



Jonan paced the floor at his home in New York City, knuckle-tapping the wall of windows in his sky rise. He was chomping at the bit, waiting for Cavanaugh to deliver. It was more than news or information, or even technical details about the holograms; it was personal. Jonan took the delay as though he were being cheated on. The manipulation tree had been planted. All he needed was water, life-sustaining water, water he'd hired Cavanaugh to steal. The phone rang and he dove to his desk.

“Tell me you got it!”

“Hey, baby. The flight leaves in three hours and I haven't heard from you. You're still going, right?”

“Oh shit, Venusberg ... I forgot tonight was our night. I'll get right back to you.”

“Make it quick, stud. Don't make me wait. We've got about an hour to get to the airport.”

“Wait ... same pilot?”

“Same one. We have eight so far. It's an even mix. The goal is ten, though. No pun intended.”

“Five minutes, all right? That's all I need. Five minutes.” Jonan grabbed his little black book and reached for the phone, but then a brainstorming grin appeared on his face and he stopped. He tossed the black book aside and pulled a desk drawer open, reaching for Sara's number instead.

Just out of the shower, Sara had barely wrapped herself in a towel when her phone rang. She glanced at the caller ID and answered, “You just don't stop, do you?”

“I got a deal for you, Sara. Something you're gonna love. I know it, I just know it.”

“I don't do deals, Jonan. How can I get you to stop calling?”

“Well, it's more of an offer than a deal. Come with me to Paris. Tonight, all right? Let's go. Tonight.”

“You are certifiably impaired, aren’t you?”

“Only if I don’t ask you out. Come *onnn*, it’s a chance to get to know each other, and trust me, Sara, you’ll have the time of your life. I’m telling you, this is an amazing offer! It’ll be a quick trip, but hey, ” Jonan boasted, “who can refuse a free trip to Paris—and back?”

“And back?” Sara started laughing. “Meaning between here and there, I can somehow ... *earn* ... the return flight? Do you really—”

“Ever heard of Venusberg?”

Sara rubbed the towel through her hair. “I have no idea what you’re talking about ... and if it’s not the name of a band, I don’t want to know.”

“Ha! It’s a flight, Sara. A round-trip to Paris. A private get-together. Very exclusive. Check it out ... our own private pilot ... all the drinks you could possibly consume ... and party favors—all kinds of party favors. *If* you know what I mean. And ... if the flight is smooth, the pilot will join us. Uh-huh, that’s right. And trust me, the pilot is hot. Even I got the hots for the pilot ... and I’m straight.”

Sara was quiet for all of two seconds, and Jonan took that as a cue to continue: “You *should* feel honored. Most women flock to me because of my position in the music biz. But see, I don’t just rig contests and bribe DJs. I have a soul, too. I have needs. Manly needs. That’s why we do this every three months or so. You’ll come home a new woman—I guarantee it! Plenty of men, and plenty of women—if you’re into that. Be ready in thirty minutes. I’m sending a car.”

“Plenty of men and women? Are you honestly asking me to participate in a flying orgy?”

“Yes! You got it! That’s it! I knew you were on board. I knew it. All the crazy, lustful sex you can handle ... thirty-seven thousand feet in the air. You’ll be back by tomorrow night. And you can’t miss the return flight ... ‘cause we never get off the plane!”

Jonan checked his teeth in the mirror, then said, “You can’t say no, Sara. What else ya doin’ ... huh? I bet you got nothin’ goin’ on. I’m sending a car now. What’s your address?”

He put his pen to a pad and stared at the New York City skyline, proud of his persuasive tactics, until he realized Sara had hung up.