

PROLOGUE

Early January, 2469

Sol System — Venus — Sector 1

Khalanasy Vallis Resort

“Arrogance is a poison in the vines of this family. Its grip is so vile that there are times I find myself wishing that the money didn’t exist, that the company didn’t exist. Even before I was a father I prayed to gods most of the rest of mankind has long since stopped believing in that it would not take hold of me or my future children.

Now... There is nothing more painful now than knowing how thoroughly I have failed in that endeavor...”

*-Doctor Kamiya Hiroto,
Private Journals*

Bliss was a private resort suite with a view of the wilds of Venus, Kamiya Keiji had decided.

To be fair, anyone with the fortune of experiencing the sight before him now would have agreed that there wasn’t much that could compare to the scene. Due to the unique composition of its atmosphere and soil, even after its terraforming some 2 or 3 centuries before Venus was a world of color and life unlike any other in the ISCM, within the Sol system or beyond. Whereas most planets humanity had taken hold of had been transformed to match in some close proximity to the lush greenery of Earth, Venus was a place of brilliant pinks and bright reds and oranges. The trees—monolithic, 100-story beasts that had never seen a cutting since their planting—swayed far below

where Keiji stood before the clear smart-glass window of his and Samantha's corner room, an undulating ocean of strangely-colored forest that seemed to breath with the planet. In the distance a line of vibrant blue so artificial it was magnificent indicated the pristine edge of one of the planet's many man-made oceans, and the sky above reflected the distant sun in a wash of gold clouds shadowed with black where the boiling churn was thickest. Keiji could have stood at that window for hours taking in the site. He *had* stood at that window for hours, in fact. It had been under the influence of a multitude of the various hallucinogens and stimulants that were the heart of a healthy silent market in and around the resorts, sure, but even without the drugs he suspected the view would have been enough to keep him enamored for as long as the day was bright.

Unfortunately... that experience would have to wait.

Maybe next time, he thought with a smirk, turning away from the woods of Venus to make for the room's massive bed, upon whose stark white linens the private maid their accommodations included had already laid several potential outfits for his and Samantha's evening plans.

It was their last night planetside. Not because they wanted to leave, of course. In years past the pair of them would have booked the suite indefinitely, heading home—or to whatever next destination fit their fancy—at their leisure. Infuriatingly, however, Keiji's father had very recently become something of a significant pain in the ass, and had made it clear that morning that if the two of them weren't back in Tokyo by evening the next day there would be hell to pay. Given the old man turning a blind eye to their indulgences was regrettably essential for the two of them to enjoy their stylized lifestyle, Keiji and Samantha had begrudgingly acquiesced, though not before setting themselves up for one more night of indulgence.

First would be dinner in one of the private rooms at The Valley, the Khalanasy Vallis Resort best restaurant, where even a member of the Kamiya family had a grease the right hands to get in last minute. After that, there were still several clubs in the south

tower the pair of them hadn't yet had a chance to visit, and they planned to change that before the evening was over. Finally—if they were still functional by the time the next morning—there was sunrise party in one of the permanent penthouse suites Samantha had gotten them invitations too. Keiji had no idea whose home it was—nor, he suspected, did his wife—but it hardly mattered. They were on the list, and being on the list was all Keiji had really ever cared about.

The blue one, he decided, bending to pluck the silky azure suit from the bed and holding it up to examine further. Satisfied, he pulled up his NOED and turned to face the window again, inputting eye commands even as he held up the jacket and pants. In a blink the sight of Venus in all its colorful glory vanished, replaced by a perfect reflection of the crisp white room. Keiji took a moment—as he always tended to—to appraise himself, smiling into the mirror. He might not have been a User like his father, but even despite that and being 45 years old, he didn't think anyone would scoff at the frame he cut. He was tall and fit, with jet-black hair that wouldn't fade for some decades yet if the family doctors could help it, and his slate-grey eyes—identical to every born member of the Kamiya family lineage—were as piercing as they'd ever been. Even if his father had never done much of anything else for him all his life, at the very least Keiji could thank the old bastard for his handsome frame and good hea—

CRASH!

Keiji jumped at the sudden sound of what sounded like glass shattering in the hall outside, nearly dropping his suit to the polished marble floor. Before he could even begin to wonder what the hell was going on, though, there came the muted sounds of a woman yelling and the rushed *clack-clack* of heels on stone. At once Keiji suspected who it was, and he frowned. For someone to be so loud they could be heard through the subtle muffling tech built into the resort walls...

His suspicion was confirmed not 5 seconds later when the suite door flew open with a *crash* outside in the living area.

“KEIJI!” Samantha was almost howling, sounding furious. “*KEIJI!*”

Tossing the suit back on the bed, Keiji hurried to bedroom door.

“I’m in here. What’s wrong?”

Samantha was a sight, even angry as she looked now. Then again, she was angry often enough for him to be used to it. She was of Old American decent, with light skin that held the hint of a handsome tan year-round, and long, red-pink hair that was currently wound in a pretty bun atop her head. Her eyes too, were pink, but specked with shattered black that had always made Keiji think of neon universe.

Right now, though, those eyes were ablaze with a fire that would have burned out any stars he ever saw in them.

“Keiji, she put in for a transfer!” Samantha continued to yell as she stalked towards him, hitching her green-blue dress up above her black heels so as not to trip on the hem. “A *transfer!*”

Keiji blinked at this, not understanding a word.

“She...? Who...? Transfer...?” he repeated, trying and failing to follow. “What are you talking about? I thought you said you were headed to the restaurant early to grab a drink with Aarna and that new guy she met at the pool the other—”

“Are you not *listening?*!” Samantha interrupted him with a shriek, looking positively demented. “She put in for a *transfer!* You think I was going to sit around for some shitty cocktail after that?!”

“Samantha,” Keiji growled, starting to get irritated himself now and stepping fully out of the room to face his wife. “You aren’t make any sense. *Who* put in for a transfer? What are you *talking* about?”

Samantha swelled with irritation, looking all the more livid that he wasn’t following her poor explanation.

“Sarah!” she hissed back. “Your *daughter!* Sarah. Has. Put In. For. A. *TRANSFER!*”

Finally Keiji froze, understanding at last. For a long moment he gaped at his wife, having trouble registering what she'd said despite her poignant spelling out of the situation.

“I’m sorry,” he snarled at last, feeling his anger spike. “She *what?*!”