



ASCENSION
SAGA: 8

INTERSTELLAR BRIDES® PROGRAM

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

GRACE
GOODWIN

ASCENSION SAGA, BOOK 8

INTERSTELLAR BRIDES® PROGRAM:
ASCENSION SAGA

GRACE GOODWIN



Interstellar Brides® Program: Ascension Saga Book 8
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Published by KSA Publishers
Goodwin, Grace
Interstellar Brides® Program: Ascension Saga Book 8

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

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PROLOGUE



*Queen Celene, Planet Alera, Optimus Unit Prison,
Cell Level C*

I HEARD them before the door to my cell swung open. Heavy boots. Two males and one female. All three wore clerics' uniforms, the emblem on their chests that of the clerical order itself, rather than from one of the noble families.

Orphans then. Which explained why they would be so fervently loyal to this mysterious master I'd heard so much about over the last few days. The master who was responsible for my first husband's death, for the attempt on my life, for the hunters who had searched for me for twenty-seven long years and stolen me from my home on Earth to bring me... here.

On one hand, I was glad they were finally talking about him. On the other? I knew that any information I gained now was most likely because they would kill me soon.

Whatever they had wanted from my daughters, they had been sorely disappointed. As far as I knew, they still lived. But that meant they'd switched their focus back to me.

"Good morning, Celene. Stay warm enough last night?" The eldest cleric spoke for all three of them. She always did. I'd been in this cell for several days now, and other than the male who'd killed the man I thought of as Scarface right in front of me, hers was the only voice I'd heard.

"You know I didn't." She'd made sure of it, taking my blankets and leaving me to shiver and sicken each of the last three nights. It had been cold in Mytikas, our capital city. Cold in the mountains surrounding us. Even in the depths of the cell block, inside the building, it was cold. I hated the cold.

"Yes, well, you have not earned the privilege of comfort." She was close to my age, nearing fifty if she was a day. Her long brown hair was streaked with gray and pulled up into a rather severe bun on top of her head, the tight pull causing her cheeks to thin and lines to fan out from the corners of her eyes to her temples. She was fit, her muscles outlined by the cleric uniform's tight black pants and fitted tunic. I had never seen her before and did not recall her from my youth. But she'd been close to my age when the attack happened at the palace, when my beloved had been taken from me and I'd been forced to flee to Earth with my unborn child.

"I am the queen of Alera. This building belongs to me. As does the blood running in your veins and the clothing on your backs. Claiming otherwise does not make it so," I stated.

Her dark blue eyes narrowed and the young male behind her stepped forward as if to strike me with his fist, but she placed a hand on his shoulder and shook her head. "Our master arrives in a few days. I thought you would want to know. You are running out of time."

When I'd first been kidnapped, I'd been beaten and tortured for answers. They'd given up on that. Then I'd been held in warmth and comfort. Now, the comfort was lacking. It seemed I was at the whims of my latest personal warden. Clearly, *she* didn't like me and wanted me as miserable as possible. All of them had been pawns to this *master*. They were all dead. This female, she too, was a pawn. I had to wonder if she would be dead within a few days as well. She had a purpose... now.

Finally. *Finally*, I would know who was behind everything. Who'd masterminded so much evil. Why I was still being held. What he truly wanted.

"Time for what?" This female elder, this *pawn*, was batshit crazy. The old Earth term jumped to mind, and I applied it happily. The fervor in her gaze was alarming. There was no logic there, no analysis or contemplation. Pure devotion. Obedience. She was like a trained dog. To *him*. My impatience to know the truth made me antsy.

"When he arrives, he will use you as bait. You will be the one to help him kill your daughters."

I frowned. I hadn't been kidnapped so my daughters could die. No, this *master* had gotten more than he bargained for. A queen with three daughters.

"That's not possible," I told her. "I know what he wants. He wants the royal jewels so he can take the throne." I

stood, despite the fact that my knees were shaky. If nothing else, I needed to keep moving to stay warm. I hadn't slept more than a few minutes in days. It was too damn cold. "But it won't matter. The truth will come out. The people will reject him. Jewels or not."

"You are a fool." Her cackling laughter made the hair on the back of my neck raise in alarm. "He doesn't need the jewels. He never needed the jewels. What would he need with such worthless relics?"

I thought of the way Wyse had wanted them so desperately. So it hadn't been for their master, but for himself.

"He needs me alive," I countered.

Her laughter died off to a smirk that I wanted to punch right off her face. But the knowing grins on the faces of her two young attendants alarmed me more. They were not of her caliber, too young and stupid to feign such contempt. "For now. But not for long. And once your daughters are dead, everything will be exactly as he requires."

"Requires for what?"

"To finally kill you and assume the throne. Try to stay alive until then. We wouldn't want you to die prematurely, now would we?" She nodded at the guard next to her and he tossed a blanket at my feet. "Tonight you'll be warm, but you won't eat."

Fine. Fucking fine. I refused to answer her, protest, or rise to the bait. So, this *master* thought he was going to use me to lure my daughters into the open. Away from their protectors, into a trap. To murder them?