

This episode is where Gair and Nikki gets married. In a sense, this is very much the last story of the Hammers.

You should know Admiral Jack's fate from [Shattered union arc] [1] [Revolts] [9599] before reading this.

For Gair's own past, refer to [Cecil arc] [6] [Project Marat] [8961].

## [The Hammers arc] [14] [Marriage] [9671]

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Year, 9671

It had been about two years since the collapse of United Sol. Although life had been rather chaotic for the people of Sol system, those on Venus and Mars enjoyed stable lives.

For some members of the Hammers, the collapse of United Sol achieved a milestone in their lives. It marked a new era for many.

For Gair and Nikki, there had been some chemistry between them. Those close to them knew something was certainly going on between them, and when they announced that they were going to marry, not many were surprised.

What surprised many was that Cecil declared that he was stepping down. He only made the announcement to his inner circle.

In an administration point of view, it meant little however since Cecil had been gradually passing the baton to Gair in the last hundred years.

In the bigger picture though, the presence of Cecil was important. As long as his presence existed on Venus, there had been very little opposition. If he were to retire and even die, that was to change. Compromise would be required sooner or later to keep Venus government afloat.

But that is for another story.

All the political mumbo jumbo aside, Ardilia and Kisia were on shopping with Nikki for a wedding dress.

"It's been a long time since my last shopping," Nikki said with glee. She was in her casual clothes. She did mean that it had been a long time. For past a hundred years, not once had she come down to Venus for such a personal purpose. In fact, even shopping for groceries was a rare occasion for her.

"About damned time, I'd say," Kisia said. "You two are finally getting married."

For Adrilia, she had not known Nikki and Kisia for a long time. Therefore, she didn't know what kind of time they went through together. All she could do was nodding along with a grin.

Kisia noticed this. "Don't you feel bad, Ardilia. We will tell you stories."

"No, no..., it's alright."

"You ought to know if you are going to be the matron of honor."

Ardilia looked confused. "Me? But..."

She was going to say that she had known Nikki for a little more than few months. In fact, it would have been more logical for Kisia or Tuhina to be the matron of honor.

"Don't you worry," Kisia was patting on Ardilia's back. "I think you are suited better for this."

"Are you ... sure?" Adrilia was skeptical for a good reason. In her whole life, she never really had a chance to hang out with girls of her generation.

"Well?" Kisia rolled her eyes. "Have you done this sort of thing before?"

"No." It was an instant firm answer.

"Great! You are qualified!"

"Ha-?" Ardilia was really confused. To her, Kisia sounded almost as if not knowing what to do was the prerequisite of being a matron of honor.

"You don't have the foggiest idea of what to do, right?"

Ardilia nodded.

"There you go. Nikki! It's going to be fun!"

Nikki giggled in response.

After hours of shopping together, they decided to stop for a drink. They found themselves in a cafe. They had several bags full of stuff under their table.

"I've been wondering. It's just a very personal question. You don't have to answer." It was Kisia. "I don't think I've seen you wear anything else but long skirts. Why not wear short or even mini skirts? I can tell that you are in shape. No need to hide your legs unless... Vakha disapproves?"

Ardilia beamed a smile. "I like skirts. I also have a reason to wear long skirts though. You see, I have a large scar on my right thigh."

She looked down on her right leg. "I can show you if you like."

"I see. I am sorry that I asked. I shouldn't have."

"It is perfectly alright. I can show you if you like."

Kisia and Nikki quickly exchanged a glance and Kisia eventually nodded. "Um, sure."

Ardilia raised her black skirt enough for her right thigh to show. There was indeed a long, large, scar on her right thigh. The scar appeared to be a wound from a sword fight. The scar was linear and the wound looked almost as if her skin was melted.

"That's a swordplay scar," Nikki remarked with an assurance in her voice. "Isn't such a scar healable though? Why don't you remove it?"

Ardilia lowered her skirt and soothed her right thigh, presumably where her scar was. "I earned the scar during a training session. We were not supposed to use real energy blades, but we did. I wanted to keep the scar as a memento."

"And I thought guys liked flawless skin on a woman's body." Nikki chuckled jokingly and Ardilia smiled in return.

"You see now why I always wear skirts," Ardilia said.

"That doesn't explain why you don't wear pants though," Kisia said.

"Pants, it's just not my style."

The three finally arrived at Nikki's house by evening.

"Phew, look at the dusts. I haven't been to this house for ... I forgot," Nikki remarked as she opened front door. A heavy stagnant air embraced the three women as they entered her place.

"It looks like we have to clean your place first before doing anything else," Kisia commented, waving her hands in front of her face.

Upon lightning the house, it became only worse. Ardilia drew her index finger on surface of furniture, only to find her tip of index finger covered with a thick layer of dusts.

Nikki placed her hands on her waist. Sighing, she turned around to face the two girls. "Looks like we have no choice, don't we?"

Kisia laughed nervously at "we" part. However, it was not as if Kisia did not want to assist her in cleaning her house.

"Shall we proceed?" Ardilia said as she rolled up her sleeves. "It seems we have a lot of work to do."

And that sealed the deal.

They spent hours and hours cleaning Nikki Sweetheart's home. By the time they were done cleaning roughly half of the house, Vakha visited the house to find Ardilia.

"Hey," He greeted them in his own style, which was carefree and casual.

"Hello, honey," Ardilia greeted her husband with a warm hug. Kisia and Nikki were in basement.

"Looks like you girls are cleaning this place?"

She nodded.

“About damn time, this place was going to turn into a ghost house. She rarely visits her home.”

“The same could be said about you as well.”

Vakha sagged his shoulders. “Fine, you got me.”

It was this moment that Kisia and Nikki were back on the first floor. He had brought some store-bought dinners. He was obviously expecting them to be busy.

“Woah, I didn’t think you’d be the type of a guy who’d do such a service to anyone,” Nikki remarked as she took his bags full of food.

Despite working together for hundreds of years, she didn’t know him too well personally. Yes, he was her fellow admiral, but they never worked together in person. What she learned about him from occasional glances was that he was a very carefree guy with a very loose attitude; almost like a big kid although she noticed a change in his carefree attitude after his marriage to Adrilia. He began to act more maturely since the marriage.

Sagging shoulders, Vakha fought back. “Hey, give me a break. I am married now. A man’s gotta change when he gotta.”

“Whatever you say. To me, you’ve always been someone of idiocy,” Nikki replied.

He laughed casually. "You are not wrong about that, but I am a grown idiot. I have few tricks up in my sleeves therefore."

"Let's eat, guys. I am hungry like a newborn puppy," Kisia declared.

They sat around a table in a living room and had their dinner.

"Things sure have quieted down as of late," Vakha remarked while gazing into air vacantly. "United Sol is gone. The fucking Bau is dead as Dodo. I feel like... everything is over."

"United Sol was over the moment master left them," Kisia said half-jokingly.

"They tried so hard to literally dig their own graves. I find that amusing really," Ardilia said, "At least my clan put up a decent fight. The Bau went out with a whimper."

Things had indeed dramatically slowed down ever since the fall of United Sol, and with Cecil stepping down, it felt like an end of an era. In fact, it was.

Gair stood before the imperial HQ also known as Cecil's library. The ever-quiet place had always been filled with unexplainable sorrow and silence. Ordinary people were unable to feel it although the aura did make them feel uncomfortable and scared. However, for ESPs, it was blatantly obvious.

Gulping, he walked toward the library. It was never easy to walk into his domain. He being Cecil's stepson meant nothing at all.

"Congratulations," was Cecil's greeting when Gair encountered him in the dark library. With few light sources, the library was too dark for reading, but it didn't seem to bother him. He held an opened book in front of him and was standing right next to an antique shelf.

Gair had been his stepson for over four hundred years, but he had never been too comfortable with confronting him.

"Thank you, sir. I appreciate that."

Cecil slowly closed a book he was reading and then placed it back into a shelf. He gazed at an array of books at a turtle speed and picked up another book with his pale and thin fingers.

"You've come here for a reason," He said quietly as he opened a book he just picked up. "What would that be?"

It was Nikki's idea to have Cecil act as the priest for their wedding. He was against the idea. He wanted to have someone else for the task but he eventually had to let her have her way.

So, here he was.

He told Cecil that he wanted him to be the priest for the wedding.

"Was it her idea? I doubt you'd want that," He responded indifferently.

“Yes, sir.” And Gair answered firmly. He knew Cecil well and knew that lying wouldn’t work at all.

“Very well. I see that I have no choice but to accept. I will be there.”

Gair could not tell whether Cecil was pleased or not for the task he was just given. Regardless, he was able to accomplish the purpose he came here for.

He left the library right away and headed for Nikki’s home where he met the others who were having their supper.

“Welcome,” Kisia said while she opened the door for him. “So?” She inquired.

Slightly confused, he repeated what Kisia said. “So?”

“Did the master accept?”

Then he realized that she had told everyone. He gave her a nod.

“I see. I thought he might have rejected.”

Gair let out of a sigh. “I thought he might, but he accepted. This wedding might turn out to be awkward.”

Kisia responded with a crooked grin. “Fun, you mean.”

Gair vacantly looked at her momentarily and said, “Well, can I go in?”

Kisia and Gair never got along too well. First of all, both of them had a completely different outlook for life. Second of all, Kisia was the only one who called Cecil Klisis master and respected him dearly. No other members of the Hammers referred him master except her. Meanwhile, Gair felt he was overshadowed by Cecil, and he never really understood purpose of Cecil's extreme decisions and actions.

In short, Kisia was supportive of Cecil's agenda whereas Gair was mostly against it.

When Vakha and Ardilia left, it was well past midnight although night of Venus never became completely dark. It was more like dawn. Therefore, each home had a function to block out any incoming light to create artificial darkness.

Vakha and Ardilia were talking to home; they were both hyperhumans. They really had no reason to use cars although they did have two cars just for formality.

Inhaling cool night air, he spoke to her.

"So, did you get to know the girls?"

Waving her long straight black hair, she replied, "Yes, I feel that I know them much better now."

"You feel? You are not sure?"

"How would I be sure? I haven't known them for too long."

Shrugging, he held her shoulder as they walked.

“They are good guys..., errr, gals.”

She beamed a smile in response. “I can tell that they went through a lot.”

“Yeah?”

“Yes, their level of bonding was beyond that of normal. That’s only possible by going through a lot together. The Hammers are tight-kit.”

“That, we are.” He beamed a satisfied smile.

Back at Nikki’s home, Kisia was getting ready to leave as well.

“I will get going now.” She grabbed her purse and made all garbage bags afloat with her ESP. “I will take these garbage bags out for you.”

“Thanks,” Nikki replied while placing back decorations that were removed during cleaning.

“I will probably see you at the wedding. I will have my hands tied starting tomorrow,” Kisia said as she stepped outside. Large garbage bags were following her in the air.

“Alright, see you later.”

“Well, they are gone and now it’s quiet,” Gair remarked as he took a seat on a sofa. “It’s been a long day...” Robbing his eyes, he loosed tension in his body.

She still had cleanings to do; like putting back small decorations where they were. After she was done, they had to come up with a date for their marriage and other plans.

Meave had also returned for the wedding. Officially, she had left the Hammers with Cecil's blessing but nevertheless she was welcome to visit Venus at any given time. No one had any problem with that.

"Welcome back. It's been a while."

Kisia hugged Muwa in the imperial shuttleport of Venus. Ardilia was there also because she brought her along. It was the first time for Ardilia to meet Meave.

Dress code between Meave and Ardilia was completely opposite. Just comparing their outfits, Ardilia looked more of a quiet lady with her white wool turtleneck sweater and black long skirt, whereas Muwa was wearing provocative tight mini dress with reflective texture.

Men would call Meave "hot" while they would call Adrilia "cute".

Ardilia, Kisia, and Meave hit an outdoor cafe where Kisia explained her what had happened on Venus and United Sol in general. She focused more on the internal dispute between the O'ren and Venus government since that piece of intel was highly classified and it didn't get out.

“Woah, I can’t believe the O’ren revolted. And I can’t believe I didn’t know about it. I trade information.” Meave was certainly quite shocked to hear the story.

“The conflict was top secret. Well, the Bau was aware of it, but they probably wouldn’t want to let others know since they failed,” Kisia explained.

“Welcome to the family, by the way, Ardilia,” Meave said to her, beaming a smile.

“I find it hard that VeVakha got married. He’s a big kid.”

“He is a big kid with a wife now,” Ardilia responded jokingly.

“And Gair is engaged! Damn, I guess we are gettin’ old,” Meave joyfully exclaimed.

They were indeed getting old. Still they had good few hundreds of years before considering retirement. Regardless, a plan to seek replacements was already underway by Kisia. Cecil was to take no part in seeking replacements however.

D-day finally arrived, and guests gathered in front of Venus city hall. Tens of tables of buffet were prepared for guests. It was open-for-all ceremony where no invitation was required. However, only the former members of the Hammers were allowed to be near the wedding altar. Security guards were placed therefore, forming a wall around the altar. They had precision plasma pistols equipped on their belts.

The weather was nice, and the sky was bright gray. Everything was set to go when Cecil appeared and approached the altar with a slow pace.

He was in his usual wardrobe; he wore an exquisite, but worn-out, robe. His robe was woven with actual silver and titanium threads instead of fabric threads. Such a setup did not provide any comfort, but it was extremely durable against time. The robe had a natural silver texture coming from its silver threads. Its silvery texture was enhanced by vivid, deep, red linings. He had this robe for hundreds of years and it looked as good as new on surface.

Without concerning himself with others' eyes, he walked gently and quietly, toward the altar.

All required people were present; all former members of the Hammers including Meave who had come back just for the occasion.

And most importantly, Gair and Nikki were there. The groom was wearing a tuxedo and the bride was wearing a pure white dress.

“We are gathered here today –“

He started out normally despite of Gair's nervousness. He was nervous because Cecil was known to act unexpectedly on occasion. He didn't know what and how but feared Cecil pulling something unexpected during the wedding.

“- To celebrate a wonderful occasion together.”

Neither Gair nor Nikki had living parents. Cecil Klisis was his stepfather who was acting as the priest at the moment. And for Nikki, Illy O'ren was her step mother who passed away. Her last name "Sweetheart" was a formal lastname given by Illy.

Therefore, when Gair stepped on red carpet and waited for the bride, she was accompanied by Vakha followed by Adrilia.

"Come forth, Gair and Nikki," Cecil declared.

Nikki Sweetheart had just denounced herself from her lastname Sweetheart on this day for the marriage in order to take on Gair's lastname, Klisis.

Beaming a smile, Vakha let go of her and handed her over to Gair. Crossing arms together, they walked toward the alter progressively.

"A man and a woman stand before me today," Cecil spoke, "They are here to promise a marriage. If anyone has any objection regarding their decision to marry, speak now."

A moment of silence passed.

"Very well, marriages on Venus start by a verbal contract while witnesses are present, then it will be written down for legal purposes," Cecil said and made a short pause before he would continue.

"Gair, do you take this woman to be your lawful wife?"

Smiling gently, he spoke out loud, "Yes, I do."

Cecil gave a nod at him and turned his attention to Nikki and asked, "Nikki, do you take this man to be your lawful husband?"

Grinning divinely, she responded, "Yes, I do."

Normally, a priest would end the ceremony at this point, but that didn't happen.

Cecil looked at the sky for a moment and looked back at Nikki. "Before I conclude this marriage, I have something to present to Nikki," He declared.

Gair frowned; he did not like where this was doing.

"Pardon, sir?" Confused, she inquired, "What is it that you wish to give me?"

"Your father had something for you, and I've been its care keeper for it since year 9599."

Gair wanted to doubt what was going on. He really did because he knew Nikki's past, her true past, because Illy O'ren told him. He believed that it was better for her not to know her true past, and so did Illy O'ren. The last thing he wanted on his wedding day was to see his bride break down while everyone was watching. And what he was afraid of when he let Cecil Klisis to be the priest of the day was becoming reality.

Awfully too fast, mind you. It was happening fast.

Cecil pulled out a deactivated energy blade from one of his sleeve. It had dark blood strains all over it.

“Sir, are you out of your mind?!” He exclaimed as he attempted to stop Cecil from handing over the blade. He even tried to take it away from him which he evaded Gair hand with ease. He was never going to be able to take a thing from Cecil physically.

“This is your father’s blade. The blade has its owner’s name carved.”

Nikki Sweetheart, when she was taken in by Illy O’ren, was a child. She was told by Illy O’ren that she was an orphan and that she took her in because she saw potentials in her. She had no reason to doubt her.

“Nikki, you are former Admiral Jack’s only child,” Cecil declared which was met by murmuring by the crowd.

It was sudden, and she didn’t really feel the gravity of the event going on at the moment. She took the blood strained blade and took a good look at its surface.

“Nikki! Don’t look. He is just playing a bad prank!” Putting on a fake smile, he looked back for Vakha to play along. “Right?” to which he responded, “She deserves to know her root.”

“Yes,” Ardilia responded as well.

“Admiral Jack?” Nikki raised her voice and repeated with a shout. “The Admiral Jack?!”

To make the long story short, Admiral Jack revolted against Cecil with Admiral Rommel. Rommel was captured and Jack was killed in a battle. She was directly involved in the battle as she led Venus fleet against Jack's fleet. She even dueled with Admiral Jack in their ships which Jack lost and died of. It was her virgin space battle and she was a direct cause of his death.

"Sir! What are you doing?!" Gair demanded and looked back at Vakha. "What are you all doing, ruining the wedding?!"

"I trust his decision," Vakha replied firmly. "He chose this day was the day she would find out about her root. So be it."

"Are you surprised?" Completely ignoring Gair, Cecil asked her who was doing nothing but staring at the blade.

After a moment of silence, she replied rather calmly.

"Actually, sir, I don't feel much. I don't have any recollection of my childhood."

She wouldn't. Her brain was blown away from the explosion. Cecil reconstructed a new brain from raw protein with his powers.

He carefully explained to her what had occurred during her childhood. Gair couldn't do anything while he told the tale to her. To be more precise, he did not know how to respond to the situation. To him, his wedding day was completely ruined at this point.

Cecil concluded, "You are physically his daughter, but you don't have memories of your parents. You wouldn't have the memories considering what had happened to you, which is likely why you aren't feeling anything regarding this."

"Yes..., I guess that's why. Sir, do you mind me asking you a question?"

"Go ahead."

"Why did you choose this day to tell me this? It looks like you didn't have to tell me this at all or choose another day for this."

"He personally asked me to hold the blade and give you one day. It was a dying man's wish. You don't simply ignore such wishes." He made a short pause before continuing. "I chose this very day because this is the day you are becoming someone else. You are becoming a wife today. If he was alive and the incident did not occur, this would be the day you'd leave his side and be somebody else."

"You could have told me earlier still..."

"You know I like being an arse."

A joke from Cecil, it was very rare. Vakha let out of a snicker and Ardilia smiled. The mood had suddenly become much brighter.

Nikki smiled as well and responded, "You do, sir. You sure do. Thank you for caring enough to have kept the promise even after hundreds years."

Cecil slowly looked around the crowd and then announced, "You two are now a husband and a wife."

- **Fin**