

# SLEEPING PRINCE

A model from Sleeping Beauty Inc. will do anything.



Stephanie Van Orman

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**Sleeping Prince**

**The sequel to *Rose Red***

**By Stephanie Van Orman**

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## Chapter One

“How’s she doing?” Tanya asked over the speaker.

“The pickup went fine if that’s what you’re wondering,” Gage replied, his voice husky in the lunar light.

He was sitting in the cockpit of his Cannonball III solarship. Blinking lights and screens registered colorblind readings all around him. His seat was comfortable. The artificial gravity was a few ticks lighter than it had been on Earth. It was meant to mimic the gravity common to the four large moons in the Jovian system. He was orbiting Callisto while he waited for the instructions Tanya was going to relay from head office.

Gage had said that the pickup had gone fine and it had gone fine. Tickety boo, but there was something wrong that he couldn’t put his finger on.

The model he had retrieved was Iona Stirling. She was the third most expensive model Sleeping Beauty Inc. had on offer on Callisto. Ninth most expensive for the Jovian region. In truth, she was the most expensive model that Gage escorted on a regular basis.

It wasn’t because she was the most expensive that she was Gage’s favorite. At least, he didn’t think it was. He had seven models regularly assigned to him and then any oddball assignments that came his way. Those seven were very expensive and they often had assignments between moons. Since it took months to transport them, it was his job to oversee their transport.

His duties included picking them up from their previous job, bringing them aboard the Cannonball III, and resetting them. They weren’t robots. That wasn’t what a reset meant. It was his job to look them over for any damage, ensure that they were properly washed, fed, and put them to sleep on his vessel. Five Jovian moons had divisions of Sleeping Beauty Inc. on their surfaces: Ganymede, Callisto, Europa, Io, and Amalthea. Sometimes the models were returned to one of the headquarters. However, some models had requested travel in their details, so they were never reassigned to the same moon twice.

Iona was one of those models. She was his favorite because she never fussed. She didn’t come aboard the ship crying about what her last owner had asked her to do. If she had a medical problem, she had already had it seen to it while she was still under contract because she was just too valuable to herself not to speak up about what she needed. However, even with that attention to detail, she usually had a cold when she returned.

Looking over her body was one of Gage’s favorite things to do. Sometimes, he thought of ending his contract with Sleeping Beauty Inc. and finding some other way to kill time. However, hauling space garbage and rescuing starships were really the only things he was qualified to do in space and if he switched jobs, he wouldn’t have the joy of giving Iona her quarter physical.

A quarter physical was nowhere near as thrilling as he’d hoped it would be when he went in for training. During the routine check, he looked in her ears and tested her hearing, measured her eyesight, looked at her teeth, took a swab of the inside of her cheek, checked for rashes and other skin problems, tested her for allergies, and gave her a device that checked her internal health without giving him a free peep show. Sleeping Beauty Inc. was very serious about that. If you wanted to see up a model’s skirt, you were going to pay for it.

Liking Iona especially was a little secret of his. She was entirely too famous and valuable for a self-respecting handler to admit to liking. She wasn't like most of the models he escorted in that she was always purchased for commercial use.

The other models were rented out to individual men who needed help with their lives. A model from Sleeping Beauty Inc. would help her client organize his life, give him style, flair, improve his situation, and sleep with him if that was how he needed his life improved. For a cost, of course. If all he wanted was sex, there were better places to get that. The more awkward the man was, the better his money was spent on a model from Sleeping Beauty Inc. Most of the clients were rich enough that some women would put up with him for his money, but there was something really special about that specific dollar sign amount that many clients found appealing. The model isn't trying to screw him out of his money. She's very upfront about what the deal is. He gives a specified amount of money, she enters his life, and finds ways to improve it by working with him. When the time is up, he can renew his contract, get a different model, or try his luck again in the real world with women who were 'free'.

Iona wasn't one of those girls. She was a commercial model, which meant that she was hired by a company. For the last year, Iona had worked in a showroom for a helocarrier company called Excalibur Helocarriers. The people buying those transports were not lightweights who would buy one and leave. They were company presidents who were going to buy a fleet of carriers.

Gage knew exactly what was asked of her. He had read the contract when it was transmitted to him. As the captain of his vessel and Iona's handler, he read it with her, with a visual transmission of a lawyer back at head office. It was Iona's job to lead customers through the showroom and give them all the information required to make the sale of a helocarrier. The reason she was hired instead of a normal girl was that the customers kept grabbing the sales girls. There were lawsuits. It was crazy, so the deal with Iona was that she was hired to tolerate those incredibly inappropriate touches. If she got grabbed, she was to laugh it off, but tell the man very firmly that not only was she a temporary asset of the helocarrier company, but she was also a model of Sleeping Beauty Inc. Therefore, if he was interested in bedding her, he was welcome to put in an offer.

That was how she had become the third most expensive model on Callisto. She made contact with a lot of really powerful men. The individual men bidding on her drove up her cost. The companies had to outbid the individual purchasers. Except Iona had graduated from being rented by individual men and never entertained those offers. Sleeping Beauty Inc. ran confidential auctions where the exact offers were kept secret, therefore it was completely possible for a man to outbid a company in numbers, but would be told that he didn't win the auction because the company had added some benefits that the individual man had not offered.

The benefit was always that Iona didn't have to sleep with a single person if she was purchased by a company. True, she had to tolerate the somewhat revealing uniforms they gave her, the pinches and the pats, but she did not have to go to bed with anyone. That was the benefit an individual buyer could never offer.

It was also worth it to the company not to piss her off. Because she worked in the showroom, it was in her power to cause a serious dent in their business if she decided to turn on them. She knew all their best customers. Sometimes it was even her job to wine and dine them, take them out for entertainment, and show them a good time while they considered how large and long

their helocarrier contract should be. She was close friends with some of them as Iona had a personality that was both warm and cool. She could cause more damage to their company than she had done good if she had a complaint with enough gunpowder behind it. Since she had them by the balls, they treated her like a princess.

And so did Gage.

That morning when he picked her up, she looked too ravishing for words as she dropped the Sleeping Beauty Inc. bracelet in his hand. It was his job to remove it when her contract was complete. She smiled at him and he smiled back at her, knowing that even though he liked her in his own little way, she was not for him. Her grand beauty had nothing to do with him. Her pinkish hair was swept to the side in a cascade of curls that covered her shoulder. Her white dress was made with thick, expensive fabric, yet had intentional windows to show tiny views of her creamy skin. Her heels were too high, but her balance was as steady as if she was barefoot. Her eyes and lips were where the true beauty was. Her eyes were honey brown and her lips were painted coral pink. No man could keep all that warmth to himself.

Gage took her inside the Cannonball III, which was a step down from the transports she had been selling, but she said she liked getting picked up in the dark brown starship that had seen a dozen too many reentries. She said it made her feel like she was being picked up by her badass boyfriend.

Gage had smiled at that and stroked the stubble on his chin. He didn't dare hope that he looked like her badass boyfriend.

Inside, he locked the doors up tight and took her to the medical room, where he left her alone for a few minutes to undress and wash. She'd call for him when she was ready for him to begin her physical.

He would wear a lab coat and a stethoscope to help him feel like a professional as he went through the health checklist with her. He was always especially proud of how collected he looked and acted when they were alone and she was wearing nothing but a paper dress.

When she called for him, he entered the room with a smile. In the tray next to the medical table was enough jewelry to fill a jewelry box. He eyed it. "Good haul?" he asked, his disposition utterly friendly.

"Yeah," she said dryly like she didn't care. "Please look at my throat. I think I'm coming down with something."

It was completely normal for Iona to get sick as soon as she finished a job. All the stress was gone and her body just stopped fighting whatever viruses it had been fighting before. It was almost a usual routine for Iona to spend a week awake on the Cannonball III recovering from an illness before Gage put her to sleep.

"I'll have a look," he said, intentionally under-eager.

She opened her coral lips and let him look at her throat. He was having the best time, but it was imperative that he didn't show it.

"Yeah, it looks swollen. Enough to give you a tickle in your throat."

"Have you got anything you can give me? I'm having trouble swallowing."

He nodded. "Yeah, I've got a few things, but let's finish here first."

The physical went smoothly and it ended too soon as far as Gage was concerned. He gave her the pills for her throat and excused himself. Alone, he took off his lab coat and returned to

the cockpit. Since she was fine, it was time to get back into orbit, so as soon as she was dressed, she'd come to the cockpit to join him where she would strap down for liftoff.

That had been uneventful as well. Iona didn't scream or cry when they went back into space like some of the other girls did. If he had to guess, they screamed because they wanted him to comfort them, but he was always bad at that. He didn't want to comfort them. He wanted them to grow up. With them, he always felt like their angry older brother who could not be seduced by any application of puppy-dog eyes or pouty lips.

Iona asked for nothing. She was quiet, resigned, and completely professional. That day, even with her sore throat, she said nothing. Once they were in orbit, she got herself a water bottle, took her pills, and retired to her room.

Gage snapped back to the present, Tanya from head office on Ganymede was saying something. "I've just sent you a contract to review. Have a look at it and get back to me." She signed off.

Gage licked his lips and loaded it onto his main screen. He'd have to go over it again later with Iona, but he didn't want to bother her now. She needed a rest. She was true to form and feeling sick after pickup.

Gage looked at the contract with squinted eyes. What was he looking at? It was entirely more sexual than the contracts Iona usually entertained. Why, in the heck, was head office sending this to her? It wasn't even for that much money and it was for only three months? Iona wouldn't sign a contract like that!

He was about to get all snarky and call Tanya back when he realized that he had been reading the contract wrong. It wasn't a contract for Iona. It was a contract for him... and the buyer was Iona.

He glanced at the door, toward where she was sleeping. What was going on?



## Chapter Two

Sleeping Beauty Inc. was completely within its rights to send Gage a contract of this nature. He was under a contract with them himself. Like Iona and the other models he transported, he spent quite a lot of time asleep in a cryochamber aboard his solarship. His sleep was a little different than the others as he was not quite dead asleep the way they were, but it put a hold on 95% of his aging while he was inside and gave him the flexibility he needed to continue working in space without wasting his life between jobs.

Like Iona, he had a corporate contract where he was merely hired to do a job. For the time being, he had a contract with Sleeping Beauty Inc. until he turned 30. When he was awake long enough that his body was 30 years old, they would renegotiate his contract. However, there was nothing that stated he couldn't accept another contract at will if the right one came along. He was twenty-eight.

Looking at the contract in more detail, he saw that Iona was trying to rent him and the Cannonball III for ninety days of sexual fulfillment.

Nothing sounded less natural to Gage than that proposition. His relationship with Iona made the request sound impossible. There had to be something about the contract that he wasn't understanding. Possibly, she wasn't asking him to be her partner on her ninety-day vacation. He was going to call it a vacation. Maybe she had some other partner in mind and he was just supposed to ferry them around while they experimented in her room? But as he read over the terms, it was very clear that that was not what the contract was describing.

She was requesting sex with him. There were boxes she had checked that outlined what he had permission to do to her. He knew the form. She didn't have to write out the sexual acts herself. She only had to check the ones she was interested in. Gage had seen many of those forms before in the contracts of the other models he ferried. Iona had checked a lot of boxes.

He slapped himself across the face. There had to be something about this that he didn't understand. He started at the top of the contract and read every word like a primary student who was reading in front of the class. Reading it that way helped it make a lot more sense. Now it sounded like what she wanted was merely a guaranteed break from work and she was using the pretext of hiring him as a way to safely get one according to Sleeping Beauty Inc.'s work standards. But if that were true, why had she checked so many boxes?

He huffed and left the cockpit. He didn't want to have a conversation about the contract with her when she was in her bedroom, but he was also no longer in the mood to wait for her to wake up.

He tapped on her door lightly.

"Come in," she called.

At the very least, he was the only other person aboard the ship, so she knew who was knocking.

He came in.

Iona was in her sprawling bed, resting between lines of pink silk sheets. She rubbed the side of her neck and sipped on her water. Her honey-colored eyes rested on him.

"I got your contract," he admitted, hands on hips.

She raised her eyebrows in mock indifference. "What did you think of it?"

"It left me a little confused."

“Did it?” she said, averting her gaze. “Why?”

He pinched the bridge of his nose. “We’ve always been friends. You get sick every time you leave a job, so you’ve been awake with me more than the other models I transport. We chatted and shared food. I’ve always kissed you when there’s been no one to do so when you wake up from cryostasis and you’ve always acted like that was fine by you, but I’ve never once gotten the impression that you wanted me to rip your panties off with my teeth.”

Iona snorted.

“Is it funny?” he asked.

She was a professional and got control of her features immediately.

“I’ve also never got the impression that you wanted me to haul you off to the bedroom by your hair,” he said as he flicked the screen that now displayed a copy of the contract. “Is there something going on that I don’t understand?”

She sighed and the smile on her lips made his heart skip a beat. “You know everything, Gage. You’ve always known everything. Yes, that contract is not what it seems. I’m angry and I think you can help me be a lot less angry.”

“Yes, I did notice that you checked a lot of angry sex boxes, but—”

She interrupted him by waving her hands. “It’s nothing like what it looks like. Let me explain. I’m angry because I’m going to fall in the ranking during this round of bidding. I didn’t get as much attention as I normally do at the showroom this last year. Everyone there knows me and the novelty is gone. I played it safe and I took a job that would make me very comfortable. I hoped I could be comfortable *and* rise in the rankings. It didn’t work. I want more money.”

Gage stared at her. She had a lot of money. She wasn’t as rich as God, but she was getting there faster than any of the other girls he transported.

“I need to do some campaigning. I want you to take me back to Callisto and help me retrieve the spotlight.”

“Wait. Explain these boxes.”

“They’re not really—”

“Explain them!” he said firmly.

After a significant hesitation, she said, “I need it to be known on paper that I’m not a prude. My reputation has sunk and if I’m not willing to do anything in bed, I won’t be able to pick up a reasonable individual buyer.”

“An individual buyer?” Gage asked, knowing exactly what that meant. It had always been true that she could make more money from an individual rather than a company. “Oh. I see.”

“Are you disappointed?” she asked quietly.

“Disappointed?” he replied, echoing her tone. He knew there were quite a few things included in the contract that he was not willing to do to Iona or any other person. Not only that, but he didn’t want anyone doing some of those things to Iona. Screw consent. No one deserved that treatment. There were very real reasons why he lived on a solarship with no company in a very convincing imitation of a celibate monk. He couldn’t quite interpret everything he was thinking and feeling. “No, I’m not disappointed. We’re friends. I wanted an explanation and you’ve given one, but I don’t understand why it has to be me or why we spent the fuel to come into orbit if you just want to go back down again. You could have gone to Sleeping Beauty Inc. headquarters on the surface to get dolled up for your campaigning. They help with that sort of thing all the time. It’s in their best interests for you to get the highest price possible. They get a cut of the money.”

"I don't want their help on Callisto," she said. "That was another reason for the contract with you and all those boxes. I had to make it seem like if I didn't have at least a vacation's worth of sex and relaxation, I'd quit, which I'm seriously thinking about doing. That's why I need to find an individual, not necessarily a buyer. If possible, I want to get married and quit this. You know Sleeping Beauty Inc. will not like that. They don't get pay cuts from consensual marriages, only the price of slaves."

"You have a ton of money. Why do you have to get married?"

"It's not just about money," she said, calm and still. "I want more."

Gage stroked his chin. He thought a lot of things about what she was saying, but if she was planning to get married, then the things he was afraid of for her were probably less likely than he originally imagined. Marriage, in his mind, was still an honorable estate and he believed in marriage even if he wasn't married himself. But then he also guessed it had more to do with who she married. "Well, do you have someone in mind? Or are we just throwing a net out?"

"I have three men I'm interested in chasing. One of them is on Callisto, but the other two are not. They're on Europa and Io."

Gage shuttered. He did not like going to Io. Better Io than Amalthea, but still, nothing good ever happened on Io. "If we're traveling between moons, three months isn't a lot of time. What's your game plan? Why me and the Cannonball III?"

"I have to get better first, but I planned on being sick. Our contract can't start until I'm well, but if I'm not better by next weekend, that's going to cause a problem."

"What happens next weekend?"

"We get started."

"Hmm..." he said, taking a step forward. He didn't normally spend much time awake. He would normally spend three to ten days awake out of thirty. He had a little plan of his own. Aside from his models, who he pulled through time along with him, he wanted everyone he had once been connected to, to be dead. Then he'd take his money from working for Sleeping Beauty Inc. and retire to Iapetus in the Saturn system, where no one had ever heard of him.

"I still don't quite understand why I need to be involved in this," Gage said slowly. "If you want to take a vacation, Sleeping Beauty Inc. is pretty understanding of that. You could take a break, get a spot by the ocean on Europa and chill out. Why this hot hustle to find a husband secretly? I'm not the only way to get around and a commercial carrier would be more luxurious than the Cannonball III. Give me a reason that makes sense."

She hesitated. "I need a friend. I don't want to do this by myself."

"Yeah, but you don't normally ask your friends to sign binding agreements that allow you to electrocute them if they don't drop their pants."

She shrugged her shoulders and huffed. "I didn't think those things would bother you as much as you're claiming. I would prefer to leave the contract as it is, but if you need to curate it, then mark what makes you comfortable and we'll go back and forth until we come up with something we can agree on."

As indifferent as Iona looked, sitting in the bed, as placid as a plant growing out of the mattress would have been, Gage had not always worked for Sleeping Beauty Inc. the way he was now. He had once been a model that had been sold. The contract between a buyer and a model existed to draw the line between what was real and what was fake. He knew it from

experience, without a strict contract, someone could act like anything. What was written in the contract they signed was an undeniable statement of what they wanted.

Iona was trying to make him forget that by hiding her true feelings behind a layer of heavy indifference.

He thought about forcing her to admit what she wanted from him. If he was taking a stab in the dark, he thought it looked like she wanted to clear her head about whatever romantic inclinations she had toward him by having sex with him during her search for another man. In the end, she would leave him because there was no doubt in his mind that she would get whichever man she decided she wanted.

Was he okay with that series of events?

Actually, he wasn't.

"Sorry," he said sternly. "I can't sign your contract the way it is at all. I don't know what you know about me because we have never had the sort of relationship where we have sat around and swapped stories of how we have been abused. I have the job I have for a vast collection of reasons, but one of the biggest is that I'm not interested in being used in this way anymore. If you were in love with me and this was the only way we could try a relationship, I might be interested. I haven't had any close friends or lovers in many years. But this... just the idea of someone using my body for their fun times makes me feel sick. I'm not your toy."

He watched Iona exhale in a way that reminded him of someone taking their last breath, but all she did was keep her light brown eyes on him in a way that made him feel like getting away from her would be impossible if he didn't fight hard. Eyes that soft, that beautiful, had a way of fooling a man with their form. Like many others, soon he would believe that a woman couldn't be evil under all that beauty.

## Chapter Three

Iona clamped her teeth together and made her face a perfect mask of calm. She was not going to throw a fit just because Gage wasn't giving her what she wanted. The truth was, she didn't exactly know what she wanted. She knew that she wanted more money than she was getting. At her current rates, yes, she made a lot of money and there were plenty of opportunities for a woman with her skill set. The problem with her was that she was not getting enough love in her life.

She knew it.

She wanted to fix it, but when she thought of what she ought to do to get more love in her life, she could only think of three things.

She could simply leave Sleeping Beauty Inc. and find something else to do with her life that made her happy. She had enough money to do almost anything she could think of. Except, she couldn't think of anything. Once upon a time, she had dreamed of being a fairytale princess and her life working for Sleeping Beauty Inc. had given her that completely. If she wanted to keep living in fairyland, then the best thing for her was to continue living as a model who was treated like a princess.

Her second choice was to choose to be the object of love for one man. If she found a worthwhile husband among the super-rich then the problem was solved. She'd still be a princess and she'd get the love she was craving.

Her third choice was stupid. She knew it was stupid, but she couldn't get it out of her head. She had this sneaking little attraction to Gage, who always kissed her when she woke up. She had always thought of him as the best part of her job, but in the last year, she had started thinking of him more. Sometimes she got slapped on the ass by a man she did not like at all, but she had gotten into the habit of imagining that it was Gage who had smacked her and when she turned around to scold the man who had touched her, she was so sweet that her reprimand didn't work at all. If she could convince Gage to leave Sleeping Beauty Inc. with her, what kind of life would she have? Would she still be a princess?

It was all Gage's fault. Every other man she met looked at her like she was a steak and he was a hound dog who hadn't eaten in a week, but Gage wasn't like that. He looked at her like she was more than her face, more than her body, and more than her fake smile. He hadn't done that much because their time together was always so short. They were together for one week out of fifty-two, but she had to admit he had become her most trusted friend.

There was also the problem that he was ridiculously attractive. His body proportions had a 1% margin of difference from the perfect standard of beauty. That meant that if you took off his shoes and looked at his bare feet, you'd want to use them as a model for a marble statue of a man's feet. You could look at ninety-nine other men's feet and you wouldn't find better ones. That went on as your eyes traveled up his legs, knees, and thighs. True, she hadn't seen him with his pants down, but when he mentioned dropping his pants on pain of electrocution, her mouth had filled with saliva. She was very interested in whether or not he was in the top 1% there. The same went for the rest of his body. Perfect hands, wrists, arms, he was perfect all the way up. Then his face was a miracle.

It was a miracle because he wasn't handsome.

He was like a male Scarlett O'Hara because he had a perfect body and a face that nobody could forget because it wasn't like anyone else's face! It was hard lines, it was soft curves. He had light brown hair and eyes so blue that Iona thought he looked like the God of the sky.

Something terrible had happened to him. She had always suspected it, but having him say it was something else entirely. She wanted him to tell her more about himself and hear why he felt the way he did.

She could guess what had happened. She had been passed around from man to man before she started getting corporate contracts, but what he was saying felt like it was on another level.

Instead, she found herself saying. "No problem. Let's change the contract to say that if anything sexual happens between us then it isn't a big deal. I can't electrocute you if you refuse me and that change will make sure it's a casual contract. Besides, no one would ever believe you didn't want to have sex with me."

Gage looked at her sideways.

She was confusing him. He had a right to be confused. There had never been anything remotely sexual about their relationship before. All those sexual clauses had been left in because she had lost control of herself when she was creating the contract. It may have been because no one had ever asked her what she might like in bed. She had temporarily forgotten that Gage was not amenable to everything just because the sample contract provided by Sleeping Beauty Inc. had all those crazy things in it.

"Perhaps we need a second contract," he said slowly. "One that is just between us."

"Why?"

"So I can understand what you really want."

Iona frowned. She didn't have any clue what she really wanted.

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Over the next few days, Iona was still ill, so they ironed out the details. No matter what she said, Gage wasn't happy. He didn't like the contract. He didn't like what he was asked to do. She increased his pay twice, but that didn't seem to ease his mind about what was about to happen.

She was going to use him to try to catch a bigger man. She was going to take him out in public in order to achieve this. He was going to have to shave with a razor against his skin, which was something he hadn't done in years. He was going to have a tailor measure his inseam. He said all this to Iona, but she merely brushed his concerns aside and told him she would measure him instead of the tailor.

"After all," she said haughtily. "You've seen me in the paper dress on your medical table often enough that my measuring you with your pants on shouldn't be that big a deal."

"Those creepy men are always so damn happy when they see the numbers," Gage complained.

"I'll be the only one touching you. Surely, that doesn't upset you," she said, reaching forward and touching him on the thigh.

He rolled his eyes and tapped his fingers on his bicep in a show of mild irritation. This wasn't the only plan of hers that he disapproved of. He disapproved of everything.

Iona sat back. "Just out of curiosity, what would you do if you were me?"

"I'd make a plan," he said simply.

"What sort of plan?"

"I'd plan to do corporate jobs until I had enough money stockpiled that I could live off the interest and then I'd go find some little hermit hole and hunker down."

She gawked. "You would not."

"I would so. What's happening right now is that I've found a hermit hole where I'm getting paid to be here. Sometimes I wonder if I'm not living my absolute best life right now. Someday, I'll leave all this behind and have a life somewhere quiet, but I'm not sure that right here isn't the best I'll ever have it."

The idea of that made Iona squirm. Her highest ideal was to be treated like a princess with pretty clothes, pretty looks, and a calendar of fun meetings with nothing but parties on the horizon. When she worked for the helocarrier company, every day had been a bit of a party. There was always a party atmosphere.

Just now, she realized that Gage did not have anything like that. She tried to get it to make sense to her, so she asked a question. "I'm not sure I see the appeal, but I guess the food on board the Cannonball III is pretty good."

He laughed. "I don't get the same food to eat as you. Actually, none of the models get the same food as you."

"What?"

"Well, for one thing, most of the models only eat two meals aboard this ship. They're not sick, so they don't sit around sipping cold nutritious bubbles. They come on board, get reset, have a bite to eat, brush their teeth, and go straight into a sleeping chamber. That bite to eat is either a blueberry smoothie with a sandwich or a bowl of french onion soup... with a sandwich. When they wake up, they get a bowl of hot oatmeal and a banana or a bowl of cold cereal... and a banana. That's mostly what I have on board for the models, but that's not what you get."

Actually, Iona had never been offered any of those meals. "Do those models not bring in as much money as me?" she asked slowly.

"It's true that they make less than you, but many of them don't want to be aboard this ship for any more time than they have to be. They take vacations and this ship is not their home-away-from-home. They don't like me. They resent me."

"Why?"

"Because I don't comfort them. In all fairness, I don't comfort you either. You just don't seem to mind."

Iona stared at him, perplexed. "You always comforted me after my jobs."

Gage huffed a laugh. "Really? How have I done that?"

"Well, for one thing, it's always you. It's been you who has dropped me off and picked me up for the last seven years."

"How old are you?" he suddenly asked.

"Thirty-one, but I've only been awake for twenty-seven years of it. But I started doing this when I was sixteen which is the earliest they'll let anyone do this legally. I used to have a revolving door of different handlers. You have been a constant. That's comforting. Why? How old are you?"

He replied that his personal clock said he was twenty-eight, but he was much older.

"What do you eat when you're on board?" she suddenly wanted to know.

“Whatever I want. I stock the ship.”

She refrained from chuckling. If he stocked the ship then he was treating her like a princess personally. He was also doing something different with her than what he did with the other models. Iona had always wanted to know what their stays aboard his ship were like, but she'd never been impetuous enough to ask.

Gage's frown deepened. “Why don't you show me your boys?”

“Okay. Let's do that.” Iona flipped a few buttons on the remote placed next to her bed and a picture came up of the first man she was going to try for.

“This is the man I'm trying to get on Callisto. His name is Dante Hemmington.”

When the picture of Dante came up on the screen, Iona tried to see what Gage was thinking when he saw him. The pictures she'd chosen for Dante and the other men were the best she could find: the most heartstopping, the most captivating, the most jealousy-inciting. At least, Iona hoped they were.

Dante was gorgeous in the picture. Iona knew the picture did the man a dozen favors, but that was exactly what she was looking to accomplish. He had dark hair, bronze skin, and eyes the color of pewter. His bone structure was nothing to smirk at as people with as much money as him needn't look less than beautiful, but his figure was quite impressive in person. Not as impressive as Gage, as Dante was less chiseled but more imposing in his height and shoulder breadth.

Iona glanced at Gage for his reaction and received nothing. His face was blank.

“He's the son of the CEO of Solarship Inc. His father was one of my first serious clients when I was in my early twenties. I wasn't his main model though and my entire job was merely to train with him in the gym. Dante used to visit and occasionally, I thought I saw his mouth water when he looked me up and down. He's put in bids for me on more than one occasion, sometimes the highest bid, but I always chose the corporate client instead. If I can get his mouth watering again, I might get him to open his wallet even more.”

Another sideways glance at Gage gave her nothing.

She went on.

“This is Sherman Wilson,” she said, flicking to the next picture. “He's on Europa.”

In the picture on the screen he was handsome in a Texas farm boy kind of way with sun-bleached hair and a sunkissed tan, but Iona knew that his looks were both unnatural and his only good quality. He wasn't a bad person for a trillionaire and he habitually purchased Sleeping Beauty Inc. models to try to help him with his inflexible personality. He was known for shutting down, crying, and finding it impossible to deal with real life. It was the job of the model he purchased to placate him and transition him from one part of the day to the next.

The reason he was on the list was that he was the highest-paying buyer in the Jovian region. There was talk that the primary model he had had for the last three years, Jessica, was tiring of him and unlikely to sign another contract with him. Iona didn't have any desire to marry him herself, but if she impressed him enough that he offered her a contract, she would go up in the rankings dramatically. In the case of Sherman, she only wanted a temporary contract. She wasn't sure she would be able to tolerate him any more than Jessica.

“Sherman is the son of the genetic engineer who not only revived an extinct species of sea cow but also genetically altered it to survive life in the frigid oceans of Europa,” Iona explained.



"I'm sure you've heard of him. His father is still around, but most of his wealth is in the hands of Sherman, who is better with numbers than his father ever was."

"So, who will we be meeting on Io?" Gage asked tentatively.

"This is Benediction Hallows," Iona said, moving to the next picture. "He's head of the Church of Voynich."

Benediction was so tall and dark and handsome that there actually wasn't a woman in the solar system who didn't know who he was. Information on him was sketchy as he rarely talked openly about himself but only taught the Voynich Bible. Iona was not religious herself, but she did find the gospel of Voynich to be compelling when Benediction preached it.

Without question, he was the one Iona was most attracted to and actually, she wasn't sure whether she thought Gage was better looking or not. They were very different as Benediction had undergone a treatment that turned his skin onyx black and his hair forest green as was the custom for followers of Voynich. All of them got the pigment removed from their eyes as well so that they had no color, they only reflected light. It was something they all did to show their devotion to their Lord.

When Iona had been back on Callisto working all hours, she had taken a little time to herself to run a simulator to see how she would look if she had the procedure done on herself. Goodbye pink hair and honey eyes. The end result was startling. She didn't look anything like herself.

"Him?" Gage asked, bringing Iona back to reality.

She nodded. "Though, that's not actually why I'm interested in him."

"You're attracted to him?" Gage asked, obviously more interested in her answer to that question than any other question he'd asked her all day.

She tilted her head to the side. "He's very attractive. Especially the way he speaks."

"So, do you have a plan to try to snare each of these racehorses?" he said coldly as he leaned back in his chair.

Iona put a practiced smile on her face. "I do."

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