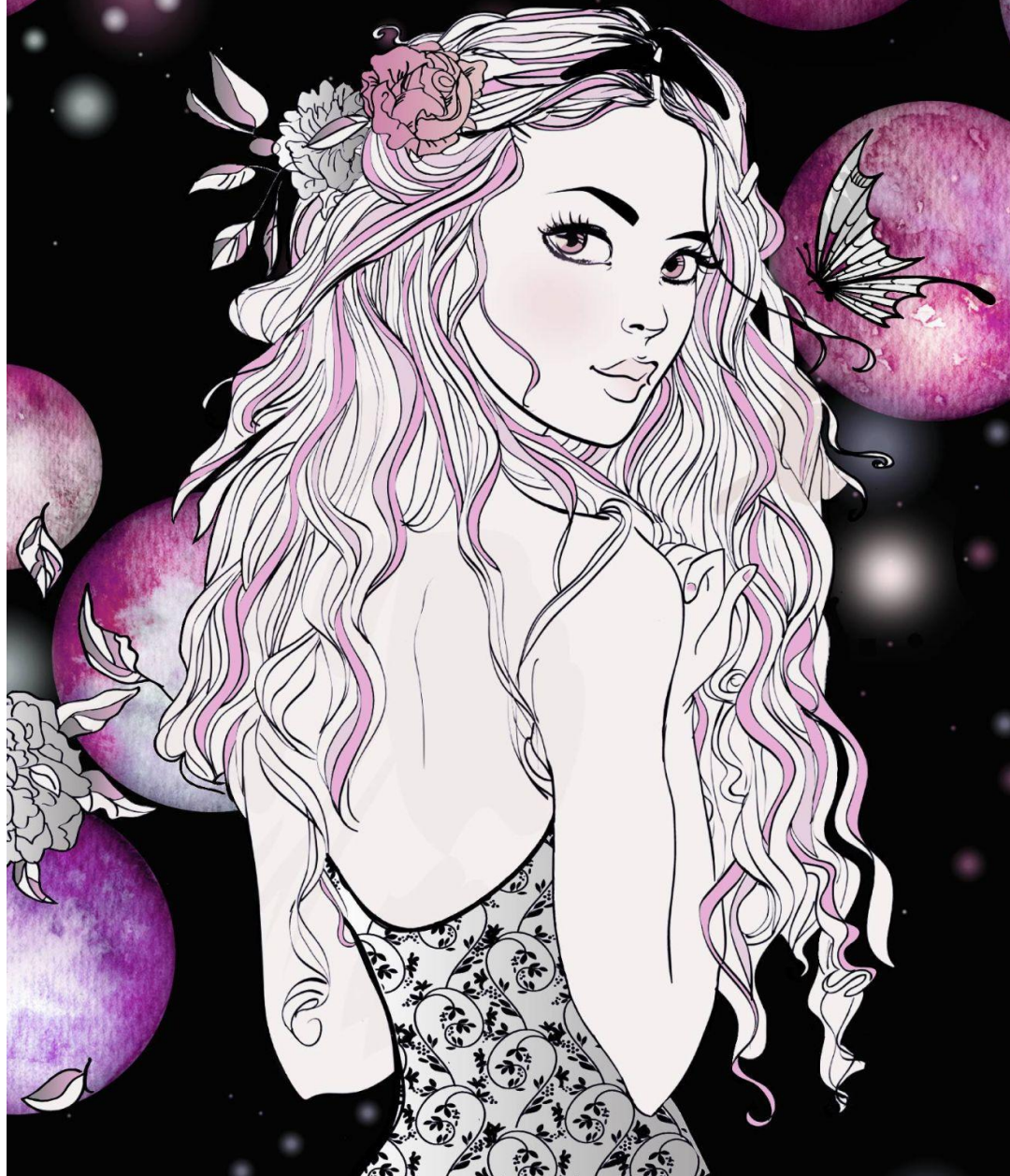


OCTAVIA GIRL

Vol II

Stephanie
Van Orman



Octavia Girl Vol. II by Stephanie Van Orman
Copyright © 2023 Stephanie Van Orman

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or used in any manner without written permission of the copyright owner except for the use of written quotations in a book review.

Any reference to historical events, real people or places are used fictitiously. Names, characters, places are products of the author's imagination.

Front cover image by Liia Chevnenko and Elena Barenbaum
Book design by Stephanie Van Orman

<https://tigrix1.wixsite.com/stephanievanorman>
stephanievanorman.blogspot.com
tigrix@gmail.com

Octavia Girl

Volume Two

By Stephanie Van Orman

Table of Contents

[Chapter One](#)

[Favel's Mansion](#)

[Chapter Two](#)

[Going to War](#)

[Chapter Three](#)

[Bones and Gold](#)

[Chapter Four](#)

[News Arrivals](#)

[Chapter Five](#)

[The Social Media Queen Gets Crowned](#)

[Chapter Six](#)

[Saying It's Sardius](#)

[Chapter Seven](#)

[Boxing the Earpiece](#)

[Chapter Eight](#)

[Her Master's Voice](#)

[Chapter Nine](#)

[Kissing Bones](#)

[Chapter Ten](#)

[Whipped Thief](#)

[Chapter Eleven](#)

[A Man Around the Palace](#)

[Chapter Twelve](#)

[Mattress Meeting](#)

[Chapter Thirteen](#)

[Two People Hiding in the Dark](#)

[Chapter Fourteen](#)

[Outskirt Love](#)

[Chapter Fifteen](#)

[Eight Legs with Fur All Over](#)

[Chapter Sixteen](#)

[Heat comes in Many Forms](#)

[Chapter Seventeen](#)

[Fall for Fallcet?](#)

[Chapter Eighteen](#)

[Double Sided Heart](#)

[Chapter Nineteen](#)

[The Rage Runs Deep](#)

[Chapter Twenty](#)

[A Shroom And A Sushfief](#)

[Chapter Twenty One](#)

[A Night that Lasts Forever](#)

[Chapter Twenty Two](#)

[Almost a Cold Shower](#)

[Chapter Twenty Three](#)

[His Voice Echoes](#)

[Chapter Twenty Four](#)

[Better than a Jelly Bean](#)

[Chapter Twenty Five](#)

[Forking Fallcet](#)

Chapter One

Favel's Mansion

Everything that happened after Sardius' earpiece was destroyed in the prison riot was a blur to Jenna. Her escape pod was inserted in a room that had air, but no opaque walls. Peering into the mansion, it was clear that there was no privacy there. There were only transparent walls and it soon became clear why. Octavians spoke through gestures, so they needed big screens to show the full intent of the speaker instead of hearing their voice. Each of the transparent walls could become a screen.

Jenna spoke into the panel inside her pod that did voice-to-text and her words were translated into Octavian and displayed on the wall for Favel to read.

She hadn't gotten to the part where she explained that Sardius was gone before Favel was rushing to do damage control. She didn't know what he did or who he spoke to. She was told to stay in the bed/pod. She lowered the glass and breathed the briniest air she'd ever breathed, but she didn't slide off the bed.

The mattress hugged her as she played with her earpiece, hoping that Sardius would miraculously come back online.

He didn't.

In the next minute, Favel was sending questions to Jenna about Sardius. Since the Octavians had stopped recording him, they didn't know what had happened. They had to get the answers from Jenna.

She explained and Favel sent her a reassuring message that he would contact the prison.

Thirty tense minutes later, he poured himself into a halfway box. It was one of the things her grandfather had taught her about. Initially, the halfway box was filled with water. Favel got inside and closed the lid. Most of the water was then pumped out and replaced with air. When enough air had been added, Favel opened a hatch into Jenna's room. He spread out his tentacles, lowering himself gently onto the floor that was nothing but a grate over a shallow drain.

"What did the prison say?" Jenna asked hopefully.

"They didn't reply. However, the riot you mentioned was a catastrophe so serious that the women's prison next to Sardius' jail could tell me a few things. What happened was that the government Sardius opposed before his imprisonment lost the election. They lost big time!" Favel stretched out his tentacles, making himself into a huge pentagon (a few of his tentacles kept him in place before he continued). "When the new government was inaugurated, it meant that Sardius was no longer a criminal. In the past when he fought alongside them, they were the rebels. Now they're the ruling government of his system. In response to the change, the guards in charge of the prison began executing all the political prisoners. They had to stop the new government from getting any additional power, and the prisoners fought back. It seems order hasn't been restored yet."

Jenna wrung her hands painfully before getting off the bed and sitting on the grate beside Favel. "So you don't know if Sardius was killed by the guards?"

“No. We don’t know, but Sardius is a first-class killer, and he wasn’t bound inside his cell, so there’s a good chance he survived. I didn’t tell you half the things he was guilty of.” Favel paused and changed the subject. “We have good news from the Dahlia palace. None of your staff was hurt. Sardius got word to Smoothie fast enough that she was able to disarm the soldiers who entered the servants’ wing. She called the overland police and they just finished apprehending all six soldiers. They’ll be held in prison until they can be retrieved by the military. There is bad news though.”

“What’s that?”

“Not all the soldiers went to the servants’ wing. Some of them went to your room and they ripped the place apart looking for your unused crowns.” Favel showed her a view of her room from the palace’s security feed by projecting the video against the glass wall.

The room was a complete mess. They’d ripped the walls apart, tore her mattress to shreds, pulled up her carpet, and left the room in utter turmoil.

“Would you like to stay here tonight or would you like to join Excelyn in the Stone Palace? It’s quite late,” he said kindly.

“I feel sick, Favel. Sick!” she almost screamed. “This is worse than those damn liplo fruits squirming around inside me. This is worse than puking them up. I can’t stand this. Sardius protected me like a bulldog: all night and all day. He protected my whole staff. He was the one who chose Smoothie and Misha and Vash. And they’re great people. I was such an idiot. I completely took it for granted that he was safe in his maximum-security prison. You would not believe the unkind things I said to him when no one was around. I didn’t even tell him how much I... needed him,” she finished feebly.

Favel made a sound.

Jenna wasn’t sure what it meant. Her head shot up. “Are you laughing?”

He blinked. “No. I’m not. I’m sure Sardius knew you needed him. That was why he wanted the job. Sardius wasn’t the kind of guy who wanted to do an easy job. I think he was torn in half about you. One side of him wanted to protect you from anything awful that could happen and the other side wanted you to have it tough, so you could get stronger.”

Jenna wiped at her face. Whether her cheeks were wet from sweat or tears, she didn’t know.

“It’s certain he cared about you no matter what words you said to each other. He made sure I submitted the paperwork to register your marriage... Now if you want my opinion, I should escort you up to the Stone Palace.”

“Why can’t I stay down here? For now, I feel like I would be safer here. If I were someone looking to undermine me by stealing the crowns, I wouldn’t have only planned the one attack. I would have planned to hit the Stone Palace next, but I wouldn’t hit it until after I had joined Excelyn. I feel like everyone will be much safer if I stay down here tonight.”

Favel lowered his head. “All right. If you think that’s better.”

Jenna placed a kiss on his mantle, just above his eye. She pulled away and smiled at him.

His eyes cut to a spot to his right.

Jenna looked there too. A cluster of octopi had eyes pressed up against the glass.

“I think perhaps you are not used to living in a house with glass walls,” he said, making a heroic attempt to sound lighthearted.

Jenna sighed. “Sardius warned me about this. He was annoyed I poured water over you. You were looking so dry. That can’t be good for you.”

“He clearly didn’t warn you seriously enough,” Favel said dryly. Almost all the good nature had left his voice. He moved back to the halfway box. “With your permission, I’ll send your staff to prepare the Lotus Palace for you to use while the Dahlia Palace is being repaired. It’s on the tab of the AAMC, and they say they’re willing to pay. Don’t let them fix it with their contractors. Choose people yourself.”

“How can I do any of that without Sardius?” she asked limply.

“We’ll talk about it in the morning. Excelyn began a selection process only a day or two ago for a personal assistant and even if she did choose someone from the men’s prison, they can’t serve her now. I’m sure the two of you can work together to get decent personal assistants for yourselves from the women’s prison. In the meantime, use the screens in your pod.”

He was leaving in such a cold way, and Jenna couldn’t allow it. She jumped up and followed him to the halfway box. He got inside and was about to close the box when she grabbed it. “Favel, I see I shouldn’t have kissed you, but I don’t know what harm I’ve done. You have to tell me.”

He dropped his eyes. “It’s not that you have done anything wrong. It’s that you have raised the expectations of my people even further. Do you know how many Adamis diplomats have honored our traditions and actually married an Octavian for their second spouse?”

“No.”

“There hasn’t been one in eighty years. They take their third spouse and their first spouse, but they don’t form a tie with an Octavian. Watching us, all those members of my household think something is going on between us.”

“Not romance?” Jenna clarified.

“No, but they think a special sort of camaraderie has sprung up between us. It makes them so hopeful about you and what you’ll be able to do for our people if you love me so much.”

“They hope we’ll get married?”

“Yes,” Favel said gravely. “They know that unlike everyone else on the Octavian Council, I have only had seven spouses. That’s why I was chosen as chair and why you have had more to do with me than any other Octavian...”

“Everyone is hoping I’ll marry you. They planned it,” Jenna finished for him.

“The Adamis are not. They like it when their diplomats show unwavering support for their race. That was how Arvantis got that insane contract with Vinia. They made his contract legal in exchange for him signing papers declaring his intention to never form a tie with an Octavian.”

Jenna rubbed her eyes. She had no idea what time it was and what Favel said weighed heavily on her mind. She glanced back at the wall. Three times as many eyes were now staring at them.

“I’ll let you go,” Jenna said before removing her hand and letting him close the door to the halfway box.

She dried off her feet and got back into the bed. She found the controls and pushed the button that raised the walls. She did it to make herself feel like she had some privacy, but there were still so many eyes staring at her. She fiddled with the controls longer and found a setting that oxygenated and purified the air she breathed while inside. Then she found a control that shut out the light by turning the glass to opaque black. Then she found the nightlight inside and a stash of emergency food that had been stored.

Jenna chuckled. It wasn't really food. It was preserved meal replacements stored in bags with straws.

Alone with her thoughts and with herself, Jenna could have screamed. Naturally, she had been planning to marry Sardius *and* Favel. She needed allies. She had also checked out all the majors the AAMC had sent her to see if there was a decent first husband among them. The idea perished rather harshly as she was running out of options. She hadn't been given very many tools for forming alliances. The only thing she had absolutely been given was the ability to marry more than one man.

The thing about Sardius that Jenna had explained quietly to Favel at the dinner where she removed her earpiece and spoke to Favel without Sardius' approval, was that Sardius had the opportunity to be something different to her than any of her other alliances. He wasn't doing anything else. Her other husbands would leave her for other responsibilities. Not Sardius. He was there for her night and day. She found his voice to be dead-sexy and he was helpful every minute of every day. When she heard his voice, she felt something leap up in her chest because whatever he was about to say was a gift, a surprise.

Not only was he a constant source of joy to her, but he was in prison and she thought no one could ever hurt him there. No one could ever take him hostage and make her do what they wanted because she couldn't bear for Sardius to be hurt.

If her marriage to him somehow became public knowledge, it would be magnificent publicity for her. No man could satisfy her but a pirate and a terrorist. For her, it had to be a man so proven in battle that she didn't look like a pushover. She looked like his equal, cunning and ruthless.

Of Jenna's greatest fears, she feared being seen as easy. She wasn't easy! She was a monster and she needed a man who was a monster by her side, even if only the shadow of him could be there. At least, everyone would know he was in her ear, telling her how to break convictions and reorganize power.

And now she wasn't going to get him.

It was a loss on so many levels. It was the loss of every minute of every day. Forgetting all the other bonuses Sardius represented, it was the loss of the click of his tongue in her ear that undid her.

She cried in the darkness.

Chapter Two

Going to War

Jenna stood in her wrecked bedroom in the Dahlia Palace with Vash.

“What do you think?” he asked, his voice grating like rocks grinding against each other.

Jenna bit the side of her thumb and answered heartlessly, “Screw the Lotus Palace.”

“You haven’t even spent one night there,” her enormous butler said timidly.

“Yeah, but I’m not getting chased out of here like my home has ghosts. If I give up this palace, it will always be remembered that I was attacked here and I ran away like a little girl. What? Am I going to give this palace to one of the new diplomats I crown? What would I say to them? ‘I’m a big diaper baby and I couldn’t live here, but I’m sure you can?’ Smiles and hugs? Screw all that! It isn’t like there isn’t another room down the hall I could sleep in while this room is being repaired.”

“The AAMC has sent a list of building contractors they use. Even if you’re willing to move back in here after the renovations, I wouldn’t have thought that you’d want to stay here *during* the renovations,” Vash said.

“Throw that list in the garbage. I’m not getting anyone they recommend. They’ll wire in backdoors so they can access my security system.”

“Who’s going to do the renovations?” he asked, his little voice hiding the fact that he was a man almost seven feet tall.

Jenna straightened her back and cracked her neck. “I’ll do it. I was super interested in DIY stuff when I was back on Earth. I have stapled carpet, laid my own tile, painted, sanded, and one time, I even fixed a foundation.”

“It’s beneath you, Madam Diplomat,” Vash argued.

Jenna threw up her hands. “I don’t know who to trust. Sardius would have told me who I could hire that I could trust. He’s gone. Unless we find something major wrong when we’re cleaning up that needs a professional, then I’m going to do this myself.” Turning to Vash, she laughed a bit. “I know you won’t help me. You’ll say things like, ‘I don’t do grout. I don’t carry bricks. I don’t smile for the tourists.’”

Vash’s expression was downcast.

Jenna turned the tables on him. “Those guys didn’t lay a finger on you last night, did they?”

He shook his head. “Sardius warned me they were on their way over and I ducked into the hidden passage he told me about. They messed up my room though.”

“We should look into tightening security. Sardius told me he was vetting guards, but as far as I know, he hadn’t found a candidate that suited him. I need a new personal assistant. Excelyn is coming over later so we can go through some candidates...” Jenna trailed off. She had been about to add, ‘from another jail.’ Luckily, she stopped herself. She couldn’t be a diplomat with a loose tongue. “Have you had a chance to clean up your room?”

“Not yet.”

“Why don’t you go do that? When you’re finished, you can come back here and get rid of anything ruined or smashed. At least that’s within your job description.”

"Where are you going to sleep tonight? None of the guest bedrooms are ready. If I don't prepare one now, it might not be ready by the time it's time to sleep."

"Don't worry about that. There's another room ready in the servants' wing. I'll sleep there. Sleeping near Smoothie will help me relax enough to sleep. I'd sleep under her bed if that wouldn't weird her out."

"But that room is not ready either."

"I poked my head in earlier. It's fine," Jenna refuted.

"It's a blanket and a pillow on a bare mattress," Vash retorted.

"Yes, and that is good enough for me. Do you know where I slept last night?"

"Underwater?" he replied cautiously.

"Yes. Underwater. With twenty Octavians staring at me while I slept."

"Was it unnerving?"

"No. It was fine. Favel's mansion isn't that deep below the surface. I didn't have to worry about a significant difference in pressure." The last thing Jenna wanted to admit was that yes, it had been very unnerving to have twenty Octavians stare at her. Twenty of anything staring at you was weird, whether it was twenty humans, twenty octopuses, or twenty goldfish.

Just then, there was an urgent beeping sound.

"What the crap is that?" Jenna wondered noisily.

"It's the communicator," Vash said, showing Jenna the display screen. "You just never saw this before because Sardius screened all your calls."

Jenna missed Sardius for the two thousandth time that morning and looked at who was calling. It was Admiral Lou Denver.

"Shall we take the call?" Vash asked.

"Yep. Put him up."

The army man's face was even pinker than the profile picture of him Sardius had shown her.

"Good morning, Admiral," she said stormily.

"Good afternoon, Your Excellency," he greeted, his manner one hundred percent professional. "You must accept my apology for what happened last night."

"I understand that you're willing to pay for the damage caused by your officers?" she asked, getting down to business.

"Naturally." A dismissive 'boys will be boys' grin across his piggy features.

Jenna gritted her teeth before snapping, "And what punishments will be enacted against them to be an example against those who try to attack a diplomat?"

"They did not actually attack you."

Jenna's eyes were steely. "Do you realize that the room we are standing in is my bedroom? Your officers entered my bedroom and caused this mayhem. You can see the damage for yourself. What would have happened to me if I had remained here? I expect all of them to be stripped of their rank and removed from the military. Anything less is completely unacceptable. Obviously, they came here to steal the crowns so they could crown whoever. And who do you think ordered them to do such a thing?"

"It could hardly have been someone in the military," the Admiral tried to deflect.

"Your soldiers are so poorly trained that they take orders from people outside the military?"

"No. I-I..." he stuttered.

Jenna continued, "Do you have any idea who was behind the assassinations of the dead diplomats? I have a deep fear that I shall be buried next unless you can show me unbridled support by dismissing all six of those officers."

"Your Excellency," he said in an attempt to pacify Jenna. "None of that is necessary. They were just being rowdy boys."

"You promote 'rowdy boys' to the rank of major?" Jenna asked acidly. "I'll be dead by next week with the AAMC protecting me."

"All they were going to do was crown each other and get our agenda back on track. No one was going to hurt you. There were no orders issued. It was something they decided themselves and you would have loved it."

"With numbers like those, my opinion as a diplomat never would have mattered again because there has to be an even split of four against four to even have a debate. With six diplomats who always vote the same way, the AAMC's interests always would have been paramount. I would not have loved it. There are a lot of Adamis outside the military who deserve a voice, Admiral."

His face looked like someone was turning a screwdriver in his mouth. "You're such a pretty thing. Too bad you have to think that way."

Jenna had a moment when she wanted Sardiis more than she'd ever wanted anything in her entire life. She puffed her chest. "Do you want to go to war with me? I'm happy to go to war with you."

"Happy?"

"Yes. Joyful."

"But you have no army," he said slowly like he had found the chink in her armor. "You don't even have an Adamis husband to watch your back. You have nothing."

Jenna frowned bitterly. "You didn't have to do anything special to get along with me, Admiral. All you had to do was let me do my job. Since that is ruined, I will be placing your interests at the back of my queue. I have other groups to pull diplomats from and until every single one of those soldiers is discharged, I will not interview another member of the AAMC."

"You're being unreasonable," he gushed, flustered.

"Am I? Have you found the vessel that gunned down my ship? I almost died being flung out into outer space. It wasn't the Adamis that helped me. It was the Octavians. I got attacked in my own home by my own military and it wasn't the AAMC that came to my rescue, but the Octavians again. There have been multiple assassinations and no one is solving them."

"They were accidents," he obstinately rebutted.

"Right," Jenna agreed, but her tone said that she did not believe him.

The Admiral lost his patience. "Listen, you miserable little girl. The Octavians have us by the throats. They control almost all space travel. The treaties must be rewritten."

"I have nothing against that!"

"Then why are you fighting us?"

"Why are you trying to force me to do things your way instead of convincing me that your way is better?"

He cleared his throat and prepared to be patient. "You just got here. What do you know about the Adamis and our needs? Go to war with me if you like, little girl, but you'll lose."

"You mean, you'll have me murdered."

He loosened his collar and ended the transmission.

Jenna leaned toward Vash. "Was that recorded?"

"Yep."

"Good," she huffed, going out to meet Excelyn.

Too angry to think straight, Jenna showed the video footage of the call to Excelyn. They sat in the courtyard and watched the split screen of Jenna and the Admiral fighting.

Excelyn looked at the screen with a broken expression. "We're both going to die."

"Do you think any Adamis' news outlet would be sympathetic toward us?" Jenna asked, wondering if they could transmit the recording of the phone call on the news somewhere.

Excelyn got a look in her eye, a special little glint. Jenna had seen it before. It was the one she got when she offered Jenna the liplo fruit. "Have you ever thought about crowning a reporter?"

Chapter Three

Bones and Gold

The order of the day was recruitment.

Excelyn came over to the Dahlia Palace every day for a week and together, she and Jenna did nothing but go over resumes and personal backgrounds. They started with personal assistants. There was still no news from Sardius' prison, but more information about that prison became available to Jenna.

It turned out that his prison was in a different dimension. That was how he was able to keep in contact with her no matter where in the universe she went. From that dimension, they could do faster than light travel from tiny tears in the universe. Her earpiece held one of those tiny tears in space and time that allowed him to communicate with her anywhere. However, the tear could not be made large enough for a person to fit through. The hole was no bigger than the head of a pin. He could send his voice and other information through, but nothing physical.

It turned out that his prison was not the only prison in that dimension that allowed their prisoners to be outsourced as personal assistants. The women's prison Favel contacted for further information about the riot also lent out their prisoners.

"Why put prisoners in a different dimension? And if it's so convenient for space travel and communication, then why doesn't everyone slip in and out of that dimension instead of traversing the stars?" Jenna asked grouchy.

"Radiation," Excelyn answered without skipping a beat. As a scientist, she already knew about the other dimension, just not that prisons had been built there. "Spending time in the Xypher Zone is a sure way to cut fifty years off your life and provide a service to everyone else in the universe. One way is by acting as a PA to a diplomat. I wish you had more information about what kind of Adamis Sardius was... is," she stuttered, tripping over her words like she wasn't a doctor with a bedside manner using a single word to indicate that she thought Sardius was dead before correcting herself.

Jenna shrugged.

Excelyn was a doctor who treated Octavians. A bedside manner for an octopus was probably something else entirely from how humans wanted to be treated.

The doctor continued, "Some races of Adamis deal with that level of radiation better. The Crying Sun in the Xypher Zone is unholy. If I were placed there, I'd be dead in two years. For a lot of prisoners sent there, it's a death sentence. The Adamis authorities make no secret of how dangerous it is to be there. I've just learned they have prisoners who are scientists who have been asked to help with studying the Crying Sun and report back on how it works in that different dimension. Other scientists are not allowed there."

"I see," Jenna reflected. "Sardius wasn't a scientist, but he still wanted to do something important with the time he had left." She felt an aching throb in her heart.

Excelyn put her hand on Jenna's shoulder for exactly three seconds, as that was the extent she was able to comfort people. "Let's get on with choosing, shall we?"

Jenna began by talking to the warden of The Xypher Zone Prison for Persons with Double X Chromosomes—the women’s prison.

The warden agreed to make an announcement at the prison that if anyone was interested in taking a position as a personal assistant to Octavian/Adamis diplomats, they should apply. Otherwise, Jenna said she hoped to get eight assistants trained regardless of whether or not they had an immediate diplomat to be assigned to.

The warden snorted over the communicator when Jenna told her that number. “You’re going to be lucky to get the two you need right now.”

“Can’t we offer some kind of incentive?” Jenna questioned.

“No. You can’t offer a reduced jail time and that is the only thing any of them want.”

“Really? Then why are you there? You’re not a prisoner.”

“I’m a Boneman.”

“There’s no need for that language,” Excelyn interjected hotly. “Jenna, don’t repeat what she just said. Calling a Calcumicas a Boneman is unbearably rude though they do have the most bone mass of all the Adamis races. Their skeletons are different from yours and mine. They’ve got more bone mass through their whole body and their bones are different from ours. The radiation doesn’t affect them as strongly. Actually, nothing affects them as strongly. They’re almost indestructible.”

The warden’s voice sounded like she enjoyed the compliment when she spoke next. “I’ll see if I can offer them an incentive for you, but it won’t be much of anything. It’ll probably get you three instead of two.”

“We appreciate that,” Jenna said.

“Shall we meet again at the same time tomorrow? You can conduct the interviews then.” The warden snorted again before signing off.

Jenna and Excelyn looked at each other. “I liked her,” Jenna said. “Good job complimenting her.”

“I didn’t do it on purpose,” Excelyn grouched. “Her race is unique. Calcumicas look like they have beautiful muscle groupings when they don’t. Their bones are shaped like those muscles, so their bones cover their muscles with taut skin over the bones. It’s like how the bones in your face have shape, but they’re covered with skin. Their whole bodies are like that. It makes their muscle power a complete mystery to the casual observer. They might be a wuss or a hulk and you wouldn’t know the difference unless you poked the underside of their arm or inside their thigh.”

“That’s interesting.”

“There’s more, but there isn’t time for a biology lesson. Why didn’t Sardius hire a bodyguard for you?”

“He was going to. He just hadn’t found the right one yet.”

“I think we should hire one of those girls with poison in her fingers,” Excelyn suggested.

“What are they called? Oh yeah, Uklians. They scare everyone.”

“Want me to look for one?” Jenna offered when Vash entered the room.

The butler looked panicked and frightened. “Madam Diplomat. I need you to see something.”

Jenna glanced at Excelyn. She hadn’t exactly been keeping secrets from her. What had Vash seen that he felt ought to be kept secret? She had no idea.

Jenna stood up. “I’ll be back.”

She joined Vash as they walked the distance across the courtyard and to her bedroom.

Once inside, Jenna asked, "What's going on?"

Vash showed Jenna a pile of bricks. They were the ones the majors had broken out of her wall. Jenna had seen the broken wall and didn't understand what Vash was trying to show her. She'd seen broken white bricks before, so she didn't know why Vash was staring at the bricks so intently.

"Yes," she finally said. "We are looking at bricks."

Vash looked at her like she was stupid, bent down, picked up a brick, and showed it to her up close.

Each brick had eight hollowed-out tubes inside. Jenna had seen bricks like that on Earth. Then, she stopped. Vash was showing her something inside each of the cylindrical hollows. Jenna put her finger in and drew out a piece of plastic that had been rolled up and stuffed inside. When she unrolled it, everything written on it was unfamiliar to her, but it could only be one thing—money.

"What the?" Jenna put her fingers in more holes and brought out more money.

Soon she and Vash were on their hands and knees getting caked in brick dust as they pulled money out of every brick.

"How did the AAMC guys miss this?" Jenna gasped in wonder.

"I guess they were only looking for the crowns and they weren't thinking that your wall was full of money."

"How did you notice?"

"I picked one up wondering how I could dispose of it. We're very fussy about how we dispose of things on Octavia Prime. Everything has to be biodegradable, but the bricks are closer to rocks, which don't change. I was doing a sensor check on the composition of the brick so I could figure out where it could be properly disposed of and the sensor picked up on the plastic. I saw a glint and found it."

"How much have we got?"

"Some of these are fifty notes. Some are hundreds. Lots are doubled up. At a glance, I'd say we're looking at several thousand."

"What can you buy with that much money? I don't know much about your currency."

"These are Liri. At the least, we're looking at enough money to completely repair this room."

Jenna looked at the wall. "Is it worth more to us to rip the wall down entirely to see if there's more money in it, or to leave the wall as it is?"

"Rip it down," Vash said without hesitation.

"Wait," Jenna said, getting up and walking around the room. "This was Arvantis' palace before it was mine, wasn't it?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"That means that Vinia lived here. Sardius said something about how interesting she was. Was she stashing money everywhere? Not just in the walls, but everywhere?"

Vash looked like he didn't know the answer, but he was also curious. Experimentally, he pulled a vase off a floating shelf. The vase had real flowers in it. It was a white and pink flower that resembled an orchid but was growing like bamboo, in glass beads with water surrounding it. Vash shook the roots loose and then dumped the beads out into a glass bowl that sat on a table

as a decoration. A plastic bag was discovered inside. He opened it and quickly counted the money.”

“It’s two thousand Liri.”

Jenna looked at Vash, who looked at her, before they both reached to shut the bedroom door.

“She probably hid money everywhere,” Vash said in excitement. “What should we do? Should we tell everyone what we found?”

“The bigger worry is where it came from. Vinia hid it,” Jenna explained.

“But where did she get it from? As Arvantis’ third wife, she wasn’t entitled to huge stashes of money. If any of this was legal, she would have taken it with her. The fact that she left it behind is worrisome,” Vash said hesitantly.

“I agree. I can only see one solution here.”

“What?” Vash asked nervously.

“You and I are going to need to learn how to lay bricks.”

“You want to put the money back into hiding?”

“No,” Jenna snapped in a hushed whisper. “We need to find all of it and put it somewhere that makes sense to us and if anyone comes looking for it, then we need to be able to return it to them without any fuss.”

“Why? Where are you thinking it came from?”

“I’m not sure,” Jenna admitted. “Perhaps it would be helpful to talk to Vinia and get her perspective on all this. Start taking the wall down. I have to get back to Excelyn. Until I say so, no one can know about this. I’ll cut surveillance of this room from the control panel.”

Vash nodded, and for once he didn’t seem concerned about doing a task that wasn’t in his job description.

Jenna stepped out and closed the door behind her.

The control panel was her new best friend since Sardius... disappeared. She couldn’t wrap her mind around everything that had happened. She couldn’t believe Sardius was dead, but nor could she believe that things would ever be the way they had been if he hadn’t even been in the same universe as her.

She went back to Excelyn. She and the doctor chose a reporter to come to Octavia Prime. Hours later, they were still haggling over the details. It was particularly taxing because if Sardius had been given the job, the whole thing would have been done without Jenna being involved. He would have managed all the arrangements and somehow made her feel like she had been the one to haggle the deal.

It was all bullshit as far as Jenna was concerned. She didn’t even want to be a diplomat without Sardius.

She wanted to go back to Earth.

Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

