

The Queen and The King of the SpaceHighways

B06 ~ Venus Beach

Gentle caresses awake me...

My eyes slowly focus on Aia's gentle smile.

"Good morning, dear," I say after a long yawn.

"Morning, love," Aia giggles and moves to lie on me.

We kiss gently, a loving kiss that grows into a passionate one...

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"Ahh~" Aia sighs emotionally, "that felt good..."

"Yeah," I chuckle.

"Seems like we can't stop fucking like rabbits," Aia giggles sultry.

"Seems so," I chuckle again.

"Ugh~ Is it really okay? I mean... Me being so—"

"Sexy? Sure, it's okay," I say, wearing a smirk.

"Dummy~" she giggles and punches me teasingly.

"Ouch!" I playfully retort.

Aia snuggles against my right and lets her fingers brush over my chest.

"I mean..." she sighs. "Yeah, you've told me the other day that's okay, but..." I look at her and brush some locks of hair off her face. "Thanks, darling," she purrs. "I mean... I'm always horny as fuck now that we finally had sex..."

"Aia..." I sigh a bit moved but wear a gentle smile, "it's okay. Being sexually active isn't really a catastrophe, right?"

“Oh, you~” Aia giggles. “Even so... Is it normal? I mean, us having so much sex right after starting to date?”

“Oh, actually, it is...” I confirm. “At least, in my experience.”

“Oh? How so?”

“Let’s see... We had quite some sexual tension between us for a time, right?” She nods while we keep exchanging caresses. “Now that we finally took the step to have sex, we are bound to recover all that tension...”

“Hmm...”

“That’s my impression in our case. True it is, that I’ve always had such experiences with lovers before, a lot of sex just after starting dating.”

“But that much?”

“Well... You’re quite unique after all,” I say, smiling and caressing her scalp.

“Oh, you~” she giggles again. “Will it go away? Will we get bored of this?”

“I don’t believe so, Aia. We’ll always find something new before we get bored.”

“You think so?” she asks, wearing a smirk. “Did it ever happened to you? I mean, to get bored from sex?” she adds.

“No...” I sigh. She looks at me, questioning. “I’ve never had a relationship lasting long enough that I could get bored...”

“Oh, Kira... Sorry.”

“Don’t worry, love. And... being with you, I doubt that I’d ever get bored,” I chuckle and play with her beautiful hair.

“Oh, you~” She punches me playfully. “Hmm... What do you want to do today? As much I’d love to stay in bed all day and fuck, I want to do something together with you, outside.”

“Living a couple’s daily life?” I ask chuckling. She nods. “Hmm... Now that you mention it... I haven’t been to a beach in ages, and never since I’ve awakened...”

“Wanna see me in a bikini?” she purrs sultry.

“Yeah...” I laugh. “Ah... shit... I forgot... We’re already in autumn... The beach nearby could be cold...”

“And too crowded...” Aia sighs. “We wouldn’t have a chance to enjoy ourselves.”

“Damn... What options do we have?”

“Venus?” Aia suggests with a bright smile.

“Venus?” I ask back.

“Yeah, there’s a huge beach resort and a smaller but public beach open right now.”

“Sounds great!” I almost jump up. “I’ve never been to Venus. Ah... But I don’t own a swimsuit...”

“Then let’s buy some after breakfast, shall we? I wanna have some new ones, too.”

“Perfect!” I laugh.

Occupying the pillion of Aia’s nifty bike, and holding on her, we flit towards the nearest mall.

“Wow...”

“Huge, right?” Aia giggles.

“I really can’t get used to these huge thematic malls of nowadays...”

“I believe you. I don’t like ’em either, but they do their job.” Aia sighs as she reads the map of the vast apparel mall. “There... Sea & Sun. A fitting name,” she giggles. “Let’s go.”

“So many swimsuits...” I blurt out in awe.

“Right?” Aia giggles. “Hmm... Me first?” she ask wearing a sultry smirk. I nod and laugh. “Okay, help me to find some, will you?”

I confirm and put myself to the task to select some nice swimsuits for Aia to try on. Too many... But thanks to Aia’s favorite color, blue, I can rule out a vast quantity of options. Fuck me... Each is sexier than the other...

Aia has implied that I should find some sexy ones, but I'll get some more conservatives too, just in case. Hmm... How do I feel about watching her showing off to others? Our conversation from last night comes back... I don't know... Would I really want to open up our relationship? In other times, I would have accepted without a doubt. How is it that I finally found a partner I fully trust, I start having these doubts? I sigh deeply while looking for blue swimsuits.

“This fitting room is great...” Aia points at one, which clearly states that it is for couples. Really? A fitting room for two? A sign reminds us that sex is not allowed in these rooms... Fuck me... “Coming or going?” Aia giggles at my hesitation.

“Coming, coming...” I laugh.

“Okay...” she giggles again and starts to undress. “Oh... I forgot to bring my try-on set... Could you buy me one?”

“Try-on set?” I ask her stupefied.

“*Hm~* A special, transparent bra and pantie set, just for trying on underwear and swimsuits...”

“Oh! Okay, I'll get you one.”

“Get one for you, too,” she giggles. “They are usually near the checkouts.”

“Okay. Be right back.”

I give Aia a peck before leaving the fitting room.

Just as Aia instructed, I find a big rack labeled with ‘fitting sets’ standing tall near the checkouts.

Fuck me... there are so many. And all are really transparent! Hmm... it seems they are arranged by species-type and gender, then sizes. Okay... I know her sizes by now and find her a fitting set. I find one for me too... are these *things* strange

I knock on the fitting room's door.

“It's me, Kira...” I say.

“Come in,” I hear through the door. “Ah! Wait! Gotta unlock the door first...” The door opens, and Aia’s happy face emerges. “Missed me much?”

I give her a peck while she pulls me into the fitting room.

“Yeah...” I chuckle. “Here... I was told that they are already sterilized and clean to use.”

“Yup! Thank you~” she sings happily and gives me another peck. “It’s done so we can use ’em right away. Let me put it on.” Aia opens the pack and starts to giggle. “Oh, Kira~”

“What? Did I buy something else?”

“No... But you got the sexiest one...” she keeps on laughing. “These are pasties instead of a bra...”

“Shit... I’ll get you another one...”

“No, no...” Aia giggles. “It’s okay. These will work quite fine.”

We try a myriad of sexy and strange swimsuits until we find some we both like. Aia ends up with several bikinis and a sporty one-piece. She will wear this one-piece today. It’s actually quite revealing... The front is open from beneath her navel up to her breasts. The sides are also open, as is part of her back. According to her, it hides enough.

For me, I ended up buying some briefs which look similar to the traditional Japanese fundoshi.

Giggling and laughing, we leave the changing booth. Aia drops our discarded suits into a designated basket, and we look around.

“Sunscreen...” I say pensively.

“Yeah... Well... I don’t really need some...” Aia sighs.

“Really?” I ask astonished.

“Dunno why, but I can’t get a tan...” she sighs again.

“Me neither, Aia,” I say, trying to reassure her while laying my hand on her shoulder and gently caressing her. “But be better safe than sorry, right?”

“Right,” Aia giggles. “Plus, you can oil me up,” she adds with a sultry smirk.

“Yeah,” I chuckle. “You too...”

“Oh, yeah,” she giggles again. “You’re right, Venus is quite near the Sun, better safe than sorry.”

We look through the myriad of sunscreens, creams, oils, and lotions until Aia finds one she thinks is the best for us two.

“Beach towels...” I say pensively again after we got our sunscreen.

“*Hm~*” Aia hums in affirmation. “Better get some nice ones. I don’t mind using those from home, but it’s a pain to clean ’em afterwards. They’re not thought to be used on a beach.”

“Okay.” I shrug at her comment. It shouldn’t be a problem at all. But I won’t go against her. After all, I suggested it.

“Kira, darling, look...” Aia points at a huge towel for two. It’s two by two meters. “Would be nice to lie down on it, right?”

“True, love,” I confirm and look through the many on display. “Oh! Aia, look...”

“Cool! A black to blue gradient... Our colors...” She smiles radiantly.

“Dibs on the blue side,” I call out childishly.

“Oh, you, Kira~” Aia giggles. “*Hm~* let’s take the other’s color.” She laughs charmingly. “Then, have this one too...” She points at a big blue towel.

“And you, this one...” I show her a black one.

“Sure,” she giggles again.

“Now we should have everything, right?” I ask Aia.

“We got our swimwear, towels, and sunscreen... The beers and the mini-fridge are ready at home... *Hmm...*”

“A shower kit?”

“Good idea, have you seen some?”

“Right in front of you...” I point at some shelves filled with shower kits similar to those we use on route after running out of our stuff.

“Oh! Right!” Aia laughs.

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We flit back to *our* home on Aia’s bike while I carry the backpack filled with our recent acquisitions.

As the door to the apartment closes, Aia already undresses her biker one-piece.

“Aia, dear, you forgot to take your try-out pasties off...” I observe.

“Ouch... Right... the thong too...” She peeks her tongue out. “I’ll wear the swimsuit under my clothes. I suggest you do too.”

“Okay. I suppose it will be hot there, right?”

“Yeah... Wear something light.”

“Great.”

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“How do we get to Venus?” I ask Aia while strapping myself into her Ferrari’s pilot’s seat.

“Per Gate. There’s a new one to Venus,” she explains.

“Right... I read about it the other day, it happened while I was in hospital...” I confirm.

“Yeah, it will save us several hours.”

“Neat...”

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After a two hours ride through the Jump, I’m rendered speechless by the sight of Venus. It definitely does not look like the pictures I’ve seen in my old times. It looks similar to Gaia... A blue and green planet. Well... more in different aquamarine hues...

The AR shows a vector to our destination on Venus. It’s clearly on the sunny side of the planet.

“Will we be able to see a sunset?” I ask Aia.

“*Hmm...* I’m afraid not... We would have to spend about forty Gaian days for it to happen...” Aia explains.

“Wow... Right... If I remember well, Venus has a shorter year than Gaia. And... its days are about a Venusian year, right?”

“Almost right, Kira,” Aia giggles. “You’re right in the year part. But the days are about fifty Gaian days nowadays.”

“How’s that possible?” I ask dumbfounded.

“It had to do with its terraformation... Dunno exactly how the process works, but it was needed to maintain life on the planet. Anyways, it seems that all the substances injected into the core to reinforce its magnetic field also accelerated the planet’s rotation...” Aia explains after a shrug.

“Wow... Incredible...”

“Also, it’s always slightly clouded, more like mist in the higher atmosphere. That gives the planet a refreshing air about it.” Aia giggles at my visible state of awe. “In a strange combination of Venus’ natural soil, endemic vegetation, and this mist, everything has a light aquamarine shade on it.”

“That’s...”

“Incredible, right?” Aia giggles while I nod.

I land on a designated parking lot Aia directed me to.

Opening the door, I’m welcomed by a pleasant warmth.

“Wow...”

“Lovely weather, isn’t it?” Aia asks happily.

“It is,” I confirm.

I fetch the fridge-backpack and one of our beach bags, while Aia takes the other bag.

With taken hands, we wander along a nice promenade. It’s quite empty...

“Most people are at the beach right now,” Aia explains. “This walkway is only thought for this public parking. I’ve read that the original intention was to make a mall along this place, but never materialized...”

“The views are clearly nicer,” I observe.

“True...” Aia giggles, then sighs. I look at her questioning as I try to interpret her sigh. “Ah... Just thinking...” she giggles. “Why is it that ever since we met, we had such stupid confrontations with some people?”

“Which one do you mean, honey?” I ask. “The truckers? The racists? The anti-IE? The—”

“All of them...” Aia interrupts me and sighs. “Since we’re dating... The anti-IE, like the old woman the other day. Carles, the whole of my life... Then all those we met on our hauls... And some truckers...”

“Right...” I also sigh. “Remember the day I admitted being the Phoenix?”

“As it was yesterday,” Aia giggles and smiles brightly. “Right... there was the Younger Cole...”

“In the case of some of the truckers and other workers related to our job, I think I get it...”

“What do you mean, Kira?”

“You are *the* best trucker in the Gaian sector, if not ever. You are beautiful, no doubt. And, you are the most famous one around. Almost everybody fawns over you, you are their goddess, their queen. But you didn’t accept those advances... And... suddenly, I appear...” I sigh.

“*Hmm...* Makes sense... Since you came into my life, I threw myself onto you...” Aia giggles. “Right... You mean, that many got jealous of you?”

“That’s one reason I can think of...” I let her hand free and hug her waist. She does the same with me. “At least, in regard to those who attacked me specifically when we were together.”

“Right... You mean that those who were frustrated by my lack of interest in them, attacked you to free their frustration? Even if they ended as a punching bag?”

“Yeah, the like.”

“I get that the anti-IE attack us... Even if I don’t understand these sentiments.”

“Neither do I...”

“Yeah... Thanks, darling,” Aia giggles. “Ah... we’re almost here...”

“Wow!” I’m speechless... A long promenade along a vast beach opens up in front of us.

“This is the quieter part of the beach,” Aia explains. “The other end of the public beach is adjoined to a beach resort which shares some facilities to the public. Most people go there, to mingle.”

“This part is the best,” I laugh.

“Right?” she giggles. “Thought you’d like this better. Let’s find a nice spot, shall we, love?”

“Of course, darling.”

The beach is terrific. Its sand has a pale aquamarine hue that fuses into a darker aquamarine color where wet. The water has a deep cobalt blue hint, while the rock formations are turquoise. Everything has a similar hue... It’s mesmerizing.

Along the promenade, there are street vendors and some facilities. Further down, it looks like more and more structures appear, but we aren’t interested in them.

Aia guides me to a beach umbrella rental stall, and we get one for a fair price. We follow the promenade towards the empty end of the beach until we have to walk on sand.

After taking our shoes off, we keep walking towards a rock formation where absolutely no people are. Nice feeling... I missed walking barefoot on sand so much...

“I take you’ve been here before, right?” I ask Aia.

“Yeah, several times, with my parents. They brought me here for the first time when I was about ten. I love this beach since then. Ah... there’s my favorite spot,” she adds, giggling.

Aia sticks the parasol into the sand and... presses a button... To my amazement, the shade opens up, and the stick rushes deeper into the sand.

Aia giggles at my awe. “Never seen an automatic beach umbrella? Oh, right... Sorry...” She smiles and explains, “These umbrellas anchor themselves into the sand and won’t fly away, not even in a strong wind.”

“Amazing...”

Still taken aback, I spread out the big beach towel we bought earlier under the shade. Meanwhile, Aia puts our bags in order under the parasol.

“Finally!” Aia exclaims and takes her summer dress off. I follow suit and undress bar the swim-fundoshi. “Those thunderbolts near your package surely indicate well what’s hidden,” Aia laughs.

“Oh, yeah? Then your swimsuit should have sparks and bolts around your tits and pussy,” I joke back.

“Oh~ Aren’t we fierily passionate?” Aia giggles lusciously.

“We are, honey,” I laugh.

“And we love it,” she adds sultry.

Everything is ready to enjoy ourselves.

Aia lies down on her belly and throws me the bottle of sun oil we bought.

“Oil me up, darling?” she coos.

“Sure,” I chuckle.

“Let’s swim,” Aia suggests while standing up.

“And the sunscreen?” I ask.

“It’s waterproof for three hours. C’mon, Kira...” she explains and pulls me up.

“Cool,” I say and stand up too.

“Last one makes dinner!” Aia shouts and runs towards the water while giggling.

“Hey! Not fair!” I laugh and run after her.

Aia runs into the water way before me.

“I won!” she shouts but stumbles into the water and falls.

I laugh while she emerges from the water, wearing a grin.

“Wow! The water is warm!” I exclaim surprised.

“Yup!” Aia giggles and moves her wet hair from her face. “Nice, isn’t it?”

“Incredible!”

“Let’s swim a bit further,” Aia suggests.

“Ah! And our stuff?” I look back at our towels where our things are.

“There’s a lifeguard tower nearby. They have it controlled,” Aia says, pointing back at the beach.

“Cool. Wait! Do you mean they could have seen us?”

“Most likely... not,” Aia says, wearing a smirk and giggles.

“Aia...”

“We were behind our sunshade. Just out of the line of sight. Don’t worry, dear. I made sure of it.”

“Aren’t you prepared...” I joke.

“Yup! Now let’s swim,” Aia laughs and dives into the water again.

I follow her as she swims out into the deeper water. Once we reach the point where we can’t find the ground beneath our feet, we swim following the coastline.

“That feels great...” I say after a gratifying sigh.

“Hmm?” Aia asks me with a simple hum.

“I haven’t swum for ages...”

Aia explodes into laughter and stops moving on.

“What?” I ask perplexed.

“Oh, darling...” Aia giggles. “You shouldn’t use this expression so lightly.”

“Ah!” I also start to laugh. “Right... it’s too literal...”

“Yeah... You haven’t gone swimming for centuries, more than a thousand years now, don’t you?”

“Right...” I chuckle.

We keep on swimming for a while.

“Kira?”

“Yeah?”

“Why did you fall for me?” Aia suddenly asks.

I stop and turn towards her. “Why?” I ask her dumbfounded. “Why should there be a reason?” I ask back.

“I... I’m a strange alien...”

“You are a strong woman.”

“A freak...”

“A lovely woman.”

“A—”

“Aia, darling...” I embrace her as well as I can. “I fell for you because of all of you.”

“Kira...” she sighs happily.

“If I really had to enumerate all possible reasons for loving you, I’d never find the right words for it, or I would fill volumes of books.”

“Love~” she smiles brightly.

We kiss as good as we can while keeping ourselves afloat.

“So difficult...” Aia giggles, breaking our challenging kiss.

“Yeah,” I also laugh.

Aia turns around to swim back towards our place.

“I can’t think of an exact reason either,” Aia says. “I simply fell in love with you. Well, it’s more complex than that...”

“I know,” I chuckle.

“You’ve shown me so many new things I’ve never imagined to see...”

“Like?”

“How a real gentleman acts,” Aia giggles. “I mean, how you act around me. The way you treated me ever since we’ve met. Your caring way to help me with my problems. Your gentle way to introduce me to sex. Really... everything.” Aia smiles brightly as she stops swimming forward for a moment. “You’ve shown me things from the past. Like all those great movies and books. You confide in me with your own problems. You know when to intervene and when to let me handle difficulties... I could go on for an eternity...”

“Aia, my love...” I say, moved. “Yeah... You’ve also shown me a lot of stuff. In fact, everything about nowadays. How to live in nowadays’ society. You’ve shown me to reach the outer space, to reach the stars. You were there, when I’d awaken... Aia, you’ve always been there to show me new stuff.”

“And Enya, Jim, and your other friends.”

“Right... But you’ve shown me more intimate things.”

“Oh, Kira...” she giggles.

We’re reaching the rock formation bordering this side of the beach. Aia keeps swimming towards it.

“There...” she suddenly says.

“Huh? What?” I ask.

“Take a deep breath and follow me,” she simply says and disappears below the surface.

I do as said and also dive into the warm water.

Where is Aia? I spot the blueish alien diving towards a fissure in the rocks. I follow her. To my amazement, Aia enters the small cave, and I follow suit. Right after entering the cave, I see light from above, and Aia swims up.

I gasp for air as I emerge from the water.

“Wow!” I exclaim, mesmerized.

“Incredible, right?” Aia smiles brightly. “It’s my little secret...”

We're inside an ample cave with a wide hole in its top, which lets the sun's light flood it. Plants similar to fern and moss cover the walls of the cavern. A small beach lies nearby.

Aia giggles at my amazement and takes my hand and pulls me towards her. I notice that my feet have found solid ground. She climbs a small rock and reaches the small beach. I follow her, still in awe.

"Where was it? Right..." Aia chuckles.

"What are you doing?" I ask her as she starts to dig at a specific spot of the beach.

"I should have buried it around here..." she simply states.

"What?"

"Found it!" Aia exclaims, making me jolt in surprise.

I look perplexed at the small box she holds in her hands.

"What is it?" I ask, intrigued.

"A time capsule," she explains. "I've buried this the last time I came here with my parents."

"Wow! But why do you take it out now? Shouldn't a time capsule stay buried for the longest time?"

"Because I've timed it," she says, wearing a bright smile. "To the day I bring the guy I want to share my life with..." she declares, blushing deeply.

"Aia..." I say, moved.

She opens the small metallic box, and several neatly folded letters appear.

"I wrote these letters during different moments of my childhood and teens, even adulthood," Aia explains. "They are meant to remind me of my dreams. I've buried or hidden these letters for every dream I had. When one of 'em materialized, I recovered 'em and added a new one. Then, I hid 'em again."

"Aia, dear..." I embrace her. "Then, your last dream..."

"Was meeting someone like you, darling," she confirms, beaming in happiness and hugging me tightly.

We kiss passionately inside the small cave.

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“What will you do with your time capsule now?” I ask Aia.

“I’ll write my next dream up and hide the capsule again,” she explains happily.

“I think I know what your next dream is, darling.”

“Yeah...” Aia gives me a beautiful smile. “A child... Having a child with you.”

“We share this dream, darling,” I kiss her cheek while she sighs emotionally.

“I’ll let you read ’em first.”

“Aia...”

“I always read the old dreams before writing new ones down. This time, I’ll let you read ’em. In fact, this week, several of my dreams, including old ones, became true. All thanks to you, love. Of course, I let you read ’em.” She hugs me tightly.

“Aia...”

“I want you to read ’em. I want you to have a glimpse into my past. I know there are some embarrassing dreams in there, but you are the only one who can read ’em.”

“Love...” I lie her hand on hers. “I’ll share my old dreams with you too.”

We kiss briefly before deciding it’s a good time to go back to our towels and to tan a bit.

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Lying under the sun, we *toast* our bodies for a good while.

“A beer?” I ask Aia while I crawl towards the mini-fridge backpack.

“Yeah, thanks, love.”

We open the cans of Martian beers while we sit together.

“I always longed for this...” Aia sighs.

“A beer?” I joke.

“Dummy...” she giggles. “Being together with someone who understands me. Someone to whom I can confide in my deepest desires and problems. With whom I can simply sit together and enjoy a beer without having to be careful what I say or do...”

“What do you mean? The last part...”

“Ah, yeah... I mean that you won’t misread my actions or words and infer that I want something from you.”

“I think I get it. However, I’ve to confess, I always have been confused by your signals... That’s perhaps why I didn’t infer too much...”

“Yeah... most likely...” Aia sighs. “That’s surely because I lied my defenses down around you. I mean, I never hid my feelings nor...” she sighs, “Well... I did some strange things, I’ve told you, haven’t I?” I confirm with a nod. “Now I can truly be myself, even in public.”

“Aia, you can always be yourself. I’d hate you’d have to hide your being. In fact, I’m really happy to find new things about you every day.”

“Kira~” Aia sighs happily.

We empty the cans and light a fag each.

“Wanna lie under the sun for a while more, or wanna wander around a bit?” Aia asks.

“I think I’ve been lying around enough... But what do we do with our stuff?” I ask back.

“There are some lockers near the avenue towards the parking ground...” she suggests.

“Then’s set,” I laugh.

We gather our stuff and the reliable automatic sunshade. After returning the parasol, we walk towards the lockers.

There, we decide to carry only a small bag with our terminals and Aia’s personal toiletries, just in case. We opt to continue wearing our swimsuits and go barefoot as the weather is absolutely lovely.

Around five minutes later, we find a small stall selling about everything you could need for the beach. We opt to buy some cheap flip-flops. The floor is getting too hot for us to keep on barefoot.

Hugging each others' waist, we wander along the promenade until we find an ice-cream stall. Knowing Aia, I guide us there, and we buy a cone each.

Happily, Aia enjoys her ice-cream while we go on with joined hands.

"Is there something you miss from your times?" she suddenly asks.

"I suppose..." I sigh, "my parents..."

"Darling..." She strengthens her grip on my hand.

"They had died in a car accident two years before I got cryopreserved..."

"I'm so sorry... I shouldn't—"

"Don't worry, love. You didn't know. It's something I've never told you..." I sigh again. "I suppose... they were part of my reasons to accept that experiment too... Their sudden loss..."

"Darling..." Aia wraps her arm around my waist. "But..."

"If I didn't accept that experiment, I wouldn't have met you..." I confirm.

"Yeah... True. But... about your parents... Wanna talk about 'em?"

"Not now... But thanks."

"You're right. Perhaps, we should try to find out if their graves are still there... We could meet 'em, together."

"That... that would be nice..." I sigh, somehow relieved.

"*Hm*~ Anything for you," she giggles gently.

"Other things I miss..." I think aloud. "Kathy..."

"Love..."

"However... I don't know if Kathy is from then or from now..." I sigh.

"What do you mean, love?" Aia asks, astonished.

“I only got to know about her true feelings after I have awakened... Is this something from my past, or from my present? I don't know...”

“Kira...” She takes a deep breath. “I think she is both. She's from your past and your present. You still love her, don't you?”

“Ye—yeah...” I stutter.

“Then she's from your present too. So are your parents. As long as you are alive, they are alive in your memories.”

“Aia... You're right...” I sigh emotionally.

“And about Kathy, yeah... she's more than alive in your memories. I was there when you've met her again, after all. I know that you love her, and it's okay.”

“It is?”

“I would be disappointed if you weren't, Kira. Even if it took you a thousand years to realize it. If you'd run away from it, I would be bitterly disappointed. More so after reading her letter addressed to you. Her love for you was... as deep as mine is for you, I think.”

“Aia...”

“I have this feeling... She forgave you for not being with her because she loved you so much.”

“Do you think so?”

“Yeah. And I believe that you should forgive yourself too, for not being with her.”

“It will take more time, I fear...” I sigh deeply.

“I know that you will. I know that I won't forget her. I'd wish I could meet her somehow... But rest assured, her memories are still kept well alive in Perth.”

“Right... you're so right, Aia.” I take a deep breath.

We stop before a group of buskers playing a mix of Somewhere Over the Rainbow and Simple Gifts on a piano and two cellos. I sing along the song while a tear runs down my cheek. Aia hugs me tightly and dries my tear with her slender fingers.

As the song ends, the only girl of the buskers asks me if I know the song. Of course, I do. One of the guys asks me if I could sing it with them.

Aia gently nudges me and hints I should do it. I accept the offer and take the guitar standing against the balustrade.

Sitting with them, I start playing, trying to remember the notes. Emotions begin to flow as I begin to sing first with a hoarse voice, then trying to reach the higher notes of Israel Kamakawiwo'ole. I remember his medley with What a Wonderful World fondly. For some reason, I want to sing it too... I hope the busker guys won't freak out if I do... They don't, but play marvelously with me.

Aia claps her hands in rhythm at my side. Yes, what a wonderful world...

I only notice the gathered crowd as we receive an ovation after finishing the medley.

"Wonderful~" Aia charms and hugs me tightly. "I didn't know you play the guitar."

"Truly wonderful," the other busker guy confirms.

The buskers thank me for playing and singing with them. They even ask me to join their band. Sadly, I have to tell them that I'm not interested in a musical career. Downcast, they say not to worry, but that they loved my singing and playing.

Leaving the musicians behind, I sigh again from all the emotions the song has evoked in me.

"Kira~" Aia purrs. "That was wonderful. Why don't we buy a guitar? You could teach me, and we could sing together, as a hobby."

"Yeah... Why not?" I smile, but close my eyes for a moment. "These songs brought so much back..."

"Good ones, I hope." She shakes her head. "Surely good ones. You couldn't have sung 'em so beautifully if they were bad memories."

"You're right, Aia," I confirm and hug her back.

“Something still weights on you...” she says. “You wanted to say something before we met the buskers.”

“Right...” I sigh. “It’s something that happened just the day before Crushmont...”

Aia looks at me intrigued, even if her face distorted briefly by hearing that dreaded name. I tell her about the conversation I’ve had with Uordah.

“That old man... has moved me a lot...” I conclude.

“I see... And agree with him. Have you ever met him again?”

“No... And I’d love to meet him again to thank him. Do you agree with everything he said?”

“Yeah. Why? Ah! Because of Enya?”

“Yeah...”

“Sure. I fully agree with what he said. About her with you... well, we still have to chat with her about it, right? So, that’s for then.”

How can she take Enya’s involvement with me so easily? Every time I try to figure out how we could make it work, I freak out...

“Right...” I sigh.

“Darling... Please, don’t let stuff that you can’t solve by yourself torment you. We said the other day that we will talk it through, the three of us. Until then, don’t try to find hypothetical solutions to problems that might not even exist.”

“You’re right, Aia...” I sigh yet again.

We keep walking the beautiful promenade hugging each other’s waist.

“Oh! Earrings...” Aia notices a street vendor selling jewelry. “Are they beautiful!”

“All hand-made,” the Īiha vendor proudly declares.

“Impressive...” I also confirm. “Oh... Aia, darling....”

“Beautiful!” Aia exclaims excitedly at the earring ensemble I point at.

The earring ensemble is formed by five silvery rings, which are joined by a delicately crafted chain from which small planets and stars hang. It would look marvelous on her.

“How much are they?” I ask the Īiha guy. He gives me a quite low price. “Okay, then we’ll have them, right, Aia?”

“I’d love to,” she confirms.

“I have disinfectant and a small box for your earrings, if you want to wear these right now,” the vendor offers.

“That would be perfect,” Aia says, wearing a bright smile. “What are they made of?”

“Gynkx, it’s a hypoallergenic metal. It has the same look as silver, but does not discolor nor fade,” he explains.

I pay the good artisan while Aia already takes her five earrings and studs off her left pointy earlobe. Afterward, I help her putting the new ensemble on, once I have carefully disinfected them.

“They look marvelous on you,” the Īiha exclaims.

“Truly, they are a masterpiece,” I confirm.

“Wow... they are...” Aia marvels as she inspects herself in the hand-mirror he handed her. “Thank you, darling!” she exclaims, hugging, and kissing me.

We thank the artisan and leave his stall behind.

“You don’t stop giving me gifts,” Aia observes and giggles. “The dresses, the jewelry, the movies, books...”

“Perhaps, I’m overdoing it a bit...” I sigh while she hugs me again by the waist. “Perhaps, it’s my way of trying to compensate for all you’ve been doing for me since we’ve met.”

“No, no...” Aia shakes her head. “Each and every one of your gifts were given by heart. I know it, I feel it,” she says, lying her free hand on her heart. “I treasure each of ’em. And you’ve given me way more... appreciation, care, friendship, and love... I treasure ’em, by heart.”

“I can’t disregard any of your wonderful gifts. You never had an ulterior motive while giving ’em. Even if they are a simple way of yours to say *thank you*, without uttering it. So, don’t brood over it, okay?”

“Yeah... You’re right, as usual,” I chuckle and hug her back.

Aia takes my hand on her waist and places it on her bare left ass cheek...

“You can hold me here too...” she giggles sultry. “Most couples do it...” She points forward.

“This doesn’t mean we have to do it too...” I sigh. “I don’t have the need to show you off, nor that I consider you my troph—”

“I know, dummy...” she interrupts me and giggles again. “I know that you don’t see me as your trophy girl, nor that I am one. That’s why I don’t mind. Uh...” she looks at me shyly and blushing, “I actually like it. I mean, you holding me there... But only you.”

“Aia... If you wish...” I say as grab her ass cheek.

“Yup!” she purrs sultry. “Just you~”

“I’m getting hungry... Why don’t we have a nice meal nearby?” Aia suggests.

“Good idea. I’m feeling hungry too. How about that terrace restaurant?” I point at one which stands right above the waterfront.

“Looks good. Let’s.”

We take the escalator to reach the upper floor, which seems to have splendid sight over the Venusian ocean.

“Nobody at the reception...” I observe.

“Must be free to choose your table...” She shrugs.

We find a free table for two right in the first line of sight. Great! The few patrons look at us either with disregard or disdain... Whatever... They also wear swimsuits, just like us.

Just as we sat down, a young-looking waiter rushes towards us.

“Excuse me, ma’am, sir... but this terraces is for VIPs only,” he hastily explains.

“And? We are VIPs,” I retort coolly.

“Bu—”

“Indeed, they are...” the waiter is interrupted by an elderly Felii.

“Ma—Master...” the server stutters.

“Welcome to the Venus Beach Terrace, ma’am Asdiekx, mister Matsumoto; the Queen and the King of the Space Highways,” he greets and bows to us. “It is a great honor and pleasure for us to delight you with the finest cuisine from Venus.”

“Ups...” Aia giggles. “We’ve been found out...”

“Do not worry, most of our patrons wish to enjoy their meals and time in anonymity. We praise ourselves for providing it. I am Waqniz, proud co-owner of the Venus Beach Terrace, the most exclusive VIP restaurant on Venus, and one of the few restaurants having received de Nova Seal of Quality in the Sol System.” He snips his fingers and addresses the stunned waiter, “Please fetch the VVIP menus for ma’am Asdiekx and mister Matsumoto.”

“At once, Master!” The waiter jolts and hurries away.

“Do you wish to enjoy a meal or just have some drinks?” the elderly Felii asks.

“A full meal,” Aia confirms.

“Then you may choose your main beverage. I would recom—” Waqniz suddenly halts his words, “I am truly sorry for sticking my nose into—” he interrupts himself again, “But, do my eyes deceive me? Ma’am, sir... are those engagement bands?” His emotions flourish visibly, and his tail dances wildly in excitement.

“Figured out again...” Aia giggles.

“But is still a secret,” I add.

“Oh, oh~ Marvelous!” he joyfully sings. “Congratulations! Then I certainly know what beverage I should offer you. Would you love to try the one and only Venus Blue? It is *the* finest champagne from the Sol System.”

“We would love to try it,” Aia says with a bright smile.

“If you don’t mind to wait a moment, I will be right back,” the Felii gleams in happiness.

“Weren’t you brave,” Aia giggles. “For saying we’re VIP.”

“It’s correct, isn’t it?” I chuckle. “Being famous should have some perks, after all.”

“Right...” she laughs.

The server arrives. He is still uncomfortable... “I am truly sorry, ma’am, sir, for not having recognized you...” he says, bowing deeply towards us. An inch more, and he would have hit his forehead against the table’s edge...

“Don’t worry,” I say.

“Yeah, that happens...” Aia adds. “Why don’t you recommend us a nice meal?”

“Oh!” He straightens himself again, clearly relieved. “I would recommend you heartily a *K’qwied’hs*, it’s a local fish to share.”

“Sounds marvelous...” Aia confirms.

“Does it go well with the Venus Blue champagne?” I ask him.

“It’s the ideal complement,” he affirms.

“My young helper is right,” Waqniz confirms as he reaches our table with a huge bottle and a cooler. “And without wanting to vaunt, my soulmates make the best in the Sol System.”

“Master, thank you,” the server happily receives the compliment. Returning to us, he suggests, “The preparation of the *K’qwied’hs* is quite laborious and will take about an hour. Would you like a platter of local appetizers? It is a selection of only the best, two of each.”

“That would be great,” I say and nod.

“Truly,” Aia gleams and adds, “We’d love to try ’em.”

“My thanks, I will get your order at once,” the server says, bows to us again, and swiftly disappears.

“Tsk-tsk...” the Felii shakes his head while following his eyes after the waiter. “He is a good and hardworking lad,” he returns to us, “but I am afraid that he has a bad photographic memory... I am sorry for the inconvenience, ma’am, sir.”

“Don’t worry, he hasn’t treated us wrongly,” I say.

“Anyway,” he says, “I can assure you that no one from my staff will release your secret.” He smiles broadly. “Most of our guests want to leave the inconveniences of celebrity behind for a brief time.”

“That’s really nice,” Aia gleams.

The elderly Felii opens the bottle carefully... *Pam!* The cork flies upwards until the attraction of gravity is stronger, and falls down, right into Waqniz’s open chest pocket! Aia and I applaud his feat while he smiles brightly. He decants the golden liquid into our glasses with the precision of any Felii.

“Would you like a commemorative picture?” he asks us. “The scenery surely would provide a delightful background.”

“That would be marvelous,” Aia exclaims and rummages in our bag.

She hands him her terminal already in camera mode.

Waqniz starts shooting some pictures as we clink our champagne glasses and look at each other. Then, another one in which we look at the camera.

“They are splendid!” Aia confirms.

“Would you honor us in sending a copy?” Waqniz asks cordially.

“Of course,” I confirm. “But only after we make *it* public.”

“That would be the greatest honor!” The Felii jumps up in joy. “Ah, I will leave you now to your enjoyment.” He bows to us and disappears too.

“Cheers!”

We clink the glasses again and take a sip from the golden liquid.

“It’s delicious!” Aia marvels, and I confirm.

The server brings us swiftly a large platter of cold appetizers. Albeit small, they look impressive! Aia fetches her terminal again, and takes some pictures of the platter before we dig in.

We enjoy the many delicious appetizers while we feed each other while giggling and chuckling.

“Why do you think that the other patrons look at us with disdain?” Aia suddenly asks. “Why don’t they have a little bit of fun while eating? I’m enjoying it...”

“Who knows?” I shrug. “Oh, right... They aren’t in such a unique company,” I blurt out and wink at her.

“Oh, Kira~” she muses. “Perhaps... We both are unique, after all,” she adds and giggles.

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The huge fish arrives... It is immense!

“I hope you will enjoy it, my soulmates put all their love into it,” Waqniz declares with pride.

“We surely will,” I say, still astonished by this incredible looking dish.

“Their love is surely noticeable,” Aia says.

And do we enjoy it! It is the most delicious fish I’ve ever have tasted. We cannot stop extolling our delight.

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“*Ugh...* I’m full...” Aia sighs and waves her hand in defeat...

“Me too...” I also sigh.

Even so, we managed to eat most of the delicious fish. Just the bones and some more *laborious* pieces are left.

“Have you enjoyed it?” Waqniz asks us as he retrieves our plates.

“It was superb,” I say.

“Truly, the best fish ever...” Aia confirms.

“Our compliments to the chefs,” I add while Aia also expresses her compliments.

“They will be delighted,” the Felii says, glowing in happiness. “Would you like dessert? I confided to my soulmates about your engagement. They want to offer you a small present.”

“Then we surely find a place in our stomachs for it,” I blurt out.

“Truly,” Aia adds and giggles.

Seems we have given the right answer... The Felii's body language expresses his happiness and delight exaggeratedly.

"Then, why not have another, small bottle of Venus Blue?" he offers, already opening one. "This one is curtesy from us."

Unable to refuse his offer, we enjoy another glass of champagne while we wait for the dessert.

"Are you sure you can manage more food?" Aia asks me.

"I honestly doubt it..." I sigh. "But we would have disappointed our hosts..."

"As selfless as always," she giggles. "But you're right. At least, I'll manage a bit... And if we put on some weight, I know the perfect activity to bring us back in form, together."

"And that is?" I ask with a smirk, knowing where it will lead.

"By fucking," she confirms my suspicion and laughs. I also burst into laughter.

We are shocked by the huge platter Waqniz is carrying to our table. However, we sigh in relief as we find that the dessert is razor-thin.

"My soulmates have out all their hearts into this dish," Waqniz declares with pride. "Please, enjoy."

I simply have to take a picture of it, and search for my terminal.

"Such a shame to destroy it..." Aia marvels.

"Yeah..."

The huge platter is covered with chocolates, fruits, berries, and other sweets, drawing a picture of us two inside a heart. The cooks managed to portray our likeliness with stunning accuracy. It could be a painting crafted by the most gifted artists.

Aia takes the lead after I've taken many pictures, and offers me a spoon filled with a blueish mousse from *her* face.

"Yum! You are delicious," I marvel and joke.

I do the same, I take a spoonful of *my* face and offer it to Aia.

“Yummy!” Aia giggles. “You’re delicious too...”

I don’t know how, but we managed to finish off the delicious dessert. Now I’m bloated...

“I hope you have enjoyed your meal,” Waqniz says as we pay him.

“It was truly delicious,” Aia states, and I confirm.

“Could we express our delight to your marvelous soulmates?” I ask him.

The Felii expresses his happiness again with exaggerated body language.

We reach the kitchen of the restaurant.

“Darlings!” Waqniz shouts into the kitchen. “You have visits!”

“What is it, dear?”

A petite Knoreliaz-Felii mestizo woman with four arms, and a quite tall Felii guy near us.

“Oh, my...” both gasp in surprise.

“Hello,” I greet. “We won’t hold you up for long.”

“We just want to congratulate you for your delicious dishes,” Aia adds.

“Oh...” Both cooks blush deeply.

“No need,” she finally says. “We just love to cook.”

“And your enjoyment is ours,” he adds.

“By the way, congratulations for your engagement,” she sings happily.

“It’s still a secret, honey,” Waqniz tells her.

“Oh! Sorry...”

“It’s okay,” Aia giggles.

“We hope that we can, someday, sit all together and enjoy a conversation and a glass,” I offer.

“That would be marvelous!” the Felii cook exclaims.

“Chef! A new order’s in!” someone shouts.

“We won’t hold you back further,” Aia says, wearing a bright smile.

“But hopefully, we can come again for dinner, someday,” I add.

We say goodbye to both magnificent cooks and leave the kitchen. Outside, we swap contacts with Waqniz, and we promise him to send them an autographed copy of the picture he took from us.

“I will put it on the VVIP display, right there!” he exclaims in joy as he points at a corkboard where many other pictures hang. Oh! There is a photo of a famous actor I recognize...

“So nice...” Aia sighs as we wander along the promenade again. “I need a bit of movement...”

“Yeah... By the way, what time is it?” I ask her. “I have the feeling that it’s late... But the sun’s position doesn’t help a bit...”

“Right...” she giggles. “Ouch... We should be thinking of returning home. We still need an hour and a half to reach our car, then some more to reach our home...”

“*Our?*” I ask, emphasizing her words wearing a smirk.

“Of course,” Aia giggles. “It’s our home, and our car. You’re paying rent, and half of the expenses already. Of course, it’s yours, too,” she happily declares while intensifying her grip on my hand.

“But your precious ride...”

“It’s yours too now. I wanna share everything with you now. Ah... I know it looks childish... but I wanna share it with you.”

“Sadly, I don’t own anything I can really share with you,” I say after a sigh. “I just own my truck and my bike... The rest, the movies I bought, and such, we already share it...”

“Don’t worry...” she says, smiling brightly. “You don’t need to. From now on, we can always acquire new things together.”

“Right. Should we open a joint bank account?” I offer.

“For common expenses and acquisitions?” she asks back, and I nod. “That would be great. It would be easier to oversee. Each of us transfers a fixed amount a month?”

“That’s the idea,” I confirm and nod. “We could also fuse our accounts...”

“Oh, Kira~ Would you?” she charms, and I nod again. “I think it’s more practical to each have its own account plus one common one. We can still invite and give gifts to each other,” she adds with a bright smile.

“True,” I confirm.

.

We reach *our* car after a two-hour walk. We retrieved our stuff from the lockers and are already reaching the exit gate to Gaia.

“*Fufu*~ These old silent films are hilarious,” Aia giggles. “This Charlie Chaplin was a great actor.”

“It’s even old for me, this movie, *The Gold Rush*, was premiered in 1925,” I read from the synopsis.

“But you knew about ’em, and showed me such wonderful films. See, you still bring old things that are new to me each and every day,” she muses.

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“I need a good shower...” Aia sighs as she drops her bag beneath the huge mirror at the door.

“Me too... I feel salty,” I chuckle.

We enter the bathroom and start to undress. As Aia loses her swimsuit, I blink thrice...

“Aia... Your skin...” I say, astonished. “You—”

“What?” she screams frightened as she looks at herself in the mirror.

“You’ve got a tan...” I confirm.

“How can that be?” Aia wavers. “This shouldn’t be possible!”

I hastily embrace her, she’s shivering.

“It’s okay, darling,” I tell her. “It’s beautiful.”

“Why?” she asks.

“I don’t know, love. But your tan is cute,” I try to reassure her.

“It is?” Aia turns around and looks into my eyes. She is clearly distressed.

“Of course, Aia. Everything about you is beautiful.”

“But—”

“Let’s calm down first,” I say. “There’s surely a rational explanation for this to happen.”

“I’ve never...”

“Think about what else you never experienced until now,” I try to make her think about something else.

“Sex... Hmm... Anal sex... *Ugh*... Love? Ah... happiness! And...” she blurts out in drips and drabs while she still shivers in my arms.

“See? Perhaps, your tan is also part of these new experiences,” I try to infuse calmness into her while I caress her.

“But... this is physical...”

“Let’s ask the doctors on Thursday, when we take the tests,” I suggest.

“Right...” she sighs in relief. “Then... does my tan really look good?”

“It truly does,” I say and kiss the darkened violetish area of her skin. “You’re salty...” I chuckle.

Aia giggles in return.

“Shower?” she asks sultry.

Phew! It seems her tan-crisis is over.

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“Are you hungry?” Aia asks as we leave the bathroom.

“Actually... no... I’m still full...” I observe.

“Me too... Shall we go to bed? It’s a bit early, but I’m exhausted...”

“Yeah, good idea...”

Just as we turn the bed down, a harmonious tone from both our terminals interrupts us.

“Huh? It’s from Enya...” Aia says. “She sent it to both of us.”

“What does it say?” I ask.

“Hey, lovebirds!” Aia giggles as she reads Enya’s text aloud. “Had a nice beach day on Venus?”

“What? She already knows?” I freak out.

Aia reads on, “Kira would make a great busker, heart emoji. The shitty-press is littered with your escapade to Venus! Angry emoji. Hope we can meet soon. Love you two. E. Many heart emojis...”

“Damn...” I sigh. I produce my DigiBook and open it. “Look at that...”

“Wow... There are many videos of you playing that song with those buskers...”

“And hundreds of pictures of us walking the promenade...”

“There you bought me the earrings...”

“Entering the Venus Beach Terrace...”

“And leaving...”

“Fuck...”

“The press is going absolutely wild...” Aia sighs. “Most are assuring that we’re dating now.”

“And wild speculations about how we started to date follow up...” I also sigh.

“Some, still debate if it’s true... That we might be playing a game with ’em...”

“Idiots...” I sigh again.

“We have to make it official...” she also sighs again.

“Damn... And fast... Or in no time we’ll be overrun and even followed at work...”

“Tomorrow?” she suggests.

“Yeah... I hate it, but better early than late...”

“Then, tomorrow. In the morning, we’ll contact Mitsubishi’s office,” Aia proposes.

“Good idea.”

“Let’s watch a movie? I’m angry now about ’em, but too tired to do anything else...”

“Yeah, let’s do that.”

We snuggle together and select a classic movie on my DigiBook and watch it until drowsiness overcomes us.

SI

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SpaceHighway: *The Queen and the King* ~ B07 ~ Visiting the Alpha

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