

—chapter 1—

I'd try to hold on to my stass dreams as long as I could. It's a game I would play, struggling to keep track of those misty images that were always so easily lost. I'd try to keep myself in stasis, keep my heart beating too slow to feel, refuse to wake up my lungs. Once or twice I managed to hold on so long that Mom panicked and turned on the resuscitator.

So when the electric-blue seascape I was trying to hold on to was interrupted, not by a hand but by the feeling of lips on mine, I was startled. I sucked in a breath through my nose and sat bolt upright, knocking my head against my would-be rescuer.

I couldn't see. Everything was dim and painful, as if I had just opened my eyes into a bright light after days in the dark. An unfamiliar voice shouted unfamiliar words: "Holy coit, you *are* alive!"

I felt utterly lost. All I could do was grope for what I knew. "Where's Mom?" My voice wasn't mine; it sounded like a croak. I tried to take stock of my condition. My muscles

ached, and my lungs seemed filled with fluid. I coughed, trying to force air into the dormant passages. I tried to get to my feet. Piercing pains like knives shot through my legs and arms where I tried to lift myself. My very bones ached. I slid back down into the smooth, soft cushion of the stass tube.

“Whoa!”

My rescuer leaped toward me as I fell. Warm hands grabbed at me, and my muscles screamed with stiffness. “Don’t touch me!” I gasped. I didn’t understand why I was in such pain.

He let me go, but the pain didn’t diminish. “Coit, you scared me.” The voice sounded overly excited. “You weren’t breathing there—I was afraid I’d botched the system and exed you.”

I barely understood half of what he was saying. “How long?” I whispered.

“You only seemed dead for a minute,” he said as if to reassure me.

I’d meant how long had I been in stasis, but I abandoned that line of thought. It didn’t matter. I told myself that every time I woke up. It didn’t matter. “Who are you?” I asked instead.

“My name’s Brendan. I live in suite five. Do you know where you are?”

I frowned, or would have had my head not begun to ache. Suite five housed an elderly couple and their collection of tropical fish. At least that’s who had lived there the last time I’d been awake, but I had no idea how long I’d been stassed. “Unicorn Estates, of course. What are you doing here? Did you just move here?”

There was a long silence. “No, we’ve lived here all my life.” He sounded frightened now.

I blinked and directed my bleary eyes toward where I was sure he was. Brendan was a dark shadow, a blurry silhouette of a man. A young man, from his voice. I was confused. “Why did you wake me up?”

He started, as if surprised. “You wanted to stay in stasis?”

“No, I mean, why did *you* wake me up? Where’s Mom?”

There was a long silence. “Um . . .” He took a deep breath. “I don’t know where your mom is. Do . . . do you know who you are?”

“Of course I do!” I said, but my voice was still shaky and hoarse. I coughed again, fighting the stasis fatigue.

“Well, I don’t. I’m Brendan, and you are?”

“Rosalinda Samantha Fitzroy,” I said precisely. I was annoyed. Who was this boy? I’d never had to tell anyone who I was before.

He took a step backward and then vanished out of sight. Alarmed, I tried to force myself back into a sitting position. My arms screamed, and my back seemed almost too weak to hold me up. Whatever strength my initial surprise had lent me, it was gone now. I pulled myself upright on the edges of the stasis tube and tried to find my shadow man.

He was on the floor, less of a shadow now that I was sitting upright. He’d stumbled. His eyes were two white smudges in a dark circle of a head, opened wide to stare at me.

“What?” I croaked.

He scrambled backward, crablike, until he found purchase

on a box and hauled himself back to his feet. A box? Where the hell was I? This was definitely not my own comfortable closet, carpeted in rose pink, with all the latest fashions neatly on their hangers. This was vast, echoing and cluttered at once, like a storehouse. Tall shelves full of dark shapes towered over our heads. “Did you say Fitzroy?” Brendan asked. “Rosalinda Fitzroy?”

“Yes,” I said. “What of it?”

“I need to go get some help.” He turned his back to go.

“No!” I yelled, or as close to a yell as my stagnant lungs and my parched throat could. I didn’t know why I’d cried out at first. Stass chemicals did a number on your emotional state, so sometimes it was hard to put a finger on how you were feeling. After a moment I realized I was terrified. Everything was wrong, nothing was what I expected, and I had a feeling that something truly terrible had happened.

He turned back to me. “I’ll be right back.”

“Don’t!” I breathed. “Don’t leave me alone here! I want my mom! What’s going on? Where’s Xavier?”

There was a moment of hesitant confusion, and then I felt his hand on my shoulder. This time it was gentle, and my muscles didn’t scream so loudly. “It’s okay. Really. Just . . . I can’t do this alone.”

“Do what alone? Tell me what’s going on! Where’s my mom?”

“Miss . . . ah . . . Fitzroy . . .”

“Rose,” I said automatically.

“Rose,” he repeated. “I came down here just . . . exploring.

I didn't know this place existed. I stumbled on your stass tube and accidentally started the revive sequence. No one has been in this corner of the subbasement since the Dark Times."

"Dark times?" I asked.

"The Dark Times?" he said as if it should be obvious. "When the . . . Oh, God." His voice fell to a horrified whisper. "That was sixty-some years ago."

"I'm sorry . . ." I whispered, unable to grasp what he was saying. "Sixty . . . y-years?"

"Yeah," Brendan said quietly. "And . . . if you're really Rosalinda Fitzroy . . ." Whatever more he had to say would have to wait. The ocean from my dream returned in the form of a roaring surf, which blocked all sound and stopped my breath. Sixty years. Mom and Daddy, dead. Åsa, dead. Xavier . . . my Xavier . . .

I think I screamed. The last thing I felt as the shadows overcame my vision completely was Brendan's strong arms catching me as I fell.

—chapter 2—

I woke in strange surroundings with strange voices at my feet. I lay on my back, reclined rather than flat. Cool fabric under my fingers. A familiar smell—antiseptic and illness. Hospitals always smelled the same. Used to holding on to my stass dreams, I kept my eyes closed and my breathing even.

“What does the doctor say?” The voice was male, wavery with age. He sounded concerned.

“They’re having trouble figuring out who to give that information to.” That was a woman, brusque and kind, a voice I immediately liked.

Another voice cut her off. “Me, of course.” This one was strong and imperious, used to being obeyed. “Who else?”

“She has no family.” That was the older male.

“She has UniCorp, and that means me,” said the younger one. “Imagine waking up to discover she’s the sole surviving heiress to an interplanetary empire!”

“We aren’t an empire” was the older man’s gruff reply. “Honestly, Reggie, I think you have delusions of grandeur.”

“Well, who do you think should be responsible, then? You?” There was no response, so the younger man continued. “This is mostly your fault, anyway. This would be so much easier if you’d left well enough alone. If you’d let me sign her over to the social services anonymously, it wouldn’t even be in question. It’s not as if anyone would believe her story.” He sighed. “I don’t know why we even had to tell the board, or the state. We could have given her a new identity. I doubt her memory’s very strong.”

“Because that wouldn’t be *right*,” said the older man, with a bite to his words that kept even the imperious one from arguing.

“All of this is moot,” said the woman. “Dad, Reggie, calm down, both of you. The judge will be here in a moment. I think your proposal will be accepted, Reggie. No one disputes that you’re the president of UniCorp.”

I opened my eyes at that. “*Daddy’s* president of UniCorp,” I croaked.

The three people at the foot of my hospital bed jumped. The woman came toward me. She was Eurasian, slender, and well groomed, though her clothes seemed casual. The two men wore business suits, but the cut had changed from what I was used to. I couldn’t make out their features, as my eyesight was still blurry. The younger man looked like a blur of gold, while the older one no more than a blur of white, with a dark suit beneath it.

A finger tapped on the glass wall of my hospital room. A blurred figure fidgeted in the hallway. “The judge is here,” said the younger of the two men. “I’m on it. Ronny, Annie, I’ll leave this to you.” He gestured at me as he left. Apparently the judge was the important one, and I was nothing more than a “this.”

“Who are you?” I asked the two who were left.

“We work for UniCorp, dear,” said the woman, while the man turned away from me. “My name is Roseanna Sabah, but you can call me Annie. This is my father, Ron. I’m Brendan’s mother. You remember Brendan?”

Brendan. My shadow man. “The one who woke me up?”

“Yes.” Mrs. Sabah smiled. “He found you yesterday. You’ve been in stasis for so long, we had to bring you to the hospital.”

Something clutched at the back of my throat, something dark and terrified. “So it’s true, what he said?” I croaked. “Sixty years?”

“Sixty-two,” said the old man from the back of the room. His words fell like lead weights.

“And my mother and my father . . . and everyone I knew . . .” My vision disappeared completely as I started to cry. I tried to force the tears back, as Mom had taught me, but I couldn’t. The tears ran down into my mouth. They tasted strange, oversalinated and thick.

“I’m afraid so, dear,” said the woman. “Mark and Jacqueline Fitzroy died in a helicopter crash while you were still in stasis. But you are alive, and we’re all going to see that you’re well taken care of.”

“How?” I managed to whisper.

“I’m afraid your parents died without making a will,” said the woman. “By default, their company went to their shareholders and the board of directors. However, now that you’re back with us, all their assets revert to you.”

“Are you telling me . . . I own UniCorp now?”

“No,” the old man snapped brusquely. For some reason, his voice frightened me. “Unfortunately, UniCorp owns you. At least until you come of age.”

“Dad, don’t frighten the girl.”

“She should know where she stands!” He was almost yelling now.

The woman pulled away from my bedside. “Until you can control yourself, Dad, you should stand outside!” she hissed. “I’m sorry your company is in shambles, but that’s no call—”

“It was never my company,” growled the old man. “It was Fitzroy’s. And now it’s Guillory’s. Give this speech to him!” He took a deep breath and turned away. “But you’re right. You should be the one to talk to her. I have some things to take care of.”

He strode out the door. Mrs. Sabah came back to my bedside. “Sorry about that,” she said.

“It’s all right,” I lied. Now that the stass chemicals had faded further, my fear bubbled beneath my voice.

“I should let you sleep,” Mrs. Sabah said, touching my hand gently. “Don’t worry about anything. Right now all you should think about is getting better. We can deal with everything else when you’re stronger. I’ll be back in the morning. Bren would like to see you’re okay, too, if that’s all right.”

I nodded for her, even though it hurt my neck.

“Get some rest, dear. Don’t worry. We’ll sort everything out.”

Six days later, I was perched before the backdrop of Unicorn Estates while at least a hundred reporters snapped pictures of the miraculous Sleeping Beauty. Or so they called me. I didn’t feel very beautiful.

Despite six days in the hospital, plus twenty-four hours of priming and preening, health monitors, vitality injections, and a thousand other ministrations to which I had been subjected, my hair was still lank and brittle, my skin sallow and sensitive, and my bones protruded so much I looked like a skeleton in a bag. My eyes were weak, my breath was shallow, and I felt ill when I tried to eat. I felt like an old woman. Technically, I was one.

More than eighty years old at the age of sixteen. I’d never spent so long in stasis. No one ever had. Even the astronauts and colonists on their way to the outer planets were revived every month, to prevent stasis fatigue.

Mr. Guillory spoke now at the podium, back straight, gold-tinted hair immaculate. Mr. Guillory—“Call me Reggie!”—was apparently my designated executor. Since I had no living relatives, he was the one responsible for finding me a guardian and a home. He was in his late fifties, and though I knew he deserved my respect, I was hard-pressed to like him. His light-brown eyes didn’t seem to look directly at me when he

spoke to me, and he seemed to me like an expensive golden statue. Something about him frightened me, but he also reminded me of Daddy, so I was very polite to him.

“UniCorp is thrilled to have discovered young Rosalinda,” Guillory said. “When Mark and Jacqueline Fitzroy died without an heir, it was a great tragedy. To have their issue returned to us is a joy beyond imagining.”

One of the reporters shouted out a question. “What about the rumor that you tried to have knowledge of her discovery suppressed?”

Guillory didn’t even flinch. “Six days ago, Rosalinda was suffering extreme stress fatigue and was subjected to a severe shock. We thought it would be best for her to spend a few days acclimating to her situation before the press descended and scrutinized her every move. We never intended to suppress the truth beyond what we thought was best for Rosalinda’s mental and physical health.”

“So what is the state of the UniCorp organization, and what will be the future of the corporation’s assets?”

“Rosalinda is, of course, the sole heir to the finances of her parents’ immediate holdings. However, until she reaches the age of ascension, her finances are to be held in trust by our company. A lawyer has been appointed to her through UniCorp, and she will be taken care of to the best of everyone’s ability.”

The reporter’s face was deeply skeptical. She tried to follow up. “But what about ownership of the company itself?”

Actually, even I didn't know the answer to this question, and I watched the back of Guillory's head with interest. But the reporter was ignored as Guillory pointed to someone else.

"How is it that Rosalinda was left in stasis in the first place?"

Guillory sidestepped. "As you know, the Fitzroys were financial giants of their time. With their considerable assets, the Fitzroys purchased the stass tube for their family's personal use long before the Dark Times. It is presumed that it was lost during the unrest that followed. Next?"

"Rosalinda is underage," someone called out. "Who is going to care for her?"

"Rosalinda's lawyers have already found a suitable foster family. The family that resided in her old apartment has generously agreed to move to a comparable apartment nearby, so Rosalinda will be able to return to the home she knew before. The foster family has been thoroughly vetted and is beyond all reproach. Next?"

"How was she discovered? The rumors are garbled."

Guillory smiled. "For that I'll turn you over to my young friend Brendan Sabah, who made the startling discovery. He is the son of one of our most prominent executives, and a remarkable young man. Bren, if you would step up to the microphone?"

I studied Bren as he approached the podium. He exuded confidence, not a tremor of stage fright. Little, it seemed, ever fazed Bren. I'd learned a bit more about him during my week in the hospital. He was my age, athletic in a streamlined way, and he moved like a panther. Mrs. Sabah told me he played competitive tennis. His dark skin came from his father, who

had emigrated up to ComUnity from off the Ivory Coast. He looked more like a holostar or a fairy-tale prince than a high-school student.

“My parents bought Unicorn Estates six months ago, when it came up for sale, and I started poking around to help,” Bren told them. “It turns out there were a lot of rooms and storage facilities that no one knew about. A set of biometric cards was handed over with the deed. Some of those old cards opened the storage rooms in the subbasement, and it was in one of those rooms that I found Rose’s stass tube.”

“What did you do when you first realized there was a girl inside?”

“I didn’t know it was a stass tube right away,” Bren said. His eyes glinted in the light of the flashbulbs. He’d picked up his mother’s stunning eyes, which shone hazel-green in his dark face. “It was covered in dust, but a light was still flashing on it. I tried to wipe off the light to see what it was, but it turned out the light was a button, and when I pressed it, I had started the revive sequence.”

“So the tube opened, and you found Rosalinda?”

Bren shrugged. He seemed a little uncomfortable. “Yeah.”

I knew why he seemed uncomfortable. When he’d seen that I wasn’t waking up, he’d been afraid he’d botched the revive sequence, which was why he’d started rescue breaths, and I think he was a little embarrassed to discover they weren’t necessary.

“When did you first realize who Rosalinda was?”

“She told me,” Bren said. “My granddad had the hospital confirm it.”

At this point, Guillory stepped forward and nudged Bren out of the way. “Bren contacted his grandfather, one of our top CEOs, and he brought the matter to my attention. Are there any more questions?”

A reporter’s hand shot up. “I have a question for Rosalinda!”

Guillory turned to me and gestured for me to stand up. I flung Bren a panicked look. His face softened sympathetically. “Go on,” he mouthed.

I took a deep breath. I wasn’t one for cameras. Even the idea that they had been recording me sitting behind Guillory had frightened me. I didn’t want to go up there, but everyone expected it of me. . . . My mother’s voice echoed in my memory. *It doesn’t always matter what you want, dear. Sometimes you have to do what others expect of you.* I didn’t have to like it. I just had to do it. I made myself rise from my chair.

More cameras flashed as I stood. I swallowed. One step. Two steps. Three. And then I was at the podium, and Guillory’s firm hand kept me from backing away.

“Miss Fitzroy, how does it feel to wake up in a new century?”

I swallowed again. I was in constant pain, weak as a kitten, and perpetually exhausted, but I didn’t think that was what she meant. In truth, I didn’t know how I felt. And I didn’t want to know. Between the shock and the pain and the stass chemicals, my emotions seemed distant, like they didn’t belong to me. “It’s good to be back,” I said, handing them their sound bite. Cameras flashed. It was a lie, but that didn’t matter. That was all they wanted to hear.

. . .

He was covered in dust, but that didn't affect him. He was past noticing such things. Then the name passed through the net and tickled his programming. "Rosalinda Fitzroy."

Electrodes fired that had long been dormant. Systems slipped into active mode. He accessed the file that had triggered the response program.

This world was shocked last week at the discovery of the daughter of Mark and Jacqueline Fitzroy, the founders of the interplanetary corporation UniCorp. Apparently kept in stasis for more than sixty years, Rosalinda Fitzroy was found beneath Unicorn Estates. Today we see Rosalinda for the first time as UniCorp . . .

His programming scanned the file. If it had only been the name, he would have let himself go dormant again. But then the voiceprint confirmed a match.

"It's good to be back."

TARGET IDENTIFIED: ROSALINDA SAMANTHA FITZROY.

Once, his response would have been instant. Now his processors were wearing down. Slowly, after an eternity of seconds, his primary directive flickered into awareness.

DIRECTIVE: RETURN TARGET TO PRINCIPAL.

His directive active, he implemented a net search for the principal.

SCANNING . . . SCANNING . . . SCANNING . . .
SCANNING . . .

It took a good twenty-four hours before his programming came up with the result.

PRINCIPAL UNAVAILABLE.

His programming wandered around for another eternity,

and it was some minutes before it finally found its secondary directive.

SECONDARY DIRECTIVE: TERMINATE TARGET.

That was a difficult one. Pathways that had never before been implemented were suddenly called into action. The recovery pathways of his primary directive were always on the alert, but this secondary directive had never been necessary before. He put the secondary directive on standby, awaiting a second scan. The principal might become available by the time the target was acquired.

Only then did his system begin the required status check.

STATUS REPORT: .03 PERCENT EFFICIENCY, LOW POWER, STANDBY MODE.

The report recommended a refit, and after some painful moments of wandering, his central information processor agreed. The recharge cable was already connected to his heart, but it took him more than five hours to turn it on.

RECHARGING. 100 PERCENT EFFICIENCY PREDICTED IN 687.4 HOURS.

The fact that it would take him nearly a month to achieve a reliable efficiency rating did not bother him in the least. Time meant nothing to him.

Systems whirred. Nanobots powered up one by one and scurried around his systems, cleaning his veins of detritus, lubricating his joints. His vision cleared as the nanos swarmed over his eyeballs, removing a heavy layer of dust.

As he awaited the completion of his recharge, he performed another scan for the principal, a scan he would perform again

and again before his directive was carried out. The secondary directive was not his main program. If he had had feelings, he would have said that termination made him uncomfortable.

But he had no feelings. All he had were updates.

STANDBY RECHARGE.

STANDBY . . .

STANDBY . . .

STANDBY . . .