



ASCENSION SAGA: 2

INTERSTELLAR BRIDES® PROGRAM

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

GRACE GOODWIN

ASCENSION SAGA, BOOK 2

INTERSTELLAR BRIDES® PROGRAM:
ASCENSION SAGA

GRACE GOODWIN



Interstellar Brides® Program: Ascension Saga Book 2
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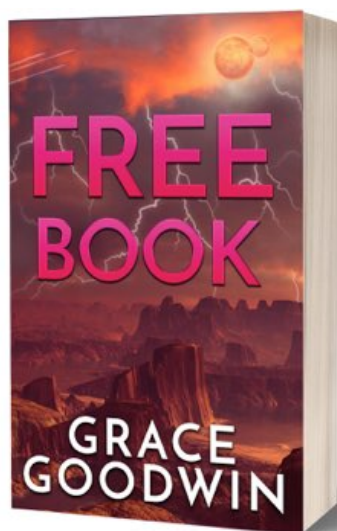
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PROLOGUE



Queen Celene of Alera, Prison Cell, Location Unknown

I KNEW FROM THE ANGRY, quick slap of my captor's boots on the smooth, metallic floor that something had happened. Something that would make his customary ranting and raving seem pale in comparison.

"Open the door." The bark was louder than usual through the thick metal.

His order was obeyed instantly, but even the speed of the two guards he had chained outside the door wasn't enough, and I watched as he struck them with an electrically charged flogger repeatedly for being too slow.

The two aliens—whose race I could not define—flinched, but didn't make a sound. Like me, both were prisoners. Perhaps more so, for I was not a slave destined to live a life of cruelty and despair.

And this bastard knew it. Thrived on it.

I wasn't a slave. I was a queen. Even in my red and black lumberjack plaid pajamas I'd been wearing when they'd taken me. I sat on the edge of the small cot I'd been provided, my ankles crossed, my hands settled demurely in my lap, my chin up and my eyes shooting as much disdain and disgust as I could manage while cold, hungry, bleeding. I would not give in to this alien's glee at weakening me.

"What do you know of the citadel?" he asked.

My silence was all the answer he would receive, but hope flared in my heart. I'd been taken days ago. Perhaps a week. With no sunrise or sunset to mark the time on this spaceship, I wasn't really sure how much time had passed. I could feel the subtle hum of the engines, note the smooth movement of the ship through some quadrant of space. We were not on Alera, that was for sure, but I had no idea if we were within the planet's orbit or half a galaxy away.

But in the time since they'd stormed the house and yanked me from my bed, they'd never asked me about the citadel itself, only about the royal gemstones. The mark of royalty I'd hidden all those years ago. Inwardly, I was pleased with my forethought to secure their safety, deciding not to take them to Earth with me twenty-seven years ago. If I had taken them, both the gems and I would be in the hands of evil now.

Better me than the power and tradition the royal gemstones represented. The royal bloodline would continue, even if I were to die in this cold, wretched cell. Alera would survive. The ancient bloodline—and their gifts—would survive me. The same could not be said if the gems and their powers fell into the wrong hands.

No usurper would stand a chance of claiming the throne without them. The people simply would not accept their rule, not while I lived. Not while the light of the spire glowed over my home city of Mytikas.

And while my captor wasn't happy about it—he wasn't happy about *anything*—he knew this. Or his master did. And that was why I was still alive.

The only reason.

The gray-skinned giant walked closer but I refused to look away. To let him see anything but my confidence in the line of succession. In my daughters.

"Talk, female," he snarled, spittle flying from his lips. "Tell me what you know, or I will bleed you."

I gave a slight shrug to let him know I'd survived that action once. I could do it again. "We both know your master won't let you kill me."

"There is pain, Celene," he vowed.

Inside, I shook with fear. But outside, I remained calm. This alien monster with his gray skin, black eyes and huge, scaled hands had already beaten me. Starved me. Threatened me. Screamed. Raged. But no more.

He might not know it, but he was a fool. A pawn. I had never seen another of his species, had no idea what dark planet he came from. He was nothing to me.

I remained silent and he dropped to his knees before me, so that our gazes aligned. Black meeting crystal blue. I believed he meant for me to fear him even more, but he was a suppliant now bowing, before me. A worm.

"The citadel. Three more spires light the sky. What do you know of this?"

Unable to contain my joy at this confirmation, I defused the smile with a soft chuckle meant to enrage him. It worked, for the hideous gills in his neck flared.

"I suppose, if the legends are true, there must be three more living royal descendants on Alera." All of this he already knew. "One of them is probably parading around in the royal gemstones and being crowned the new queen as we speak."

If this were true, I would not be held here. I'd be dead.

"Your cousins, the only other royal family members, never had a spire light for them. Not one. And they tried many times."

"Then the Goddess deemed them unworthy," I clarified. Again, the history of the spires was something he knew. "Perhaps She changed Her mind?"

Not possible, but this male didn't believe in the strength of a female. He didn't understand the divine wisdom—and power—of the Goddess. The idiot.

"The spires would not light for them after all these years," he countered. "Not while you live."

My smile turned malicious and I shrugged once again, as if this conversation, as if *he*, were boring. "It's been a long time. A very long time. Your master waited too long to take over the throne. With the additional spires lit, he's too late."

I hoped he would slip, tell me his master's name, give me some way to track and eliminate my enemies, the threat to my daughters. But I was becoming accustomed to disappointment.

“Bitch queen.” He stood and I braced for impact. Even knowing the blow was coming wasn’t enough. That monstrous hand struck the side of my head and everything went black.