have shown my appreciation for all of you. I can do it again, and Veth would definitely like to try in case you weren’t feeling it the first time.”

She groaned. “That isn’t really necessary.” She took another bite and mumbled, “And I am still a bit sore.”

He set the last bite down, and his eyes whirled. “*Why didn’t you mention it?*”

“I did... to Neevath. It just made me relive last night every time I adjusted my weight. I didn’t want to upset anyone.” She sighed. “I am just not up for the same... uh... energy tonight.”

“*You should have mentioned it sooner. To me.*” He wrapped his arms around her, and she felt a cascade of healing warmth running through her.

She snuggled against him and sighed as she inhaled the scent of his skin. It got spicier when Veth was in control.

He crooned happily. “*Better?*”

“Better. Thank you.”

She felt heat pulsing through her wings, and his crooning continued. “So, only one of you speaks at a time?”

He chuckled. *“We can both speak together, but he offers me the respect of representing myself as I do with him.”*

She nodded and leaned her head against his chest. “That’s good.”

“If I offer to join you in your body as well, will you be offended?”

Liona lifted her head and leaned back. “Isn’t that what happened last night?”

He smiled and stroked her cheek. *“I mean internally. After the children have been brought into the world and are grown. After they are with us, I would like to join with you as I have with Neevath so we can all remain together.”*

She paused, “So, I will outlive my children?”

“You will. I will. Neevath will, but they will have very long lives, and you will get to see all that they create and become.”

She opened her mouth, and he smiled in understanding as nothing came out.

“We will discuss it again frequently. We have a few centuries before we reach that point. I just wanted to plant the idea now so you can keep it in mind. I intend on spending decades and decades proving that you can trust me with everything that you are.”

She swallowed. “Is this the pitch you gave to Neevath?”

He grinned, his eyes bright. *“I approached his beast and explained my issue. His beast discussed it with Neevath, and we talked for two years before he became my avatar.”*

“Why did it take two years?”

“There was nothing else to do, so we waited until we were certain it was a good combination.”

She blinked. “I knew you guys took your time, but two years... damn. I can’t even imagine two years.”

“From what I understand, you measured your life in hours, not knowing how long it would go on. I can confidently tell you, you have time. We are offering you time to do anything that you want to do. The caveat is that you have to do it with us.” He was stroking her wings. *“You can fly with Neevath and walk through the deepest depths of the globe with me.”*

She smiled. “Trying to bribe me?”

He nodded, and Neevath took over. “He prefers the thought of enticement. There is an entire world at your disposal. He wants to see himself through your eyes.”

“It’s an interesting idea. I am still trying to get used to having a healthy body.” Liona stared up at him. “Last night was the first time sex didn’t hurt. If I have time, let me take time. Let me enjoy being me before I have to invite someone else in.”

He smiled. “There is no *have to*. Your choices are yours.”

“Well then, I am on a new world with a new me, a new partner, and the partner’s weird, introverted friend.” She grinned. “Back home, this would be a sitcom.”

He cocked his head. “Will you explain that to me?”

“Of course.” She stroked her hands up his chest. “We have all the time in the world. Veth said so.”

Chapter Eight

Four weeks later...

Liona held on as Neevath landed, took her cloak off, and held it as her wings expanded. She walked up Neevath's neck, and he tossed her into the air as she started a downward stroke that would take her to the rapidly growing settlement.

She flew and landed near the greenhouse that was filling with little sprouts. She walked in and smiled. "Lee-ha, how are you?"

The botanist turned and smiled. "Lady, it is good to see you out and about."

"Yeah, well, Neevath found a hormone he hadn't explored yet, so I have been at the castle for a few days."

Lee-ha giggled. "Well, we are working with those greens you asked for. They are taking to the soil extremely well."

Liona looked over and saw the lettuce. She walked over and started eating. She had worked her way through the row, and the botanist was staring at her when she realized what she had done. "Uh-oh."

Lee-ha blinked. "I guess you really like greens."

Liona shook her head in shock. "No. I don't. I generally avoid them at all costs."

"I find that hard to believe." Lee-ha chuckled. "You ate half the crop."

"Uh, yeah. About that." She was about to say something about the signal her body was giving her when the staff outside began shouting with excitement.

Lee-ha and Liona went outside, and Liona blushed as the huge chunk of mineral was lowered into the town square.

Lee-ha clapped. “Oh, wow. The colonists can start having families. I thought he was making us wait until he had a child.”

Liona looked down at her hands full of lettuce. “Well, he said the colonists couldn’t start the project until he started his. I am guessing this is what the last week of constant intimacy was about.”

Lee-ha looked at her. “You are...”

“It must just have happened.” She shoved another lettuce leaf into her mouth.

There was a lot of excited crying and bowing toward the dragon, who was sitting and looking proud.

His head slowly turned to look at her, and she took several steps and launched herself upward. She approached him, and he lifted his head for her to land on, but she veered off and headed toward the distant coastline.

She heard the heavy beats of his wings behind her. Smirking, she dropped, and he overshot the place she had been. Liona used her wings to play tag with her enormous mate.

Her wings began to cramp, and she slowly glided toward the top of a grassy plateau. Her left wing curled in, and her controlled glide turned into a tight spiral. She was ten feet from the ground when arms wrapped around her, and Neevath said, “Got you, but you have to work your wings more before we can play aerial tag.”

She panted, and he landed, massaging the cramp out of her wing. He let out that crooning noise again, and it struck her.

“Neevath, how pregnant am I?”

He paused. “Four weeks.”

“It is the beast making that noise, right? The crooning?”

He cleared his throat. “You noticed that?”

“Yeah. It’s relaxing and similar to your song but definitely more on the protective and smug side.”

“Ah. That would give it away.” He kept massaging her wings.

“Rather irritated that I am the last to know.”

“I was waiting, and then the beast got all excited when you flew, so he scampered off to get the stone for the colony.”

“Which was how I found out. He had what he wanted, and now they could start their own families. So, giant crystal to the rescue.”

“What are you eating?”

She groaned and looked at the last of the head of lettuce in her hand. “Imbolt sent some seeds that do well in hydroponics, and Lee-ha agreed to grow some of my home plants. This is lettuce. It is a fast-growing plant used for salads and garnish. I think my body wanted iron, and this was identifiable enough.”

He paused. “We can look up species requirements for you and compare it to local flora.”

She looked at him while munching the last of the green. “Could we? I think the wings are throwing off my mineral balance. The cramp could be a magnesium issue.”

“We will begin regular scans.” He nuzzled her neck.

She leaned back against him. “Good, then I can find out how long I will be pregnant. Huh. My body hasn’t done this before, and there were no Draï on Earth.”

“Earth?”

“Terra. It all means dirt.”

He snorted. “Well, child of dirt, we are going home and going to treat that wing.” He bundled her up and wrapped her cloak around her before launching upward. He got a thousand feet up and started transforming. His claws wrapped around her and tucked her into the ball that she formed when she was sleepy.

She could feel the changes in temperature as they crossed the ocean and returned home. The song in her mind was soothing and incredibly joyous. She could feel the smile on her lips as she dozed for the rest of the flight.

The excited sounds of the colonists having their first public market were heaven to Liona's ears. The guardians were milling around and seeing what the locals had been creating since they landed.

Liona was wearing a tunic that covered her swollen stomach, and Neevath was always in earshot. The local representatives were thanking him and Veth for allowing the colony after decades of waiting.

She walked past the stalls filled with fruits that the botanists had gotten from trees that survived implantation. Accelerated development had produced the fruit that was on display. Her mouth watered as she looked at the fruit, but she wasn't falling for the temptation a second time. She lifted her head and softly said, "Neevath."

He was at her side in ten seconds. "Yes, treasure of my heart?"

"Is any of this safe?"

He looked over it with Veth's gaze. He pointed to a purple fruit. "That one has the mineral content you are craving."

"Oh, excellent." She smiled at the vendor. "May I try one?"

The vendor paused. "They are fruit withheld for our women. They are sacred."

Liona tried not to lose it; instead, she looked to Neevath. "Can I get a little frank here?"

"Oh, please. you will just have you make it up to me later, *vrasuuli*." He lifted her hand to his lips and kissed it.

There were gasps as she looked at the vendor. "Do you represent the Tremori?"

The man swallowed. "No."

“That’s good. Do you have a mate?”

“Yes. Ma’am, are you Neevath’s mate?”

“Neevath’s, Veth’s, I draw the line at the Draï. He just gets to lick.” She looked at the fruit. “If it is forbidden to those who are not Tremori, then get them off the fucking table, or I will do it for you.”

“Ma’am... I...” The vendor was standing, and everyone was staring at him.

Liona snapped. “Get them off the fucking table!” She ripped off her cloak, reached out with her wings and flipped the table over.

Neevath pulled her in, wrapped an arm around her breasts, and put a protective hand over her belly. “He’s hungry, isn’t he?”

She nodded and sniffed.

He stroked her belly. “Let’s find him something to eat.”

“Okay. There isn’t anything here, so we had better go home.”

Dorren came up and murmured, “I brought some rations, so you don’t have to leave. We have a heater in the shuttle.”

Neevath sighed. “She can’t eat the rations. She is stuck on fresh food only, and it is driving her a little crazy. Finding food safe for her to eat here has been more challenging than we had anticipated.”

Liona was embarrassed, but she was so hungry. “Sorry about the table. Let’s just go.”

Neevath pressed a kiss to her temple. “Of course, carrier of my soul.”

The Tremari began to flutter and mill about in confusion.

Liona paused. “Wait. This is an event to thank you. You have to stay. Maybe one of the non-Tremari guardians can take me home. We have meat in the chiller.”

“I don’t have to do anything. What you would like me to do is not sweep this colony off my surface and send the Tremari scattering for this insult.”

“Why was it displayed if I couldn’t have it? That was so unfair.” Pouting didn’t become her, but she could feel herself doing it.

“Don’t worry. Their fruit is about to wither on the ground. They are here because of you, and if they can’t offer you some of the harvest that was brought out because of you... they will not harvest that particular fruit.”

“Veth, don’t. Don’t kill their plants.”

“They insulted you.”

“One man wouldn’t give me fruit. It isn’t the end of the world.”

“No, but it pissed the world off.”

Guardian Kevel came running up, and she said, “I will take her back to the castle. She will be safe.”

Veth paused and nodded. *“Keep her safe, or your bloodline ends with you.”*

“I understand. I will take care of them both.” Kevel nodded.

Neevath nodded and stalked back to the mortified representatives.

Liona sighed during the walk to the shuttle. “I am sorry about the scene, but I am just so hungry, and Veth said it was safe for me to eat.”

Kevel smiled. “Lady, I have four sisters, and I would never mess with a pregnant female.”

They got into the shuttle, and once she was fastened in, Kevel lifted off smoothly and headed to the castle slightly faster than Neevath would be able to manage.

It was a relief when they got home, and she walked to the kitchen and opened the chiller. Unable to wait anymore, she tore into the chunk of meat while a fascinated Kevel watched.

After a few mouthfuls soothed her, she looked at Kevel. “You had better get back to the party. I will be fine.”

“So, when he said fresh food...”

“Yeah. Raw. This baby wants raw food. Well, my body wants raw food. It seems to work. I am healthy but not gaining enough weight. Neevath doesn’t have a problem hunting for me, but he doesn’t like leaving me, so I have to go with him lots, and I don’t like to be there when he guts his kill for me.”

Kevel blinked. “I thought your people were omnivorous.”

“We are. Usually. Pregnancy cravings are usually manageable. The Terran plants haven’t arrived yet. When they do, this area will be for me and my children. I am going to watch some vids. You can get going. The other guardians are at the party.”

“Are you sure?”

“I am sure.” She took another savage bite of raw meat. “Go.”

Kevel sighed and left.

Liona kept eating, and then she went for a nap after taking a bath and getting the blood off.

* * * *

Neevath got up in front of the crowd. “Tremari, you are welcome to live here in this colony.” He turned and left the podium.

The representative looked at him and then darted to the stage. “Thank you, Lord Neevath-Veth. It is an honour to be here, and we are grateful for your hospitality to our people.”

Neevath froze and stalked back to the stand. “I am not offering you hospitality. My mate is. My mate, who is starving because I had not considered a change in biology when she got pregnant. The child she carries is the only reason you are able

to plan a new generation. If she or my child dies, I will burn this colony to the ground. Enjoy the celebration.”

The gathered celebrants were silent.

Neevath was worried, and when he was worried, he got frustrated by being unable to help Liona.

“Lord Neevath. Please.” A voice made him pause. The vendor who had upset Liona was standing with a large wrapped bundle.

“What?”

“I didn’t know she was your mate and definitely didn’t know she was carrying. That is what the fruit is for. It helps with hormonal fluctuations. Please give this to her with my sincere apologies.” He smiled weakly. “Your lady is quite strong.”

“She is, and she is ravenous. This is the fruit?”

“Yes, Lord Neevath.”

Veth took control and said, *“Good, then your colony will live to see another season. She didn’t ask you for fruit; she asked you for a taste. Who did you expect to meet here? It is Tremari, guardians, and my family.”*

He darkened and bowed. “I have been on other worlds with tourists. Our fruit is harsh to those who are not evolved for it.”

“So, not knowing her species, you dissuaded her. Dangerous. Well, if she can consume this fruit, you will have bountiful harvests, and if she can’t, it will be purged from Neevath, and your females will have to find something else to soothe them. Fair, yes?” He took the parcel.

“Uh, yes.”

Neevath returned to speak. “Yes. If the fruit helps, I will be in contact shortly.”

“I sincerely hope that it does.” The vendor bowed low.

He flared his wings and began ascending. His beast emerged, and he held the bundle of fruit as carefully as he

could. He flew as fast as he could to get the fruit home. If Liona needed it, she would have it.

* * * *

Liona heard Neevath land and sat up from watching vids from home. He came in holding a bundle and smiled. “How are you feeling, *vrasuuli*?”

She smiled. “You don’t need to suck up. I ate two pounds of meat over the sink. I feel classy.”

He nodded and diverted toward the kitchen, calling, “Be right back.”

She smiled and watched the robot on the screen come alive. She could watch it over and over, and she did. Back home in hospital, she always had it queued up on her tablet.

Liona was smiling when he returned and brought something out on a plate. She blinked as the scent hit her, and then she whined as hunger struck her. The blue and purple fruit looked like a giant blueberry with delusions of grandeur. As she put the first piece in her mouth, the texture was all crisp apple.

She cried and ate another piece. Neevath sat next to her, and she held him as her body was screaming with relief. Whatever was in this fruit, she needed it.

Neevath lifted her chin and whispered, “Better?”

“Best thing since you.”

He kissed her and murmured, “Good. He was very apologetic.”

“Thank you for bringing it home.” She grabbed another few pieces and crunched her way through them. “This is probably dying me all kinds of blue and purple.”

“You look lovely, no matter the colour. It is helping the cravings?”

“It is. My body is going quiet, and even Junior is kicking slowly.”

He rubbed her belly. “Stronger kicks.”

“Yup. He must be getting something he needs.” She smiled. “I don’t care if I change colour myself. If he’s happy, I’m happy.”

“I concur. I will fly back and forth daily if necessary.”

“Do you think we can get some of the plants around here?”

He chuckled. “We can. Kevel is an agricultural talent. I will send a message to the colony, and Kevel can bring a few plants with her.”

“Do you think the colonists will part with them?”

He smiled wryly. “I think they may be invested in helping you and keeping you happy.”

“What did you do?”

He wrinkled his nose. “I may have threatened them that if anything happened to you or the baby, I would burn out the colony. Maybe.”

She sighed and kissed him. “Thanks for that.”

His tongue teased hers, and he chuckled. “That is a lovely taste.”

“The fruit?”

“You feeling happy. It changes your kiss.”

She sighed and curled against him, finishing the slices of fruit. “You were worried.”

“All of us were. Veth was mad that he couldn’t just fix your hormones and help you gain weight. I was worried that nothing I served was quite right, and the beast was worried that you weren’t eating five pounds at a sitting.” He sighed and said, “He wanted a pile of carcasses so you could pick what you wanted for each meal. He didn’t think it would distress you.”

“Some days it wouldn’t. How much fruit did you get?”

“There were eight in the bundle.”

“Right. I am going to go to the medical room and do a base level. I should have done it before I ate.”

He chuckled. “Let’s go.”

He picked her up and carried her to the scanners that sent calibrated beams over her six-month bump. When she stood next to him, she asked, “How far along is he, and how far does he have to go?”

“There is one hundred and fifteen days to go for this little hybrid.” He looked at her. “Can you manage that?”

“Wait. Still?”

“Yes.”

She scowled. “That’s a lot of fruit.”

“You will have it.”

“Okay.” She yawned. “Time for bed, I think.”

“Are you propositioning me?” He raised his brows as he shut off the display.

Liona smiled and ran her hands beneath his wings, caressing the softer skin. “Maybe. You have been so worried that you haven’t been yourself.”

His eyes darkened as the pupils expanded. “I was worried.”

“Be less worried and be more attentive. Hunger wasn’t the only appetite that has been burning through me lately.”

He smiled with a happy and relieved grin. “Yes, Lady of Veth.”

He lifted her against him and began walking up the stairs to their bedroom.

“It has been changed in the Imperium.”

She smiled. “Congratulations. The world is now named for its consciousness and not the large scaly beast that I have the pleasure of calling mine.”

“As long as we get to call you ours, we don’t care about the label of the world.” He grinned.

“You do. The Tremari paid top dollar for me.” They laughed together.

Two hours later, they cuddled together. Tired and sweaty, she looked at him. “Yeah, that was more energy than I have had in the last month.”

He rubbed her between the wings. “I noticed. I am going to have Kevel plant an entire forest of those fruit trees.”

She laughed. “I am wondering what the scans are going to show tomorrow?”

“As am I. It is amazing what odd hobbies couples pick up.”

Liona smiled, and they entered sleep.

“Ninety-five days left.” Liona read the field on the screen. “Right. I don’t think we need as much fruit as we thought.”

He chuckled. “No. What we have will take you to delivery and faster than you thought. Certainly, faster than any Draï pregnancy in history.”

She patted her belly. “He gained a pound overnight!”

“He is on track to get to standard weight in the next few days if you continue to gain like this.”

“Uh, I think I am going to go one day on, one day off. Maybe two.” She rubbed her side. “My skin feels a little tight.”

Neevath wrapped his arms around her and crooned in her ear. Her body relaxed, and he swayed with her. She sighed. “Just keep doing that until he’s here, and everything will be fine.”

He chuckled then gave her a brisk kiss on the cheek. “Time for breakfast.”

“Almost as good as the crooning.” She grinned.

He swung her into his arms and took her off to breakfast.

As they ate, she looked at him and wanted time to stop. If this moment could be frozen, she would love to have an image of it on the wall. When she looked down, she saw the roast on her plate and grinned. It seemed that her standards had remained the same.

“Liona, my dearest heart, what is that expression? Is he moving?”

“Oh, he is, but I just realized something.” She met his gaze and saw Veth watching as well. “We have all the time in the world, but I still want this baby out as soon as he’s ready.”

He laughed and squeezed her hand. “All the time in this world.”

Warmth ran through her, and their son kicked in agreement. It seemed they had all come to the same conclusion. Liona was home, and her family was about to grow around her.

Author's Note

Well, this one has taken over two years to finish. It's done. She's done, but Liona will appear in the next book involving a giant and a cyborg parrot. Don't know when, but that is the next Reset.

Thanks for reading,

Viola Grace

About the Author

Viola Grace is a Canadian author who immerses herself in Fantasy, Paranormal, Sci-Fi, and graphic novels (that's new). Writing for a few decades, she has spanned short stories, novellas, novels, and the occasional collaboration with the result being an astonishingly large backlist.

Focusing her work on humour, lightness of spirit, and now and then a heat level to scorch the pages, she leaves the dark and depressing to others. Happily ever afters are guaranteed.

The crafts she has accrued over her lifetime regularly work their way into her books with a variety of results for the characters.

When she's at home, she is usually hiding indoors with felines of various sizes. The bees come in one size, and their speed is usually fast. When she is outdoors, she takes pictures of the stunning skies above her home and the wildness of nature that surrounds her, imagining fantastical worlds hiding in everything around her.