

Leona Bristolie at Space Station Pour S'Amuser

Chapter 10

Space Station Pour S'Amuser

It was Lonnie and Muto that were flying the *Englander* back to W12C3. *ICC Slininder* disappeared out of *Englander's* scan range in a flash, leaving behind a panoramic view of space without an end, sprinkled with nebulas, dust clouds, worlds.

"The controls are sluggish in responding. I don't think it's the environmental system that's the real problem. I'm going to head to the nearest space station. They'll have a small repair yard," Muto said.

"Where would that be?"

"Pour S'Amuser. I hope we make it on our own power but...."

"You can't find someplace nearer or other than that place?"

"Why?"

"There's someone that's been sending me fan mail from there."

"You keep track of all your fan mail? I thought celebrities pay someone to keep track of all that for them."

"I don't get that much fan mail, besides I like to know who's out there that may distract me from my other job."

"Fans can be obnoxious," he smiled. "So, who is this fan?"

"Dingmire is the name she signs her correspondence with. She designs and manages over a hundred fan site links over the galactic worlds site. Diva Kali isn't one," she smiled at Muto's upraised eyebrows. "According to Dingmire, I'm the only one she really likes."

"So, what's your worry?"

"It may be nothing, but when Shari can't get a handle on a person, it's unusual. Dingmire's correspondence has been on trying to influence me to pay her to manage my fan site."

"You have a fan site?"

"Nothing that I would put my seal of approval on, so-to-speak. Since dancing with Kali I've had fans designing their own fan sites with my name on the GWS and what's really scary is they're able to pull a lot of information on me."

"Really?"

"What are you doing?" she asked.

"I'm going to look at some of the GWS...."

After hitting ten sites and listening to his "Ohs!" and "How did they get pictures of you naked?" He finally went to the GWS Dingmire had of her. "Now these pictures are very nice and flattering. Oh, I like this one. You should let her handle your site. It would counter that other junk. Jol Hrorian would make a hunk of credits for everyone with those recordings of you linked up on your site," Muto said.

"Think so?" Lonnie was not interested in making herself known wherever she may visit.

"You're a talented person, Lonnie. Not only can you dance and look good doing it, but you can play various instruments and sing too. I have a cousin that I could hook you up with that can get your musical talents...." He laughed at her expression. "Why not send a note over to this Dingmire and let's see if she's up-and-up?"

"I rather not meet up with her. In case you *failed* to note during all this time you've been with me, I don't like to be noticed."

"Why are you so nervous about meeting up with admiring fans? Of course, there are some real crazies out there," he amended quickly and then added. "What did Shari say about her offer?"

Lonnie stared at him annoyed.

"She agrees with me, huh?" He laughed. "Uncle said he never met a more talented person with such an aversion to mingling with her fans. I thought it was because of your *other* job but now..." He continued to laugh, "You're a shy person."

"I'm not shy, Muto."

"Maybe not like the 'classic' type but you're shy. So, what else do you have to do while we wait for the ship to be repaired?"

"Let me think about it."

"Good! Let me send a communiqué to the harbormaster and let him know we're in need of emergency repair and we'll see where it gets us."

"This is not a job for you, Muto. You're having way too much fun."

Chapter 11

Dee

"They aren't bad, Lonnie," Muto said as they both looked over a suite of rooms that were among the few available on the communication site for available places to stay. "Your fan, Dingmire recommends it."

"She does their advertisement for them. Who's paying for you, anyway?"

"I was hoping you. So far she's winning my approval. She does good work, Lonnie. I still think you should tell her you're here."

"Not yet. You're lucky I'm a nice person and found you a nice room."

"Nice!" He laughed. "Very nice," he emphasized. "I'll pay for all the meals. I noticed they have some interesting dinning spots."

"Okay, I reserved the Queen's suite. Two bedrooms, two separate bathing facilities, an exercise room and dinning room. For a space station, that's a considerable amount of space to rent out, even for two people. Kali would be proud of my extravagance." Lonnie paused for some sort of melancholy to hit her.

A voice not unlike Caline said, *You really need to get on with your life.*

"Where is this room?" Muto asked as he went into the hotel's GWS and searched it out.

"It's on the inside of the space station. I would rather have a view of space showing on the monitors than have the outside room where space is just inches away and dream of one of the seals breaking while I'm there."

"Inside *is* safer. They don't have the exits or safety escape routes marked here but when we get to the room we'll find them. If we're going to a nice place, we'll have to have our bags delivered," Muto said. "It just won't look right for us to be arriving with them."

"Muto, at that price, they have chauffer service. If they didn't I'd know they're not worth a stay."

"Have you been to many of these places?" Muto asked.

"In the beginning of my tours, I stayed at least once at each of the top rated hotels, so that I knew what someone was talking about. When that got old, I started to go into the back country and take the recommendations of... fans, who turned out to be nice people," she grudgingly admitted.

Muto laughed and then nudged her. "There's our ride. Nice looking driver." He leaned over and turned off the ship's monitor. "The engineer said he'll run a scan as soon as we disembark. He doesn't like to rely on other people's diagnostics."

As soon as the exit hatch opened a bot was there to pick up their luggage. An extremely exotic and attractive woman stood at the door of their ride.

"Leona Bestrolie?" a voice asked.

It was the type of voice that if it was whispered in your ear, you would swoon instantly. After being off balance during her tour with Kali, Lonnie was able to respond with no noticeable reaction, to her great relief. "Yes. Are you from Rua Elevada Hotel?"

"I am. Are you here on business? Is there somewhere you need to be right away?"

Muto cleared his throat feeling just as affected by the woman's presence. "We would like to freshen up and maybe see the sights. Do you have recommendations?"

"And you are?" she asked in soft voice.

"Muto, her personal bodyguard," he said in a deeper voice.

Lonnie would have laughed at Muto's loss of composure, but she didn't want him to turn the tables on her. He was besotted by the woman. She would keep her sensibilities and let Muto stumble around between keeping his focus on business and recreation.

The woman blinked her luxurious lashes in surprise at Muto. "Of course. One shouldn't take chances when some crazed group is hunting your assignment down." She smiled at Muto and then turned her eyes to Lonnie. "I thought that person was in custody. I'm sorry, I'm Dee. I manage the customer relations end of the hotel's business. Our chauffeurs are engaged with other customers. No need for you to wait or arrange for someone else when I'm available."

Muto and Lonnie got into the cart as soon as Lonnie was sure that her musical instruments were packed safely.

"Are you here to perform?" Dee asked.

"I hadn't thought of that. I haven't scheduled anything."

"Do you play musical instruments as well as dance, Leona Bestrolie?" Dee asked.

"Yes."

"The guests have an impromptu performance at eight bells every evening. As long as it's not something you make a living at, you're free to participate. It's become a competition for a prize that they all agree on. Having a lot of credits doesn't mean you pick sensible prizes. The last one was a trip to one of the massage parlors, for a Bemas. No Bemas in the competition."

"How fun," Muto said with enthusiasm. "So did the winner collect?"

Her smile had Muto breathing slowly to regain his equilibrium. The woman was devastatingly beautiful when she smiled.

"I haven't seen him so I'm presuming he's recouping. The performances are very good. If they weren't everyone would hoot the performer off the stage," Dee reassured them.

Lonnie looked over at Muto. "You'll have to play your flute, Muto."

Muto glanced at her and picked up the sexual innuendo when she batted her eyes at him. Rather than taking it as an insult, he grinned.

Chapter 12

Strange Meetings

Dee escorted them to the Queen's Suites on the 20th level, and for places to go, recommended the hotel's list for visitors. Dee explained to Muto, out of Lonnie's hearing, that Lonnie had a lot of fans on the station and it would soon be known that she was here.

Lonnie soaked in her tub until her stomach growls became too noisy for her to ignore. After drying off she went looking for Muto. He left her a note telling her he went to speak to the engineer that was looking over the ship repairs. The owners of the ship were more than willing to pay for the ship's repair at Pour S'Amuser rather than at the transportation terminal where the charges were more expensive. Muto suspected the captain and engineer of the ship would be looking for a job elsewhere since it was possible, as he had proved, to fly the ship to a less expensive port to have the repairs done. What the second diagnostic showed was a computer malfunction, easily reprogrammable. Someone was pulling a scam on the owner.

Lonnie dressed and when Muto was still not back, left him a note that she was going to look around. Her list of places to visit had at the top the Virtual Adventures Room where almost all sports adventurers went. She checked to see if there was a session available. Ten minutes seemed to be enough time for her to get there. Virtual Adventures was six minutes away by taxi, per audio guide.

"Are you going out, Leona Bestrolie?"

Lonnie turned to Dee who had a reader in each hand.

"Yes. Since Muto's busy, I thought I would go out and look around."

"Is that wise to leave without telling your bodyguard where you're going?"

"Probably not. I'll be back in a few hours."

"Surely you would like me to tell him where you're going?" she asked alarmed.

"Is there something I should be worried about?"

Dee looked uncertain of what to say. She believed that all celebrities rebelled against being safe all the time and rather than challenge a celebrity's need for independence she shook her head. "I... can I send the hotel's security bot with you? It's not noticeable and sometimes, even in the safest of places, strange things happen."

Lonnie was going to say no, but knew she was being unfair to Muto. Some precautions should be made. "Sure." Lonnie was going to ask the cost then remembered Kali's comment that if you have to ask the cost then you should not be there. Of course, Shari's return would be that you are responsible for knowing what goes in and out of your accounts. "Does that go on my bill?"

Dee smiled. "It's part of your services."

Dee issued the order over one of her readers. A tiny silver ball winked on next to her.

"This is Mickey. He's my favorite because he takes after an old comic character."

"As in Mickey Mouse?"

Dee looked happy at Lonnie's recognition. "Yes."

"As long as it's not Elmer Fudd," Lonnie said. Lonnie was taken aback at Dee's genuine smile. The woman was beautiful she thought again. "Getting shot in the foot or back is not my preference."

"That's funny," Dee said. "I guess on a ship you have access to all sorts of old movies."

"Actually, I remember them from my youth."

"Well, they don't mimic the characters they are named after. The programmer was in a hurry and chose the names from a brochure that was convenient. We are an entertainment station so it's appropriate."

With Mickey following her, Lonnie left the hotel, picking up a taxi at the door.

"Take me to Virtual Adventures," she addressed the automated taxi.

Leaning back she watched as the shops and people were passed. It was a busy space station. The taxi weaved in and out of pedestrians and other taxis, coming close to hitting something or someone but did not. If the scenery was not passing by so quickly she wouldn't have known she was moving so fast.

"Stop!" Bracing herself, the expected sudden stop was more of a gradual and safe stop.

Jumping out of the cart she ran back to the alley where she thought she saw someone she recognized. The alley was deserted and looked abnormally clean. Moving past the first two doors, she noted the sensors along the bottom of the walls. Trash sensors. What doors there were along the alley were either fake or locked and if she tried any she was sure security alarms would go off. Looking at the name on one of the doors she recognized it as an old vaudeville theatre's name. This was a space port aimed at entertainment, so it wasn't out of place, she thought.

Turning back to get to her ride she found it was waiting for her at the alley entrance. As she entered the cart she was startled to find Jenny waiting for her.

"Close the door, Lonnie," Jennie said.

"What's going on?" Lonnie asked.

"I saw the Delphia Rose."

"Who?"

"She's supposed to have died years ago." Jenny's dramatic announcement dissembled quickly into nervous chatter. It was not at all like Jenny. "Do you know who I'm talking about? It was *the* Delphia Rose."

"So?"

"I saw her." The tone was as if she had discovered something truly important.

"Why are you hiding in my taxi?" Lonnie asked her.

"Because Bess knows me."

"Who's Bess?"

"The Delphia Rose!"

"So?"

"She's in hiding! Of course she doesn't want anyone to know of her whereabouts and that she's alive."

"So?"

"I think something's not right. I can feel it Lonnie."

"Just what are *you* doing?"

Jenny gave her a strange look. "*I* was following her to that alley."

"Where do you want me to drop you off?" Lonnie asked.

"Well, I was thinking, since we're both here, maybe we can have dinner together."

"No. I've made other plans," Lonnie said.

"All right. Remember what I told you. You can let me off here."

This was definitely not the Jenny she knew.

When the cart resumed its journey Lonnie leaned back in her seat. The image of Jenny was correct but not the character. And what was the Delphia Rose about?

"Gods but I hope I'm not hallucinating or something like that."

That would be a real disaster. People that had it all their lives had all their life to adapt to seeing random slices out of peoples lives. She didn't want to be involved in other peoples' problems. Getting used to herself as a civilian was enough for now.

Her transportation halted in front of a busy entrance. It was very carnival with lights flashing, vendors calling out their deals, and people dressed in what Lonnie could only describe as costumes from past periods on various planets. Stepping on the sidewalk the noise around her was loud; voices and vendor music competing for an audience.

"Virtual Adventures, the best you'll ever find... Guaranteed," the banner above the entrance read.

"That's quite a claim," she said. Suddenly the bush near her became animated. It was a Zohors. As it changed shape she became dizzy. Lonnie giggled and shook her head from the giddy feeling she was getting from the energy around it.

"They *are* the best in this part of the galaxy. Hi, my names M'boto. I'm new here."

Lonnie grinned. She always wanted to meet a Zohors. They could morph into any plant structure and were considered the consummate gardener or farm assistant. They nurtured plants and the ground.

"My name's Lonnie. I just arrived too. Do you travel much?" Lonnie asked.

"Not like we used to. Not many freighters want to give us rides." He leaned close to her. "I think they're superstitious about something."

"You do give off a strange energy. It makes me giddy." A giggle escaped her and she put a hand over her mouth embarrassed. When she thought she had a better handle on her giggles she cleared her throat and continued. "It could be that your needs require more than they can spare. You know how all ships travel lean."

M'boto sighed. "That's what my family says. But when the need to migrate hits us, there is no holding back the traveler. We used to have available ships but...that was long ago when we were friends with the Holans."

Lonnie looked surprised. "They don't have the reputation for being friendly folks."

"That was eons ago. Something sent them off on the wrong track. Now we travelers grab a ride where we can."

"Why do you need to migrate?"

M'boto puffed up his chest, if that was what it was. "It's a calling some of us receive. We are responsible for many worlds having lush and flowering plant life. We are called to help when citizens want to rebalance their planet's ecosystems. Plants help clean up the ground and air, you know."

Lonnie smiled. "I do know. So, what are you doing here?"

M'boto looked uncomfortable. "This is where the last freighter left me. I'm working in the arboretum with the gardener until I find passage to another planet."

"Where do you want to go?"

"I wander until I find a planet that feels right."

"Are you interested in a virtual sport?"

He laughed. "I just came to take care of this hedge. You seem to be a nice person so I thought I would speak with you."

"Well, M'boto, I have to get to my reservation in Room202. If you need a ride some place and I'm heading that way and can, I'll give you a lift. Or if you need a personal word."

M'boto smiled. "That's nice of you, Lonnie. Thanks."

"Do you need my..."

"Oh, I can reach you. I pick up all sorts of things...especially when word is out that another celebrity is on the space station." He laughed at Lonnie's expression.

"Another?"

"There's hundreds with all the fairs and games going on. Lenoard Hohay is here."

"Are you kidding?"

M'boto laughed. "I heard you two once paired together in a performance until he was booed off the stage."

"I booed him off the stage. He was embarrassing to team up with. Drugs and dancing are only good if it's a private party you want to forget."

"He's in Room211. Rafting over the rapids."

"Hm. Thanks for the warning, M'boto. I'll be sure to stay clear of river rafting."

Chapter 13

It's Just a Story

Lonnie climbed out of the cart back at the hotel exhausted. It was a marvelous hang gliding adventure. With the safeties engaged, she was able to perfect a very tricky turn in cross currents. A friend of hers had died from not mastering the skill before he leaped off a cliff.

At the front desk she was going to turn Mickey bot back in but there was a long line of people signing in. Instead she headed back to her suite.

"Did you have a good time?" Muto asked as soon as she stepped through the door.

"It was great! I hang glided until I was dizzy. How about you?"

"I had a strange meeting, but other than that, I got the work authorized by the owner along with the upgrades the tech advised, started. The owner will be coming to pick it up with his family so we'll have to find another ride out of here. When his family heard where the ship was docked he said his extended family pressured him into bringing them along. That means no available space for us hitch hikers."

"I found out that there's all sorts of conventions going on. Almost everyone is dressing in period pieces," Lonnie said.

"Do you want to go out for dinner?" Muto asked.

"Since you're buying...I would like to try one of those great places you bragged about. I met someone wearing Jenny's face but not acting like her. Jenny is one of my pod members."

Muto gave her an odd look.

"Who did you meet?" Lonnie asked.

"My boss," Muto said. "They have to be pulling the faces out of our subconscious," Muto said.

"Well my person had no depth of character so that's a relief they aren't digging deep. Our conversation made no sense."

"The same with me. While you were out I was doing a search to find out how mine was doing it and for what purpose."

Lonnie picked up the room communicator. "This is.... Yes, thank you. The suite and its amenities are very nice. Is Dee available?... Okay.... No, I have no message."

Lonnie hung up and looked at Muto. "I was going to ask Dee about that. Since she's the customer service person, she'll have all sorts of answers."

"When you looked at Dee, what did you see?" Muto asked.

"Tall, red hair and green eyes...."

"No!" Muto said amazed.

"I take it she appeared as something else to you. Can we leave soon?" Lonnie asked. In virtual sports, meddling in the participants head was what enhanced the activity but that was at her choosing. Having a customer service agent do it to enrich the experience of the customer was going too far. Getting off Pour S'Amuser became her priority.

"Right now with the galas and conventions going on, there's no ride off."

"Then I guess I'll have to meet Dingmire."

"Good idea."

After Lonnie sent her an introduction and a request for a meet, Muto and her ordered their meal to be delivered. The restaurant Muto had in mind was reservations only. The reservation desk opened at nine in the morning and they didn't take reservations a day in

advance. Since the suites menu was mouth watering with the chef ready to take special orders, staying in was decided.

Chapter 14

Playing the Game

"You know, not everyone is dressed up," Muto said. "We don't stick out like boring tourists. I wish I could find out what that woman meant when she said everyone participates. Did you get the feeling she was threatening us?" Muto asked humorously, his eyes moving around to catch as much as he could. Lonnie could see he was enjoying himself.

"What did you say *Bandu* looked like?"

"A fruit bearing tree." Muto turned to where Lonnie was looking. "I would have never thought someone could pull it off."

The tree with fruit bowed before them stiffly, with heavily made-up eyelids.

"Lonnie Bestrolie, I am very honored that you have visited me in person to discuss my offer. I'm DinMir. I see you're participating in our mystery vignettes. Every month we put on a festival that requires people to dress in period pieces. This venue is for Mystery Stories that have an ambiguous ending."

"DinMir, greetings." Lonnie did not bother to point out they were not participating in anything. They were merely observing and were present because this was where she set up the meeting. "What part are you playing?" Lonnie asked.

"I'm one of the judges. We had the choice of being a writing instrument, a tree, or some creature that eats insects." Stiffly DinMir turned to look over the crowd. "This is a good turnout. The hotels are filled up and guest rooms are nearly filled. You must have made reservations some time ago to have gotten a room." DinMir sounded curious why Lonnie had not notified her of her arrival sooner.

"Actually our ship had system problems and this was the closest port," Muto said.

"A coincidence! Now that is where mysteries get complicated. Will you excuse me? I see that one of my fellow judges is beckoning to me. I have sent you my ideas on your fan site and suggestions on what is tasteful to post. Hopefully before you leave you can make a decision."

"I have one question, DinMir," Lonnie said. "We met some people that have faces of people out of our past...."

"A Quintan. It's all in the mind. I must be going. Have a good visit." Surprisingly, DinMir could move quickly and agile through the milling crowd to where another *Bandu* tree was.

"Quintans?" Muto asked in an undertone.

"Is that a species or family?" Lonnie asked. "Maybe it's something else. Manipulators of the mind? That must be what Dee is."

"You're getting my brain twisted. Come on. Let's mingle and see just what this is all about." Muto looked excited. "Can you image what they can do with a talent like that?"

"For me, that's scary. Can you image what an unscrupulous government agent could do with that?"

"I'm sure they learn how to protect themselves from those that will harm them. We'll split up and cover more ground. See that bar? We'll meet there."

It took a long time to get to the bar. There were so many people to squeeze by and faces to stare at. Lonnie found that those that did pose as characters in a mystery story were expertly done both in mask and costume. It meant that not all the characters were manipulating her.

"Muto?" she asked softly.

"Lonnie?" he asked back.

"I can't figure out what seeing Jenny's face has to do with all of this."

"My reading of mystery stories is paying off. There are a lot of the macabre and ghoulish represented. The Romantic mysteries my mother likes are over toward the center," Muto said.

"So just why are we here?" Lonnie asked.

"Would you rather wait in the rooms and not do anything?" Muto asked.

"I wouldn't be bored."

"I forgot. You can be perfectly satisfied with playing...." He stopped abruptly and stood on his tip toes to see something. "There's some official looking..."

"Gather! Gather! Greetings attendees!" a voice over a public address system said. The noise in the room rose and then dropped to silence.

"We will begin our mystery vignettes. Many of you have your clues. For those of you that are new, it goes like this.... A familiar face will appear to you, give you three clues in that first meeting and then disappear. You have two days to solve your mystery. There is no sleep! There is no food! It's the effort that brings the reward. If you don't solve it this time, come back for our next event and try again. Practice makes perfect, with the degree of difficulty matched to your skills. For those that have not received any clues.... You have. You just didn't realize what they were. At the sound of the gong, you will be in your story. Good luck detectives!"

A gong sounded.

Lonnie was standing in the alley she had first seen Jenny in. She had no feeling of displacement or disorientation. This alley she was intimately familiar with. In the rehearsal hall everyone would be milling around the back where the snacks would be set out, and all the actors wrapped up in their character, not paying attention to external events. Some would eat and some not. Her hand patted her coat pocket to be sure it was there.

A noise in the alley had her turning her head. A figure back lit entered the alley. Quickly she moved into the shadows. The footsteps were nearly running and the person was crying. Maybe if she were not so overwrought herself she would be curious and kindly to the sobbing girl. The back door she was headed to opened and shut and the thud of the lock had her slapping the wall in dismay.

Would there be another day? Another opportunity? No. This really was the last time she would be here.

Leaving the alley she walked to the front of the theatre, looking for a way in. There was none. Everything was locked up tight. Leaning her ear against the door she knocked and listened for anyone. A scream came from inside. Startled she turned from the front of the building and ran to the alley. The back door to another theater opened and people came out looking up and down the alley for the direction the scream came. They stood in a group, straining to hear something more.

"That was good scream," one of the actors said.

"Sure was. I thought it was real." They all laughed and went back into their theatre. When the door closed, there was absolute silence.

The walk back to her room was on a wandering path that passed the city gardens and river way. It gave her time to rethink her plan on leaving the planet with the last of her funds. A short stay with her sister was planned, until she could get another job. It wasn't that her sister begrudged her visits or any length of time she spent with her. It was her sense of needing to move on. Nodding to herself, she walked to a transportation terminal. She would buy the ticket.

An annoying buzz sounded.

Lonnie blinked a few times, trying to place where she was.

"Yes?"

"Leona Bestrolie, this is Dee. I understand you were asking for me. Is there anything I can help you with?"

Lonnie took a deep breath and looked around her. She was in her suite of rooms. "I was wondering if you would have morning beverage with us. I have some questions I would like to ask you. Are you too busy?"

"I have thirty minutes free in a hour. Will that fit in your schedule?"

"Yes. That's fine. I'll see you then."

Lonnie got out of bed and moved to the bathing room, feeling dull witted. Thinking was not difficult, just slow.

Finished with her bath and not feeling any clearer, Lonnie pulled out her sitar. Nothing came to her so her fingers plucked through an exercise. Melancholy set in as she remembered Gaholi, her teacher. Closing her eyes, she recalled the times they spent out on the cliffs hang gliding. Her energy lifted and the music flowed as she imagined Gaholi accompanying her.

Feeling uplifted and energized, Lonnie opened her eyes and sat quietly observing the waitstaff as they stared at her. It was Dee who started to snap her fingers, and the others quickly followed suit.

"You are truly a gifted person!" Dee said. "I have never heard anyone play such an instrument before, but it is a wondrous tool to lift one's personhood."

The waitstaff bowed to Lonnie and quickly began to set the table with food stuff and beverages. Muto uncurled his form from the couch.

"You really should add some music to your GWS," Muto told her seriously.

"You have a site?" Dee asked surprised.

"No. Nothing that I support," Lonnie told her hurriedly.

"She's looking into having someone design and maintain one for her. She plays other instruments very well," Muto shared. "I think she should have herself playing various instruments with a link to download the music if anyone's interested. What do you think, Dee?"

Lonnie made a face at him.

"Oh, I see. I think that would be a very good idea...if Leona is comfortable with it," she said carefully. "Have you a list of designers?" Dee asked.

"One," Muto said. "Do you know Dingmire or..."

Dee brightened up. "Dingmire is a fabricated name to monitor traffic on various galactic sites; however, DinMir is her business name for handling official sites she is paid to maintain." Dee paused. "She has won many awards for her designs."

Lonnie was picking up conflicting feelings from Dee, which had her curious as to why, but then again, it was not that large of station so everyone would know everyone else.

"I looked over her site that she has on Lonnie as a sample of her work," Muto said. "I think it's excellent. All DinMir needs to do is connect with Jol Hrorian the Chief Purser of Entertainment on the liner *Earl Gray*, and recordings of her dances aboard the liner could be purchased with a click on the link."

Dee looked interested.

"Muto, if you want a second job, I'll interview you for my business manager," Lonnie said.

Muto laughed. "You would fire me the moment I said I booked you in a large auditorium and where there was no quick escape from your admiring fans."

"You wouldn't do that. You're too careful to make sure I wouldn't be easily targeted for assassination," Lonnie pointed out, forgetting for a moment Dee.

"Celebrities have to be so careful," Dee said seriously.

"I meant to ask you, Dee," Lonnie said. "How did you know me?"

"I'm the head of the customer service department. I must be able to identify any celebrity or person of means who stays here or I would be derelict of my duties. You did reserve one of the most expensive suites in our hotel," she reminded Lonnie.

"It was one of the few you had available."

Muto smiled at Lonnie. "Dee is right, Lonnie. She would not be good at her job if she wasn't able to find all she can about her important guests."

Lonnie looked uncomfortable. "If I knew staying at a high end place meant I have to give up my privacy I would have stayed elsewhere."

"Anywhere you stayed on this orb you would have been investigated to see what your tastes are to pander to them. This city's business is to give the customer the ultimate entertainment that does not deal in the murder or torture of another living being. The difference in our hotel is that we insure that our guests get the privacy they want, or the publicity they want. We have a hundred and forty-five guests that want the public to know they're here. Some want the public to always know where they will be appearing, some only want the public to know at some places they visit. Then we have some like yourself that wish complete privacy. When you leave the hotel, we can't guarantee complete anonymity but we have security bots that will protect you from attack, from recordings or image captures. You only need to tell it what level of protection and it will give you that."

"Did you program Mickey bot for me?" Lonnie asked.

"From your public profile I understood you wanted anonymity and *limited* fan contact. I didn't see anywhere that indicated you wanted *no* contact. Did I interpret your wishes correctly?"

"You understood perfectly. I can see why you're head of customer service."

Dee smiled, nearly taking both their breaths away. It was quiet for a few moments then Muto said something to break the silence.

"It didn't stop that person who appeared to Lonnie with someone else's face," he said.

Dee looked at her puzzled. "Is there something that you find unpleasant?"

"No, no," Lonnie said embarrassed. "I can handle fans or people in small groups of five or less, but this was just a person that appeared as someone from my past...."

"Quintans. They can be any species, but their gift is to be able to take on the physical appearance of whoever you desire to see. There is a school on the other side of the city that trains them in the healing arts, for the emotionally hurt."

"Why would one appear to me?" Lonnie asked.

"And to me?" Muto said.

"There are some working for the Mystery Festival to hone their talents. They are part of the festival staff that brings to a participant three clues to an unsolved crime. Since the crime is still unsolved, Quintans are utilized rather than actors to stimulate latent or obvious talents of a participant to psychically revisit the event."

"But she made no sense and what followed makes no sense," Lonnie objected.

"I agree," Muto said. "The last I remember was being in a hall of people dressed for the event. Then I awoke from a strange dream to Lonnie's playing."

"You don't want to participate in the mystery plays?" Dee asked slowly.

"I don't," Lonnie said. "I enjoyed the virtual sports, but I'm not interested in solving some mystery that doesn't make any sense."

"What was it?" Dee asked. "If you don't mind me knowing..."

"Something about a Dephia Rose and her wanting to disappear. That's where a friend appeared and said some things about the Rose that made no sense."

Dee nodded frowning. "Well, I can't help you with your clues. It would be unfair."

"What if I don't want to play this game?" Lonnie asked.

"When you start a game, if it's too hard, do you quit?" Dee asked.

"This is not a game I'm interested in. I'm not into mysteries, Dee."

Dee smiled at her. "On some level you have accepted, otherwise you would not have been given the clues. Quintans don't make mistakes. Was there something you wished to ask me?"

"That was it," Lonnie said. She eyed the tray of food and realized it was not as it appeared when they came in. Looking back at Dee the entire room changed.

Lonnie was in a shabby room with an equally shabby clothes case. There was broadcast music playing in the background. From music it switched to the local news bulletin. She continued folding her clothes neatly in the case. The last thing she added was a photo of her sister's family. Taking a moment, Lonnie stared at the two parents and their two kids, recognizing the daughter as Jenny. Lonnie's eyes moved to a mirror that caught her reflection. The woman staring back had a familial resemblance to the mother in the photo.

"It's Jenny's aunt," Lonnie whispered. "She was accused of murdering her lover, only according to the family, it wasn't a lover. It was a mentor."

Suddenly she stopped what she was doing and stared at the reflection of the door behind her. It opened and uniformed police came in, demanding her to turn around and stand with her hands in full view.

Lonnie was taken to jail accused of murder.

The man that was to defend her was young and apologetic that he had not been to any of her plays.

"This is not a fan get-together, Meister Arno. I don't care if you know me or not. What are you going to do about this ridiculous charge?"

"Well, you did have a weapon in your pocket and it is against the law to carry...."

"It's not even real! It's a prop."

"Oh. They haven't let me see anything. Well, then, what was your relationship with Meister Gu...ah...Gu..." he stammered unable to pronounce the strange name.

"We call him Meister G. It's easier that way. What's this about him being murdered?" she demanded.

"Well, you're being accused of murdering him. He's dumped you for Delphia Rose so you got angry and shot him."

"I quit! I wasn't dumped. I'm going home for a visit with my sister and her family, and then I'll look around for some interesting parts in the trade papers," she said.

Meister G was showing too much of his age. He forgot who he assigned to what role, the names of his staff, and what they were staging. Really, she had stayed too long, helping him out more than her career.

"Oh. Well, according to Delphia Rose, you killed him with a gun. Shot him right in the head." The young man held a finger to his head and made the noise a child would make when pretending to shoot a gun.

Lonnie leaned back in disbelief. "If anyone would shoot him in the head, it would be himself by accident. His touch with reality is ... skimpy at best. He begins rehearsal with one script and midway through begins to improvise in another script."

Her attorney nodded as if he was taking mental notes.

"So, this Delphia Rose, what's her part in this?" Lonnie asked.

"She was the new star you're jealous of."

"Star of what? There is no play. There's only chaos on stage, bountiful lunches, lots of coffee breaks and no more money to pay for any of that."

"You were seen outside of the rehearsal hall after the shooting."

"I was returning Meister G's favorite stage prop. I took it from him because he was running around waving it like he was going to shoot someone. He was senile. I really stayed too long for sentimental reasons."

Her young attorney stood up. "So, you are saying he did it to himself?"

"How would I know? I wasn't there. Some young thing walked in before me and locked the backstage door behind her so I couldn't get in. I went around to the front but it was locked."

"I'll go see what the police have," Meister Arno said.

"When you talk to the others, they'll tell you that Meister G was senile and sometimes couldn't tell the difference between pointing his finger at his head and pointing a gun."

"All right. I'll look into it. You wouldn't happen to know why the Delphia Rose doesn't like you, do you?"

"I've never met her, so no. Do I get bail or at least get a meal?"

"You don't have money, that's why I was assigned to you, and the city is running on a low budget so you don't get meals unless someone brings it from the outside. I'll be by tomorrow."

Lonnie sat back down on the padded seat, thinking that at least the seats were comfortable.

Half asleep she overheard somewhere that the Oberan's youngest daughter Bess was in trouble again. She got caught trying to run away from home by joining an acting company. Good thing her agent was dead because her family would not have allowed her to mingle with those type of people. Her marriage to the captain of the police would commence.

What a small world, she thought. So, that's who the Delphia Rose is. Maybe the police captain had something to do with G's death. But that's dumb. All he would have to do is revoke the man's passport and send him packing. I'll be sure to point those things out to my lawyer tomorrow.

Two days later Lonnie was purchasing two tickets off the planet on a flight that had plenty of stopovers. The holders of each ticket did not sit together or get off at the same port.

Lonnie's eyes opened to her hotel room in the ritzy hotel she shared with Muto.

A bong sounded again.

Rising from her bed she went into the front room and found a meal cart being wheeled in. Dee was with them.

"Leona Bestrolie, how are you doing? Did you get your mystery solved?"

"How long has it been?"

"Two days." Dee looked over to where Muto came out of his room, looking groggy also.

"You have two hours to eat and meet at the Performance Hall. There is a table where you give

your version of how you solved it. By evening, the winners will be announced." Dee turned and left with the waitstaff.

Muto gulped his beverage, washing down the pastry hurriedly. "I can't believe this story I lived through. A theatre director is shot to death, one of the actors is blamed, and it turns out no one could prove who shot him, including himself."

"He was senile, Muto. Meister G, right?"

"How do you know?" Muto asked.

"I was accused of shooting him."

"My boss was the young attorney! I think he regrets he didn't take a more aggressive approach to protecting the actor, Delphia Rose."

"Delphia Rose was a want-to-be actor, she never was an actor."

"That's who I was defending!"

"Meister Arno wasn't you?"

"No. No. I was Meister Mi."

"I don't get it. Why would Jenny's aunt, that's who I was, be blamed for the murder and then you're saying, Delphia Rose was. Her family was trying to get her married to the chief of police."

"Right." Muto frowned. "I think she ended up committing suicide. That's a pity. To get a role, she brought the old man a gun. Either he omitted the word prop or she had no idea what it was and brought a real one."

"And like he always does, demonstrated how to properly kill himself."

"What was this fascination with death?" Muto asked.

"He became famous for his death scenes when he was acting. Can you image playing the same role twice a day for years?"

Muto finished his drink and looked at Lonnie. "I don't see what I'm supposed to be solving."

"So, she was blamed for his death?"

Muto nodded. "The original person blamed...that was you... had a very shrewd and ambitious lawyer who gave the story of Bess or Delphia Rose giving the old director the chief of police's gun, a man she was being forced to marry. The jury could not decide who killed the director so your character left the city and disappeared. Bess committed suicide rather than go through with the marriage."

"Whatever happened with the police chief?"

"I don't know. Is it important?"

"Let's get dressed and see where this takes us," Lonnie said. "I want to know who benefits from what we come up with."

The hall was crowded but the line to enter the contestants' answers was orderly. Lonnie wrote only what she had dreamed and left the crowded auditorium for the open garden. Her new Zophos friend, M'boto was sunning himself while vibrating energy into the ground. By the aroma of the blooms, they liked his care.

"Who are they?" Lonnie asked, nodding to a cluster of people that looked like new arrivals.

"They are the representatives of the interested parties who submitted the mystery stories," M'boto said. "A lot of fiction based books or movies used real unsolved murders or disappearances as their foundation. I've always wanted to witness firsthand what the affected

parties would do if the participating members changed the outcome or brought out what the lawyers had suppressed to move their case to end."

"Why would you want to know?"

"I support the plants that clean the air. Negative energy affects the plants. To witness first hand the power of released hostility will help my understanding of what is the first plant that will be affected and so on."

"I didn't think of plants and their health. That's right. If one person is absolved, another will be accused." Lonnie looked at M'boto and became dizzy. Turning away she waited a moment to get her equilibrium back.

"It just occurred to me that I don't understand how a person gets picked to relive the events or to go through this story thing."

"People come here who have some sense of mediumship and whatever their skill is, that's the role they are given."

"I don't have any mediumship talents."

"But you do. You would not be able to speak with me if you didn't."

Lonnie stared at him for a few moments. "We weren't intending to be here."

"But you are here. You were picked because you were open to the role. That's what makes it so interesting to me. When my traveling days are done, I shall have many tales to tell those that sit at my roots."

"Is it important that I stay after I've handed in my version of the story?"

"What was yours about?"

"A senile director that took his life and left two women charged with his death. However, the jury couldn't decide on who was responsible for his death, so they both got off."

"Now that would upset many," M'boto said.

"Why?"

"If he had a life insurance policy, whoever received it may have to return it if he took his own life."

"How is the insurance detective going to prove he was lucid when he pulled the trigger if he pulled the trigger? And then there's intent."

M'boto nodded. "Was placing a loaded weapon in the reach of a senile director done with the belief that he would pick it up and demonstrate on himself how to properly shoot oneself in the head, like he is known to do, or was it given to him by a naïve person?"

"You know who I'm speaking of."

"Oh, yes. Books have been written with variations on who pulled the trigger. I like the most recent version that the director did it to himself in a moment of lucidity, just as you have decided."

"But what about who gave him the gun?"

"He's a director. He could very well have manipulated the people involved to give him what he wanted, to go out in a way he chose. That's what the new story says."

"M'boto, I like that ending too."

"But it means if there was insurance involved, and they can prove he was lucid, they'll want every credit they gave to whoever collected it. That will be a lawyers dream to take on the case for whichever side." M'boto stretched a little taller to catch the sun beam as it was disappearing with the beginning of evening coming on.

"Oh, there's Muto."

"Not with a friendly fellow," M'boto said. "He's not wanted here in my garden. He puts out very bad energy."

"He looks the type. I don't see any reason for me to remain."

M'boto's was focused on the group of people he wanted to study. They were milling about, some agitated as he expected.

Muto looked at her at that moment and she gestured she was returning to their hotel room. The more Lonnie hung around the more uncomfortable she became. Muto nodded.

Lonnie stopped at the front desk and found Dee quietly sitting at her desk. It was rather odd to see her in complete stillness.

It was her eyes that made contact with Lonnie and then the rest of her became animated. Lonnie couldn't make up her mind if this was a species thing, a training method of relaxation, or if this version of Dee was a person.

"How may I help you," Dee asked politely.

Lonnie could not get over the lack of any connection to Dee as she had originally and her blank stare must have said the same thing because the woman gave her a polite smile.

"You probably have met my twin. She will be back to work in two days. Do you have a message for her or can I help?"

"Yes, I was wondering if you have DinMir's number so I can reach her."

"Certainly. Usually Dee doesn't tell people her other name, otherwise I wouldn't give it to you. If you want to see her, she's still at the Roma Restaurant."

It was amazing that Lonnie's face didn't tell this person how surprised she was by the information.

"No, that's all right. Her number will do." Muto was going to be surprised when she told him Dee was DinMir.

Taking the number Lonnie remembered to ask her her name, "What is your name?"

"Dee," she said with a trace of impatience. "Have a nice stay." It was a dismissal.

"What is your sister's name besides DinMir?"

"Dee. We *are* twins." She said it as if Lonnie should know that the name had a connection to being twins.

"Thank you."

As the elevator rose to her room level, Lonnie thought how traveling brought her into meeting some of the most interesting people and the most puzzling.

Lonnie dialed the transportation terminal to see what was leaving. The sooner she got off this station the better she would feel. There was a freighter heading to Tanzinia and a private yacht that registered its flight as passing Tanzinia.

Lonnie left a message for Muto. It was time for Muto to go back to doing something else besides protecting her when all that was happening was they were getting sidetracked into some weird adventures. A quiet time in the outback with friends was what she was ready for.

Lonnie sent a message to DinMir, outlining what she wanted on her site and what the rules were to be. The cost DinMir was charging was okayed with her bank. Lonnie picked up her bags and left. The freighter was leaving in twenty minutes.

Her taxi took her by the garden she had seen M'boto in. "Stop here." She stepped out of the taxi and waited.

"You are leaving," M'boto sounded disappointed.

"I've booked passage on a freighter. Do you want to come along? It's Tanzinia I'm heading for. There's a lot of open land to look over."

"I would like that."

"You have to hurry. There's only fifteen minutes to board."

"I am ready now."

"You don't have to notify anyone?"

"They will know."