



ASCENSION SAGA: 9

INTERSTELLAR BRIDES® PROGRAM

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

GRACE GOODWIN

ASCENSION SAGA, BOOK 9

INTERSTELLAR BRIDES® PROGRAM:
ASCENSION SAGA

GRACE GOODWIN



Interstellar Brides® Program: Ascension Saga Book 9
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Published by KSA Publishers
Goodwin, Grace
Interstellar Brides® Program: Ascension Saga Book 9

Cover design copyright 2020 by Grace Goodwin, Author
Images/Photo Credit: Deposit Photos: .shock, Angela_Harburn

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PROLOGUE



Queen Celene - Optimus Unit Prison, Cell Level C

I STARED AT THE WALL, trying, once more, to use my power.

Nothing. I'd been too long from the citadel, the bond grown too weak to use as I once had.

The last time I'd truly used my gift, it had saved my life. It had often felt like yesterday when I'd had to flee, but now... it felt like a lifetime ago.

I needed to return to the citadel. Reconnect. Become strong, as I was long ago. My daughters needed me. Alera needed their queen. First, I *needed* to escape.

The cleric bitch who'd threatened my daughters was gone. Had been for days. I had no idea if she were dead or alive. I'd been well-treated since then, strangely so considering the misery when I'd first been taken. Not that it mattered. I had to get out of here. Time was ticking in my mind like the countdown on a bomb.

Something had changed, something significant. The moment that cleric had murdered the guard I thought of as Scarface, everything had shifted.

My clothes were warmer.

There had been no more beatings. Before that even, if I thought about it, but it was as if I'd gone from a cruel gulag to the Four Seasons, by comparison.

I had shoes and thick socks to keep my feet warm and an extra blanket on my bed.

I wasn't hungry, either. I'd given in and eaten everything they brought me, which had been not only delicious, but nutritious as well. Fattening me up for the slaughter, perhaps? No. If they wanted to kill me with poison, it would have happened long ago. Besides, they didn't need to resort to such devious means to commit murder. If they wanted me dead, they could slit my throat and dump my body in the Western Sea. It was only a few hours away by EV, and the creatures that lurked beneath the waves on Alera were much more aggressive than the peaceful sharks on Earth. They were true predators. Piranha-like monsters the size of small boats, some of them with teeth longer than my arms.

Dead or alive, I'd be fish food in a matter of minutes. Seconds, even.

I'd been moved three times in the last two days, so when the door opened and I saw the two young guards holding handcuffs, I wasn't surprised. Their words, however, shocked me.

"Greetings, My Queen. We have been sent to escort you to your new home." One spoke. Both bowed.

What the hell was going on here?

They knew I was the queen. Greeted me formally. As Destiny would say, WTF?

“What are you talking about? Where are you taking me? To the palace?”

The second guard straightened and stood tall, shifted his shoulders back and puffed out his chest, as if he were *proud* to be holding his queen captive. As if locking me up against my will was a fucking *honor*. “Our king has returned, My Queen. He has instructed us to escort you to your new home where he will see to your safety and well-being.”

The King? Again, WTF? What the hell were they talking about? “The king is dead.”

The first guard, young and beautiful, and clearly so, so naive, smiled. “No, My Queen. He lives. He has returned, at long last, to take his place by your side.”

“At long last?”

“Twenty-seven years is a long time to wait, My Queen. We had nearly given up hope.” His dark blue eyes were bright with excitement, as if he were about to open a gift on Christmas morning. The look was genuine. Which meant this young idiot believed what he was saying. He hadn’t even been alive all those years ago.

“The king has been gone for twenty-seven years?”

The second guard spoke. “Yes, My Queen. He disappeared when you did, and returned soon after your daughters appeared.”

“He disappeared because he’s dead,” I countered. Dead was dead. I’d watched as my mate, King Mykel, was

stabbed, killed in front of me. It was a memory I could never forget.

“He’s alive and well and eager to see you, My Queen.”

But... could he be alive? Could he have somehow survived? Surely, others would have had to know; he’d have needed a ReGen pod. Help to get there. Doctors.

And this guard used the word *eager*. No one was eager and waited twenty-seven years. Yeah, I just bet he was. If it *was* Mykel then why wait so long? Why now? It seemed the game had changed even more than I had realized. Or maybe it wasn’t him. Someone else and that meant nothing had changed. I *still* didn’t know who’d kidnapped me. Tried to have the girls killed. Now they were going to try to convince me to accept someone else as my dead mate? Did they believe that after nearly thirty years, I would not recognize him? True, our mating had been short, the attack coming soon after our mating ceremony, but I would know him. He had eased my Ardor, pledged his life and love to me. And died protecting me. Or had he?

“Then where is he?” I asked the guard. “Tell him to come down here and explain this to me himself.” I’d watched a masked assassin in black drive a dagger through the king’s heart moments before I’d fled. That hadn’t been faked. Whoever these guards were following, he had to be an imposter of some kind. Surely. Mykel was long dead. My heart belonged to Adam now. Adam, who was far away on Earth, worried sick about his family.

“He can not yet reveal himself, My Queen. He has asked us to personally escort you to your new accommodations and see to your safety.”

I'll just bet he has. "Then why the handcuffs?"

The first guard dipped his head in a show of apology. "Apologies, My Queen, but he was afraid you would not believe us and attempt to escape."

The mystery king was right. But I wasn't going to *attempt* anything.

I sat on the edge of my bed and took my sweet time putting on my shoes, hoping the guards would come closer and enter the room.

My patience was rewarded. By the time I was done, they were both inside my cell and the door left wide open behind them.

I stood and held out my wrists like a docile doe. The guard nearest me stepped forward with the cuffs.

"You know," I said, "the last person to stand where you are now threatened to murder all three of my daughters."

His eyes widened in a mix of surprise and horror, as if the idea was appalling to him. Strange, considering I was his prisoner. "Our apologies for your mistreatment. It took us some time to find you. I assure you, that person will not hurt you or the princesses."

"Is that so?" The cuff drew near and I held back a smile when the second guard stepped closer, very close to the first. Two puppies, the bumbling fools. Kind, unlike the others, therefore, I would only incapacitate them, not hurt them.

Catching my escorts unaware, I grabbed the first guard's wrist and tugged him toward me. Off balance and leaning forward, I swept his front leg with my foot as if I were kicking a soccer ball to the side. With his leg lifted out

from under him, he fell like a redwood tree and the wind was knocked from him. On the way down, I grabbed the handcuffs.

The second guard stood there blinking, completely stunned that I'd actually moved, and on top of that had taken his partner to the ground. I took the opportunity to snap one end of the cuff around his wrist. When his eyes met mine, I gave him a small smile. "Sorry."

I was a little bit sorry because they were sweet, but not sorry enough to stop.

Letting the cuff drop so it dangled from his wrist, I placed both hands on top of his hand and twisted. It turned his lower arm in a direction that wasn't all that comfortable—thank you Destiny for torturing the entire family with showing all of us what she'd learned in her Jiu-Jitsu classes way back in ninth grade—until he had no choice but to drop to his knees, then to the ground as I kept up the pressure on his shoulder blade. He went to the floor or his shoulder popped out of the socket.

This happened in all of two seconds, and I wrapped the cuff around the nearest leg of the simple bed, then connected it to his partner's wrist. The first guard was finally catching his breath and they flailed and tried to get up, but they didn't make it far since their arms were trapped beneath the bedframe which was affixed to the floor.

I looked down at the two, wondering if they were the worst guards on the planet or if they had truly felt I was a sweet, kind queen they'd envisioned their whole lives. I could be sweet, but not when someone threatened my