



ASCENSION
SAGA: 7

INTERSTELLAR BRIDES® PROGRAM

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

GRACE
GOODWIN

ASCENSION SAGA, BOOK 7

INTERSTELLAR BRIDES® PROGRAM:
ASCENSION SAGA

GRACE GOODWIN



Interstellar Brides® Program: Ascension Saga Book 7
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Published by KSA Publishers
Goodwin, Grace
Interstellar Brides® Program: Ascension Saga Book 7

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

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PROLOGUE



Queen Celene, Aleran Dungeon

DAYS WENT BY. There were no windows, so I could only tell the passing of time based on the delivery of my meals. My cousin, Lord Wyse, had not returned since his visit days ago, since my captors had transferred me here—wherever here was. He'd said I was no longer his problem, and I now believed it. Yes, he wanted royal power, a privilege that didn't belong to him. He'd been bent on that for decades. But I had no idea his bitterness had festered and grown into such focused evil.

He might have been the one who ordered men to Earth to kidnap me, drag me out of bed after nearly three decades, but he must not have been the only one involved in hunting me down. He couldn't be. If he were, I'd either be dead, or he'd still be using me for his own purposes.

Instead, he'd just... walked away.

Then who wanted me here, and why? Had they known about my daughters when they took me?

No. They must not have known. Otherwise, they would have killed my three girls: Trinity, Faith and Destiny. Or kidnapped them as well. Locked them up, as they'd done to me.

Where was I, exactly? I could see enough to know that I was in a prisoner block somewhere. The guards all wore clerics' uniforms. But there were only a handful, and they rotated four times a day. There was never anyone else. No foot traffic. I never heard them talk to one another or question who they were guarding.

I wasn't supposed to see any of them, the black hood they'd placed over my head had made that very clear. They'd shoved it over my head, blinding me, and then transported me, marched me, moved me so many times I'd lost count. By the time they'd shoved me into this cell and slammed the door, I had no idea if I was still on Alera or on the other side of the galaxy.

The lack of buzzing and engine noise under my feet assured me that I was, in fact, on solid ground and not in a spaceship. But that was all I knew. Based on the cleric guard uniforms I could see—thanks to the gift I'd been blessed with by the citadel all those years ago—I assumed I was still on my home planet.

And for some unknown reason, I was alive. They didn't want me dead or they'd have killed me on Earth. Save everyone so much time and trouble. If they wanted me broken and destroyed, they would have kept the torture going. Instead, I was fully healed. Clothed, fed, kept in

reasonably restful accommodations. I had a real bed. Fresh water. Food. Comfortable clothing and warm shoes. It wasn't the Ritz, but I wasn't suffering any longer either.

Still, with every quiet slide of my prison door, I feared what might come next. Like now, when the Aleran I called Scarface entered. For the first time, he wasn't alone. A cleric followed behind, his cape swirling around his knees. He was no one special. A low-ranking member of the guard. The insignia on his chest, which had not changed since I'd been gone, made that clear. But he came inside and remained by the door, which closed behind the two of them, locking all of us into the small space together.

Scarface loomed in my tiny cell, the damaged skin on his cheek and along his jaw stark in the glaring light. I refused to rise from the bed, to give him any bit of respect. He'd earned none and he knew it. I lifted my chin, my hands folded in my lap.

Waited.

"I am sure you would like to hear an update regarding your family," he said, his raspy voice lacking all feeling. Just like his soul. Black. Empty.

I did. I wanted to see Trinity on the throne, ruling. A natural leader, she would be an amazing queen. It had been a dream for years, but was something now I feared I'd never see. Normally, she could only rule Alera if I were already dead or had officially stepped down. But my capture and disappearance was a loophole to that ruling I'd never imagined.

And Faith. The poisoning inside the Jax house. There was a story there and I wanted to hear it. Desperately.

Surely it wasn't true. I'd spun possibilities in my head since Wyse had shared that bit of information. But it was all speculation on my part. I knew nothing.

And Destiny. Wyse knew of her existence, knew her name. But did he know nothing else? Had she been discovered?

I waited in silence and Scarface grinned.

"I am sorry to report that there has been a death in your family."

I felt the blood drain from my face. Saw little white spots dance across the room. My palms began to sweat and I was hot all over. Scarface was speaking but I couldn't hear him, blood rushing in my ears.

One of them had died. Oh god! Who? When? How?

Why was I safely tucked in this stupid prison cell while my babies were in danger? Why?

"He was no longer any use, and so he was eliminated. A risk. Gone."

Scarface spoke in sentences but I only heard words. I could barely process, barely think.

One of my girls was dead.

But then I realized Scarface had said *he*.

With numb lips, I said, "He?"

"Your dearest cousin, Lord Wyse, is dead."

Relief coursed through me so quickly I became nauseated. A laugh bubbled out of me. Escaped.

Scarface's dark brow winged up, but he said nothing.

I was smiling. Broadly. None of the girls were dead. Thank goddess. "He deserved whatever happened to him,"