

[The Hammers arc] [5] [Edith] [9607]

Rev 1.2 (Last edited on Jan 20, 2020)

Required story prior reading this story: [The Hammers] [1] [The ENN incident] [9600]

Recommended story prior reading this story in order:

[The Hammers arc] [3] [Kisia] [9600]

[Shattered union arc] [5] [1st Earthian-Venusian War] [9607] (Runs parallel with it)

It had been 7 years ever since she decided to immigrate to Venus. To be more precise, it wasn't exactly an immigration since Earth had already issued her death certificate.

During her difficult healing period, she lamented why Yagi had abandoned her. She wasn't even sure whether he made out alive. She just needed someone to focus her anger and hatred on and Yagi was a good target.

She wasn't thrilled to have been a second chance. Her life changed so much so fast that she wasn't even sure where she was heading to. Kisia ensured that she was given ample time to readjust her life on Venus. She was given her own apartment albeit it was just a one-room apartment and she was given a bank account with sizable credits.

She was, to be honest, more confused than grateful however.

Why would someone do so much for someone like her? She was someone who was virtually unknown at ENN. She was a rookie and she hardly knew the mess she got herself into before it happened. She was like one of those extras in a movie where they were expendable.

Her sound, albeit slightly troubled, sleep came to a break when she started to sense light through her eye lids. Lazily opening an eye, she noticed that blurred sunshine was coming through the light gray clouded sky of Venus.

Due to space restrictions, it was common for Fallen Crater inhabitants to live in apartments. There were few zones that were designated for houses but such zones were scarce and weren't really affordable by someone like her.

Edith was luckier ones since she lived above the ground. Hundreds of millions lived underground. Being embraced by sunshine wasn't something everyone was entitled to on Venus although it wasn't also exactly wanted by some, either. Some

actually preferred living underground. Underground life had its merits although it was something Edith didn't want to understand.

Yawning and stretching, she lazily got up from her bed and took a shower. She was employed by VNN. It was her wish to have been employed there to start her life anew. She was nobody at ENN and she was also nobody at VNN also. It wasn't something she minded. She knew what she had to do in order to climb up. She needed materials and take chances for high risk jobs. For someone who started with nothing, it was the best chance to get noticed.

And when such a chance seemed to have arrived, she realized immediately.

At VNN, employees had a morning meeting every day. Usually, such morning meetings were nothing more than just greeting each other before getting back to work, but this meeting was different. The chief of department she belonged came to the staffs and cleared his throat loudly which grabbed everyone's attention in the hall where they worked.

"I have something to announce today," He told them.

He explained that a journalist from Venus outpost had picked up strange movements from a Venusian fleet. And, with info he obtained, they determined that Venus may be at a war.

Upon hearing his words, the staff murmured. They were worried rightfully so. When Cecil took over, he went hard on civilians who wouldn't take his ways. After 7 years, things had settled down finally, and life was getting better for everyone. But if Venus was retaken by United Sol, they might have to go through yet another harsh period.

"The fleets are gathering up not far from the outpost," The chief spoke. "They are gathering all available ships. Therefore, we can only assume that United Sol has declared a war on us."

A staff questioned why they weren't informed of such crucial news to which the chief answered, "Why would they? You know how they run things."

Edith wasn't born and grew up on Venus, therefore she had no idea what kind of life they had prior Cecil's takeover. What she did notice was that there were a fair amount of discontent on how Cecil did things for initial few years.

And then there was a harsh crackdown on those who opposed him who almost always ended up being assassinated or be vanished from the face of the planet.

Cecil himself admitted on a public stage that he was willing to kill those who stood in his ways and he did exactly that; he killed those who stood against him.

But it wasn't all doom and gloom. Although everyone feared what their home was going to become when the crackdown came upon them, life was slowly getting

better. Cecil was especially hard on pirates of intangible goods and such pirates were killed instead of being sentenced. His regime accepted no excuses whatsoever and simply killed such pirates. Neither age nor gender mattered as there were reports of kids being tortured and then killed later on. Ultimately, it came down to parents who had to make sure their children would not share games and software illegally by educating them.

Such merciless killings resulted in a gigantic boost in economy as software sale shot up by 300% which became a foundation of other economic developments.

7 years later, the positive changes were clearly noticeable. People had lower taxes and their average wage had gone up due to economy boom. People complained less and less over the years.

“Now, here is the deal,” The chief said with a raised voice. “We need volunteers for this. We will be taking two VNN shuttles and follow the fleet. Now, I must inform you that you must sign a paper.”

What he meant was that volunteers had to sign a contract stating that their families cannot sue the company even if they end up getting themselves killed, and knowing how Cecil’s regime worked, there was a high chance of getting killed. For all they knew, the fleet might simply fire at them. Anything was possible.

Everyone was hesitant rightfully so, but Edith raised her hand without a thought; it was the chance she was looking for.

The chief noticed her and tried to remember her name.

“Um..., you are...”

“It’s Edith, chief.”

The chief had no idea she even worked in his department which wasn’t surprising since she had been working on equipment setups.

“Are you new? I don’t think I’ve seen you around for long,” The chief said.

Grinning, Edith answered, “I’ve been working here for 7 years.”

She wasn’t new at all. The chief was going to reject her with an excuse of her being too new, but that wasn’t going to work out.

“Alright, Edith. Congrats, you are the first volunteer. Anyone else?”

And no one seemed interested and it turned out that she was the only one in her department. There were other volunteers from other departments and VNN scrambled about five crews, including Edith herself.

It turned out that Edith was the most senior staff among the willing volunteers and naturally she became the leader of the operation.

Edith was being briefed by her chief in his office.

“Alright, Edith. You make it out of this alive with a positive result and a promotion awaits you,” He told her. He was facing her away and was looking down through a

transparent wall. “Your job is as simple as it can get. Get the coverage of the war. You don’t need to add commentaries or anything. We just need the videos.”

“I’ve got it, boss.”

“You will go to Venus outpost and our staff will hand you a keycode for a shuttle. Bring your crew and get in. Undock and follow the fleet.”

She answered with a nod although since the chief was facing away from her, her nod could not be seen. “Understood.”

“They will ask you where you are going. Simply answer them that you are going to do a documentary on solar wave surfing.”

“I see.”

Once he was done, he finally turned around to face Edith. He walked toward her and offered his hand for a handshake.

“Good luck,” He told her as they shook their hands.

Edith wasted no time and went straight to Venus outpost. She was apparently the first one to arrive at the outpost.

Venus outpost was originally a military installation. Its purpose was to secure and patrol the immediate vicinity of Venus. It was originally constructed by the O’ren to combat possible Bau invasion. However, thousands of years of peace meant

that propose of the outpost shifted. During Illy O'ren regime, the outpost was becoming more of a resort place to watch and enjoy outer space.

Unlike Moon inhabitants who could experience space daily since many of them had jobs on Earth, Venusians had little chance of actually experiencing space. Therefore, a chance to go to space proved to be fairly popular among families. The introduction of solar wind surfing boosted the popularity even further.

Over hundreds of years, the outpost was progressively modified to act and look like a resort station instead of a military station. Cecil's regime saw even further modification for resort purposes but also its weapons were upgraded in secret.

It was Edith's first time being on Venus outpost and her first impression of the space station was that it looked and felt like a resort space station. A whole lobby was constructed from transparent walls and space as well as Venus could be clearly seen from anywhere in the lobby. Civilians were taking pictures and posing for pictures and the lobby was very lively with traffic.

"Holy moly," She uttered. "This place is lively."

Upon visiting a ship registry office, she was told to go to docking bay # 11. It was a large private docking bay dedicated for VNN. It even had a giant VNN logo on its gate. There were few engineers who were doing maintenance work on shuttles when Edith entered the bay. One of the engineers noticed her and approached her.

“Miss, you are for a shuttle, I take?”

Nodding, Edith handed him her VNN employee ID card.

“Ah, yes, the shuttle is ready.” Nodding, he pointed at a shuttle at the furthest end. “You know how to pilot?”

“I know basics.”

“Good enough. Most of controlled are automated.”

Out of five volunteers, Edith and another employee named Manisi were supposed to be aboard the first shuttle. The other three were to be aboard 2nd shuttle. They were spread out in preparation for the worst case scenario. VNN wanted to have a backup.

While Edith was familiarizing herself with the shuttle controls, a young man entered the shuttle and noticed her.

“Are you Edith? I am Manisi.”

“Yes, I am Edith. Are the others here yet?”

“Most are here. We are waiting for the last person to arrive.”

“Come on in and have a seat.”

Manisi closed the door and insured that it was closed. He inspected his surroundings as if making sure nothing was amiss. And finally he took a seat next to Edith.

“This is my first time piloting a shuttle,” Edith said once he took his seat next to her. “Are you also new?”

“Nah, I’ve done this plenty of times. Granted, this is the first time I am risking my life though.”

It turned out that Manisi was a designated shuttle pilot for VNN and he had a lot of experience.

“So, what are you doing this for?” He asked Edith. “I am doing this for a big fat bonus.”

She beamed a smile and replied, “I am doing this for a promotion.”

“For a promotion? Why do you want to be promoted? The higher you climb, the more headaches you will get.”

“Because I want to be a news anchor or announcer or whatever they call them.”

Manisi hammered side of his fist onto his palm. “Oh, I see. No wonder you want a fast promotion then. That is a long ladder to climb.”

Suddenly, a voice sounded in the cockpit out of blue.

“We are ready. Are you ready?”

“Yeah, we are,” Manisi answered.

Mechanical arms gently picked the shuttle and relocated them onto a rail at which point it was railed to a safe spot to decompress and undock.

“This is Engineer Paul. We are about to decompress the chamber. Are you ready? Is everything locked up?”

“We are ready. Go ahead,” Manisi answered firmly.

Decompressing was done in mere seconds with a pop sound and a docking bay door ahead them slowly opened.

“You are ready to go. Good luck,” Engineer Paul told them.

It was this moment that Edith raised a question. “How are we going to go after the fleet? We don’t know where they are right now, don’t we?”

“Weren’t you told? We just need to follow beacons. We’ve had scouts following the fleet from a long distance and they dropped few beacons along the way.”

“Would the fleet notice the beacons though?”

“Nah, we don’t need precise location. Just close enough is fine. The sensor will do the rest of guesswork, so the scouts keep a safe distance.”

“Wouldn’t the scouts be destroyed then?”

“Nah, they would show up on long range sensor only and they flee like hell once they drop a beacon. It’s still a risky job but not as risky as what we are going to be doing soon.” Having said so, Manisi laughed. “I cannot believe I am doing this.”

As soon as they undocked, Venus outpost control tower contacted them.

“VNN shuttles, state your business. What is the purpose of your undocking?”

Edith pressed a comm. button to respond. "We will be doing a documentary on solar wave surfing, sir."

It took a moment for the control tower to answer. "I see. Safe sailing. You are clear to leave the area."

The VNN shuttles were following legacy location info beacons left which were recorded by VNN. They would pilot for a day and half when shuttle's long range sensor gave them a loud beep which woke up Both Edith and Manisi were sleeping in the back.

"Looks like we are close." Robbing eyes, Manisi took his seat while Edith was looking after her hair in the back.

"We have to approach them. We need to get into a visual range," He continued to speak despite Edith not being next to him. She could still hear him from the back.

It was imperative that they obtained visual video which was why not many wanted to take the job in the first place. Even of Venusian fleet didn't fire at them, Earthian fleet might. Or they could get between crossfire for all they knew. Anything could happen.

Edith finally took her seat. "Okay, I am ready."

And the two VNN shuttles entered a visual range with Venusian fleet that was idling.

“I am sure they know we are here by now,” Manisi said. “Hell, they should have seen us coming a long time ago. They are ignoring us and I don’t know whether that is a good sign or not.”

“Who cares,” Edith replied, standing up and going to back to grab equipment.

“We do what we’ve come here for. If anything happens, so be it.”

“... Tough girl, you are,” Manisi whispered but somehow Edith heard it.

“Thanks, I guess.”

She died once. She could die again.

Fortunately or unfortunately, they didn’t have to wait too long. A day later, Earthian fleet was on long range sensor.

“8126, Earthian fleet is 8126 in numbers,” Manisi spoke out loudly. “Meanwhile, Venusian fleet is 4998.”

“United Sol outnumber them by twice,” Edith said.

“Well, more like by 60% but, yeah, they outnumber them by a lot.”

“Can they even win this?” Edith was skeptical, highly skeptical.

“Well, if they do lose, that’s my cue right there. I might as well steal this shuttle and go for Mars.”

Ignoring him, Edith went on to record the scene with the shuttle’s onboard camera. She also set up a camcorder on a tripod in the cockpit.

Manisi was amused that Edith was setting up a camcorder. “What is that camcorder for? This shuttle has all the tools we need.”

“I am going to be adding my commentaries. That’s why.”

Puzzled, Manisi reminded her, “Huh? We just need to film the scene.”

“Just in case.”

“What case?”

“Just in case they decide to come after us and erase the data. They know we are here, don’t they?”

“Whatever floats your boat, girl,” Shrugging, Manisi talked back. “I am not going an extra mile. I just intend to do what I was told and get paid. That’s all that matters.”

“Just don’t get in my way.”

They watched the battle unfold before their eyes. Venusian fleet fired first and it took few minutes for Earthian fleet to get into their range. And then they saw a spectacular scene of a massive bomber wave swarming Earthian fleet frontline and promptly disorganized them.

“I am sure you are watching what I can only describe as a spectacular fireworks.” Edith was adding her comments over the video. “Our Venusian fleet is vastly outnumbered yet they are hammering Earthian fleet!”

Remnant of shockwaves slightly vibrated the shuttle for some seconds.

“Feel this shaking? It’s the aftershock of their ... bombs? I believe? I didn’t know fighters could carry bombs.”

“Holy shit, our fleet is ripping Earhtian fleet apart! Holy fuck!”

“Ssssh!” Edith tried to calm Manisi down.

They were in awe as they observed outnumbered Venusian fleet making fun of Earthian fleet. The battle seemed to be over in just an hour when they saw Earthian fleet being split.

“Earthian fleet is breaking apart. Some of them are ... retreating, I believe. Some are staying put and still firing,” Edith commented.

A portion of Earthian fleet continued to retreat while majority of ships on frontline continued to battle. After a while, remnant of Earthian ships either surrendered or attempted to flee.

“The battle is clearly over now. It’s hard to believe is an hour was enough to decide the fate of this battle. And I have to stress that it wasn’t a small battle. It was five thousand against eight thousand. The battle could have lasted over a day,” Edith remarked. “The remnant of Earthian fleets are surrendering. Some are fleeing and it seems they are being let go. Venusian fleet is not going after them.”

“Uh oh,” Manisi blurted. “Crap!”

“Ssssh!”

“No, we are in a trouble. We are locked. They locked on us!”

“What? What does that mean?”

Manisi turned the camcorder off and told her, “That means that they are coming after us and we are too slow to run away from it!”

“Oh, no, no, no, no.” Edith dashed into back and came back with a tiny white zippo bag and a bottle of water but the bag had a big yellow exclamation mark on it.

“What is that bag for?”

Without answering him, Edith quickly popped out its thumb-sized disk and tossed it into the bag. After sealing it, she put it into her mouth and swallowed it with water. After then, she knocked out the camcorder, breaking its lens as a result.

Manisi demanded, “Hey! Explain what the hell you are doing!”

Edith explained that the white bag was a specialized container that wasn’t detected by scanners. She swallowed it to be inaccessible for the time being and she knocked the camcorder off to explain its missing disk.

“Bah, you thought this through. I guess we will have something even if they erase the data on the shuttle.”

“Just keep your cool. If they ask about the camcorder, you know the answer. It’s been out of commission for a while,” Edith told him while throwing the camcorder into the back.

Venusian fleet approached the shuttle after warning them not to move and the shuttles were towed into a fighter bay of a cruiser.

“Release the door and come out please with hands in air,” A voice came through comm.

With hands in air, both Manisi and Edith came out of their shuttle. Fully armed crews were waiting for them outside.

“Move aside and face the shuttle. Do not do anything funny if you want to keep your head,” One of them warned them and neither Manisi nor Edith was planning to do anything “funny” and followed their instructions.

Two crews went inside. One searched the shuttle and the other tinkered with the shuttle controls. One of them came out a minute later.

“Yes, they have the video.”

The other came out soon after. “Negative on their video equipment but I did find a broken camcorder that had no disk.”

“We need an explanation on the missing disk.”

“I will do the talking,” Edith whispered to Manisi and she explained, “We’ve had that broken camcorder for God how many how years. It’s been there for like ... forever. I don’t know where the disk might be.”

The crew who was holding the camcorder inspected the unit further. “Well, it is a very old model indeed...”

In the end, they bought Edith's explanation but they weren't going back to their shuttle. After a through body inspection, each of them was locked in a quarter. They were taking them back to Venus outpost where they would be released. They weren't getting their shuttles back.

Having nothing to do, Edith decided to sleep through the return journey.

When she opened her eyes, she saw someone looking down on her and she freaked out with a scream and jumped out of her bed. Soon she realized it was a face she knew. The person's distinctive disheveled hair gave her the cue.

Panting, Edith exclaimed, "Oh, geez! It's you! Oh, God, I almost had a heart attack."

"Hello," Kisia greeted her with a grin. "It's been a while, has it?"

They never came across each other the day Kisia handed Edith the immigration paper, so it had been 7 or so years since the last time they met.

Still panting but weakly, Edith answered, "Yeah..., been a while."

"Shall we go to a cafeteria?"

"Am I even allowed to go outside?"

"No, but you are with me, so it will be fine."

Edith couldn't resist the thought of having coffee. Therefore, she agreed.

After getting a dip at her coffee, Edith felt a lot better. She was on verge of getting cranky.

“So, we won the war, yeah?” Edith asked while merrily dipping her coffee.

Kisia, meanwhile, was having green tea. She was enjoying its aroma instead of actually drinking it.

“Yes, we won. President Gvew stood no chance. He did know what he was doing though,” Kisia answered casually.

“So, what now?”

“What do you mean?”

“I saw a lot of ships surrender. They are PoW, yes?”

Kisia nodded.

“So, what’s going to happen to them? Going to execute them all?”

Kisia let out of a snicker. “Why would we execute them? We are releasing them at once. We just need their ships.”

Because Venus government was hell bent on killing civilians and the likes. Of course, Edith didn’t dare saying that out loud.

“We don’t kill or assassinate people if there is no benefit, and we sure hell are not going to waste tax payer’s money on feeding prisoners of war while we deal them. Letting them go is the most inexpensive option,” Kisia added.

Edith had no further comment to add and she quietly was drinking her coffee when Kisia dropped a bomb on her.

“And you can quote what I told you just now,” Kisia told her.

Confused by what she meant, she had to say, “What?”

Kisia explained, “When you go back to VNN, you can quote me.”

Edith was confident that they didn’t find out about the tiny bag she swallowed.

Thus she remained calm. “We don’t even have the video. What good would that be?”

Smiling, Kisia told her, “Must I mention a tiny unscannable bag in your intestine?”

Edith startled and weakly jumped up and down. She was getting cold sweats on her back. Trying to grin nervously, she carefully stared at Kisia who looking down and was swirling around her cup of green tea gently in both of her hands.

“Am I in a trouble?”

Kisia slowly moved her attention to her. “Nope, we never cared about whether VNN took the video or not. If we did, we would have simply driven or even destroyed the shuttles.”

Puzzled, Edith asked, “Why did you come after us then? What for?”

“To give you guys a hard time,” Kisia replied with a gentle smile, quickly adding, “For the fun of it.”

Edith wasn’t sure whether she should be angry or relieved.

“Think positive. You will score hugely with this accomplishment,” Kisia told her, which was the truth indeed provided by a fact that no one else made out with a video.

And as if answering her inner thoughts, Kisia told her, “No one else smuggled out with a video, only you did.”

Taking a deep breath, Edith had a question. “Whose idea was it? You know, giving us a hard time.”

Kisia answered promptly, “Cecil.”

VNN staffs were released when the fleet reached Venus outpost and Edith wasted no time and went straight to her chief who was expecting grim news in his office.

“Welcome back.” The chief welcomed her behind his desk. He had his fingers crossed. “I heard what happened. Good job regardless. I can’t fault for your efforts.”

Edith decided to play along. “No promotion then?”

“This is a result driven business and you understand that there is no result,” The chief told her. “But like I said you put in efforts. A small bonus is all I can give you.”

Instead of frowning which the chief expected, Edith beamed a bright smile. “But I do have the video.”

“What?” The chief narrowed his eyes and demanded, “What do you mean by that? Explain.”

Edith pointed at her belly. “It is in here.” And she explained what happened at which point the chief stood up from his chair at once and dashed toward her, holding her hands and shaking them up and down in excitement.

“Good job!” He uttered and repeated. “Good job!”

It was a big score for Edith. At the same time, it was also a big score for the chief as well. Both of them were going to benefit from this hugely.

Although it wasn't so pleasant to have dug through her own feces to obtain the bag and the disk within it, she couldn't care less. The disk was her key to future success.

Hours after Edith submitted her disk, VNN announced an emergency programme featuring the live video she had taken. Her commentaries were left unedited and viewer rating was over 98% during the period the programme aired. It was also the very first time Edith's name showed on credit screen. It clearly said: “Video and commentaries provided by Reporter Edith of VNN”

It was a proud moment for her.

And the next day, her chief duly summoned Edith to his office.

“Congratulations, the programme was a huge success. Viewers especially liked your amateuristic commentaries as well,” The chief welcomed her with open arms. “You’ve earned your reward. Name it and I will see what I can do.”

Edith revealed that her ultimate goal was becoming a news anchor in prime hours. The chief nodded along while she explained him her goal.

“That is a long ladder to climb and I hope you realize that you can’t just get there in one-go,” The chief explained. What he meant was that he wasn’t able to get her what she wanted which Edith fully understood.

“I know, chief. It’s a long ladder to climb but I haven’t been able to even start in the past seven years.”

The chief once again nodded firmly. “I see. I may have something that could get you started.” Having said so, he opened a drawer and pulled out a paper file.

“This is an upcoming documentary. The concept has been decided but no staffs has been assigned to it.” The chief emphasized, “Yet.”

“What is it about?”

“It’s Venusian wild life documentary. If you want this, it’s all yours.”

Edith wasn’t sure what that meant. “Pardon? What do you mean?”

“It’s all yours as in you will be in complete charge of it. How you run the documentary, who you pick, whether you will be in the film or not, it’s all yours,” The chief explained.

It was a bigger reward than her thought. She expected to be host of some minor show to gain experience & renown but being in charge of a whole documentary

meant that she had a far better chance of being known. At the same time, the responsibility felt heavy on her shoulders.

“Maybe, it’s too big for me right now. I mean I was an equipment organizer few days ago...”

“The budget for this project is 25 million credits. You can hire an advisor if you want. Personally, if I were you, I’d take this chance in a heartbeat. I can give you something else if you really want, but I’d take this. You don’t get to be in charge of a whole programme very often.”

Edith groaned and considered her options but it didn’t take her long to come to a decision. She decided to take it. She spent tens of years at ENN and she was still nobody by time the ENN ships crash-landed on Venus. A big chance came and she decided to take it instead of trying to be safer.

“Alright, I will take it.” She gave the chief a firm nod, and the chief picked the file up and handed it over to Edith. “All yours. Read it over and do your thing.”

And being in charge of the project meant that she no longer had to report for work every day. Her sole task was to get the documentary rolling and produce a result in a year. Leaving work early, she returned home and read over everything in the file on her bed.

It was apparently the first attempt to educate Fallen Cratians about life outside of their city. Fallen Crater had been a fortress itself and its inhabitants inside never

had to leave the crater in their whole lives. For thousands of years, its inhabitants lived inside of the crater merrily. They never felt the need to go out and Venus authorities never bothered to make them go out.

However, Cecil wanted to change the behavior and secretly ordered VNN to produce a Venusian wild life documentary, hoping it to make some Fallen Cratians to see that there was in fact a world outside of the crater. Cecil claimed that the project was on a low priority and VNN subsequently also placed the project on low priority as well. And perhaps because of so, the project had been handed over to Edith.

“Life outside of the crater, huh...,” She said to herself as she placed the file next to her on bed. Staring through a transparent wall, she saw a view of dense skyscrapers and shuttles were flying about. She, too, never felt any urge to go outside of the crater. Fallen Crater provided everything people wanted and needed. Recently, a big stadium was constructed right outside of the crater for European football but it wasn’t all that popular at the moment and it wasn’t exactly working out at this point.

She felt she needed a guidance or some advices on the matter and the first person who popped in her head was Kisia. Arranging a meet with her was as easy as calling FC city hall and asking for Kisia who in return asked her to come down to a café nearby the city hall.

It was the same café she had taken Edith to on the day she was given the immigration paper.

“This must be your favorite place,” Edith remarked when she saw Kisia already waiting for her by a table with her usual green tea.

“Have a seat,” Kisia gently pointed at an empty stool on the other side.

Edith ordered espresso when a waitress came by.

“I saw your video as well as your commentaries,” Kisia said. “Good job. It wasn’t too bad for a first timer.”

Edith beamed a smile at Kisia and told her, “Thanks. Well, it took 7 years for that chance to come.”

“At least you grabbed that chance. You’d surprised how passive people can be.”

Edith made no comment on Kisia’s statement. Instead, she changed the subject.

“I’ve been put in charge of a documentary.”

“Oh? Congrats. That’s a big promotion for you, isn’t it?”

“Yeah, but I don’t have a clue in what to do.” Edith took out the file. Placing it on wooden desk, she opened it for Kisia to take a look. She glanced at it and smiled.

“How fate works sometimes,” She told Edith. “I am very familiar with that programme.”

“You know about this? How?”

“VNN was contracted to make that film. It was Cecil’s order but it was also my idea.”

Edith’s eyes widened. “It was your idea?”

Kisia grinned and told her, “I am the leader of Venus cosmetic division. One of my focuses has been getting Venusians to realize that there was a wild life outside of this city.”

She explained further that only the O’ren knew how beautiful Venusian wild life was.

“I assume you want my advices?”

Edith nodded at her, adding, “I have a year to make this happen and weirdly the first person I thought was you.”

“And it seems you’ve come to the right person indeed,” Kisia agreed.

Kisia didn’t offer her complex advices. Her advice was rather simple. She recommended Avertto’s Adventure.

Avertto was an ex-policeman who changed his career after reduction of police forces in Fallen Crater. Due to sharp decline of crimes, most of police stations were idling and Cecil decided he didn’t want to waste money paying them. Furthermore, each government divisions, such as Kisia’s Venus cosmetic division, maintained a small armed force of their own, which further nullified the need of actual police over the years.

“Averto’s Adventure is a start-up tourism company. I was the one who persuaded him to take on that path,” Kisia explained. “He is one of few men who’ve actually been out there in wilderness.”

Kisia told Edith to meet him in person and tell him about the programme. She claimed that both of them would be able to benefit from it.

Averto’s Adventure was conveniently located on edge of the city. In fact, it was a small rundown 2-story building which its first floor was half buried into the rocky wall of the crater. It was by a road to a tunnel that led to the Fallen Crater Football club stadium.

Edith’s first impression of the building was that it was cozy. While the building did look rundown, it was blending well with its surrounding environment and she felt the half buried first floor was a nice charming touch. There was an old-fashioned sign saying “Averto’s Adventure” on a wall.

AA (Averto’s Adventure) was apparently run by Averto. He had two staffs working with him in the building. Edith was first mistaken as a tourist which she had to quickly explain herself and her purpose of visit. She was promptly taken to Averto’s office where she was made to wait few minutes before Averto himself entered.

“Hello, nice to meet you. I heard you were referred by Kisia?”

A man with full beard offered his hand and they shook hands. Edith explained her purpose of visit briefly.

“The whole business has been rather slow.” Crossing arms, Averno stood by a window where he could see an empty parking lot by the building. “But I was told it would be slow, so no surprises there.”

“How is it like to be out in the wilderness?” It was a genuine question from Edith who had never left the crater.

Averno beamed a tranquil smile while still looking through the window. “It’s ... wonderful. More people need to get out there. They are missing something truly fascinating.”

Of course, Edith had no idea at all.

“Let me take you out there. See for yourself. It will be good for your project,” Averno suggested and Edith agreed. It was time to see what was out there.

AA operated two shuttles and Averno took Edith out to middle of nowhere with one of the shuttles. The flight time was about half an hour and where they landed was a cliff.

Venus terrain around Fallen Crater was high canyon with countless streams. The canyon gradually lost its height and steepness eastwards and streams would

become rivers. The great rivers region was such an example where there was a plain and rivers were flowing across.

Averto apparently headed westwards and the steepness of canyons were menacing. Edith couldn't even dare to stand by the cliff. The wind was strong as well. She feared the wind might just push her off the cliff if she stood too close.

Meanwhile, Averto was installed a temporary ladder.

"A ladder?!" Edith exclaimed. "It's vertical down there and just how tall is this?!"

"It's about 8100 feet to the bottom," Averto giggled and added, "It's worse than vertical. It's 105 degree overhang."

Edith felt dizzy. She had no idea what she was getting herself into.

In a desperate attempt to avoid climbing down for perhaps hours, she suggested, "Couldn't you just have landed the shuttle down there?!"

"Are you kidding? The gap is too narrow for shuttles to navigate."

"Why did you have to pick here?!"

Averto chuckled and told her, "You will see."

He had to add several extensions to the ladder to make it reach the bottom. And he gave her a pair of padded gloves with metal pieces. She had no idea what the gloves were for but she was in panic to ask. Once that was done, Averto was ready to climb down but Edith was not.

"My legs, my legs are shaking. I can't do this," She uttered with a shaking voice. "I mean I am afraid to even look down there."

“Come on, you will get used to this. I mean you have to if you want to do your project.”

“What have I gotten myself into...,” She muttered as she took tiny steps toward the cliff. She carefully looked over the edge. The bottom couldn’t even be seen.

“Oh, God, Oh, God, I can’t do this!”

Averto grabbed a bag and started to climb down and shouted at her, “I am going down. Follow me! Make sure you wear the gloves!”

“Whoa? Hey? Wait!”

Although she hesitated, she didn’t have a choice. Therefore, putting the gloves on, she crawled toward the ladder and very carefully started to climb down. Looking down once again made her claim that she could not see the bottom. It was hazed.

Step by step, Edith climbed down. Both her arms and legs were shaking but she was holding on and progressively climbing down.

“This is going to take hours if not days!” Edith shouted to Averto who was a distance away from her.

“Which is why we do this!” Shouting back at her, Averto grabbed metal edge of the ladder and started to slide down. “You stop when you are going too fast! That’s what the gloves are for! We can make it down a lot quicker this way! ”

Edith was shaking her head in distress when she saw what Averto did. “You are asking me too much...”

“We can get down there in 10 minutes or so if you get good with this! You want to get this over with, don’t you?!”

Growling and biting her lips, Edith attempted to mimic what he did. After few attempts, she realized something.

“Why don’t we have safety equipment here?”

Chuckling, Averno answered, “I normally do use safety equipment. Not today though!”

“You are killing me!” Edith yelled in frustration and fear of fall.

“You should have seen an ESP do this!”

They eventually made it to bottom. Edith’s clothes were drenched in sweats while, for Averno, he seemed perfectly fine.

“Miss, look. You probably didn’t notice when you were climbing down.”

Edith was grasping for breath and had her eyes closed after literally falling down on ground when she came down. She wouldn’t open her eyes until her breathing stabilized which took few minutes. Meanwhile, Averno was setting a tent up after installing two lamps.

“God, I can’t believe I made it down...” Finally opening her eyes and standing up, she told Averno. “A tent? Don’t tell me we are spending a night here?”

Chuckling, he told her. “Miss, look around. We are in a fantasy world right now.”

“What?”

Edith looked around and her eyes widened. The whole area looked like a screenshot from a high fantasy e-book. The area looked completely secluded and lightly fogged. There was a small stream flowing by the tent Averno was setting up surrounded by two vertical cliffs. A far away view into the narrow valley looked and felt strange. She had never been to or seen such a scenery.

“Woah,” She uttered as she was taken by the scenery.

“Looking good?”

“I think that’s understatement.”

“Wait until it gets dark. It will be even more amazing. You can take my word for it.”

The stream was only knee deep and she could see fishes swimming inside.

“Fishes? Are those real fishes?”

Averno was setting up a chair and fishing equipment after he was done with the tent.

“Real fishes. There is an ecosystem here. I didn’t know there was one until I was persuaded to come out to the wilderness.”

“I’ve never seen a real fish in my whole life.” She attempted to catch a fish which evaded her hands with ease and swam away to safety.

“Miss, get back here. Quit scaring fishes off. We need those for dinner.”

“We are going to eat these?!”

“Aye, taste good, you see.”

“Is that even legally allowed?!”

Edith was born and raised on Moon where concept of fishing did not exist and fish was an amazingly expensive delicacy. She did work on Earth for ENN but fishing was prohibited on Earth.

Averto sat in his fishing chair and threw in a bait. “Never eaten fish?” And Edith came out of the stream and relaxed on ground by the tent.

“Nope, never.”

He chuckled again. “Fishes taste so damn good. Once you taste it, you can never go back to those dummy food you get to eat.”

“You didn’t answer me though. Is this legally allowed?”

“I don’t know. Kisia told me that it was okay within a limit. I have no idea what that meant.”

The area had a strange scent. It was also damp and fairly dark even with clouded sun right above them which was why Averto installed two lamps. The only sounds she could hear were Averto’s humming and the sound of stream and there was slight breeze coming down on them.

“So, this is what nature feels like?” Edith spoke. She didn’t mean to ask Averto.

“No idea, miss. I’ve never been to Earth,” Averto answered and exclaimed, “Oh! I got one!”

Edith looked up. She couldn’t see the top. It was hazed.

“It feels good to be here,” She remarked. “It feels secure and cozy.”

Averto continued to hum after throwing a fish into a basket.

“So, miss, what’s your story?”

“What do you mean?”

“You know Kisia. Those who know her generally have stories.”

Edith laughed weakly. “I don’t have a big or long story. I’ve been nobody. I am trying to become somebody.”

Averto laughed weakly as well. “You are trying to do the exact opposite I am trying to do then. I was somebody and now I am trying to become nobody.”

He told her that he truly loathed Cecil’s government in the beginning. As a detective, he could not see innocent civilians getting killed left and right.

“Yeah, yeah, they may have committed some crime,” He added. “But none of those crimes warranted execution.”

He was vocal in anti-Cecil movement until his department was decided to be dismantled.

“We were all getting fired,” He told her. “And boy was I raged.”

Shortly after it was announced that all staffs would be let go, he grabbed his gun and attempted to break into Venus city hall where he believed Cecil was residing. Long story short, he couldn’t get past the lobby on first floor and was jailed.

“I was expecting to be killed,” He told her with a weak laugh.

And it was when Kisia approached him with an offer.

“She got me out and took me to some weird café and offered me a drink which I duly refused. She told me to get out of the crater and cool my head which I understood as being exiled.” Avertó laughed as he told her. “She asked me what I wanted to do and I told her that I was a cop. Then she asked me again what I wanted to do.”

Being a cop wasn't Avertó's childhood dream. In his childhood, he wanted to become an adventurer. A silly dream, he claimed with a laugh, but Kisia took it seriously apparently as she got him an interest free loan that had no deadline.

“A loan of fucking 25 million,” He said out loudly. “Can you believe that? Interest free and no deadline to pay. She basically gave me all that money. Can you believe that?”

Edith smiled. Yes, she could believe that. Her project also had fund of 25 million, so yes...

“So, I purchased the rundown building for a million and started the business. And when I got here the first time...” He wouldn't speak further.

“What happened when you got here the first time?”

“Hah, shit,” He blurted. “I went too far. Oh well.” Sighing, he continued, “I cried.”

“You cried? How come?”

“Because what I wanted was right here all along. Being an adventurer wasn’t a stupid dream. It was an achievable goal.”

Hence the beginning of “Averto’s adventure”. Later he inquired Kisia why he wasn’t killed while others were killed for virtually nothing.

It was the same café when he called her out.

“We don’t kill people with dreams, sir,” was her answer. Since the answer, she refused to meet Averto anymore.

By time it was getting dark, he had caught four fishes. He gutted them out skillfully and started to cook them on sticks by a campfire he created with slow-burn logs he had. He applied salts while cooking and, when Edith took a bite, tears foamed in her eyes.

“What is this? Magic? All you did was cook it on fire and sprayed salts. How can this taste so good?!”

Averto laughed pleasantly. “Shocking, isn’t it.”

“Oh, Gods, this is sooo good!”

He looked around. “It’s getting dark enough to start.”

Edith was clueless as to what was about to happen.

Averto giggled. “You will see soon enough.”

By time, Edith finished her share of two fishes, the ground started to glow in light purple. It wasn't actually the ground. It was the Vie moss that started to glow.

"The ground is ... glowing?!" She stood up immediately in fear at first and then she became curious. "It's the Vie moss, isn't it."

Averto clapped weakly. "You are smarter than me. I thought I was high when I saw the ground glowing for the first time."

He explained that only Vie moss in valleys would glow and he didn't know why.

"I haven't bothered getting samples to examine. I am just an adventurer after all. It is what it is as far as I am concerned," He added.

"Amazing..., the valley feels like a fantasy world right now."

"Yep, and only few of us know this is out here."

She carefully sat down and touched the Vie mosses. It felt warm and fuzzy.

"I think there are more interesting things to discover on Venus, so that is what I am doing now," Averto explained. "Hoping to make some money with the tourism company I've set up though. I never have to pay back the 25 million but I am going to pay back if I can."

Edith realized why Kisia recommended her to him. His business could easily get free advertising through her project.

With a smile, she told him, "I think I have an idea."

Kisia was watching TV which was a rare behavior from her. She was watching a new documentary called “Averto & Edith’s adventure”.

Edith showed up on TV. She was apparently on a roof of some building and her short blond hair waved sideways as she began her speech.

“It’s pretty windy out here today. Hello, everyone, I am Edith. Today, I am about to show you something you’ve never seen. And you know what? It’s been here all along.”

Edith soon went out of focus and the camera focused on what were behind her, a shuttle that had its door open. A man with full beard and two staffs were uploading crates of what appeared to be equipment and supplies.

The man with full beard shouted toward the screen.

“Miss! Edith! Come on! We haven’t got all day!”

And then the focus came back on Edith who beamed a smile at the screen and turned around at once. She dashed toward the shuttle.

Smiling, Kisia said to the screen.

“Keep climbing, you will get there one day.”

The show became a hit.

Fin

A long time ago ...

Two scientists in lab coats were finalizing what appeared to be a tiny bit of a purple moss on a petri dish. It was inside of a sealed transparent glass container where two sensors were wired into.

The male scientist said, "Artificial sunlight is on."

The female scientist's eyes remained fixed at the sensor readings. The male scientist, meanwhile, made sure that the angle of light was correct and joined the female scientist.

They waited a minute and the male scientist raised his voice in excitement. "Oxygen level is raising rapidly. Photosynthesis efficiency and speed are off the charts!"

They were attempting to create a form of moss to be used on Venus. At this era, the only habitable area on Venus was Fallen Crater and the crater was completely sealed. Everywhere else on the planet was inhabitable due to high level of carbon-dioxide as well as sulfur dioxide, not to mention sizzling temperature caused by the greenhouse effect.

“Let’s add sulfur dioxide,” The female scientist said to which the male scientist replied with excitement. “Yes, of course, it isn’t over until we test it out with sulfur dioxide.”

The glass container had a small opening that was covered with rubber. By using a needle, the male scientist added sulfur dioxide into the container.

And they waited another minute.

“The sulfur dioxide level is dropping and it seems photosynthesis efficiency has gone down but by only perhaps 10%,” The male scientist reported. “It’s working! It’s really working! We’ve found a solution to terraform Venus!”

The female scientist rubbed her eyes. “It took so long,” She told him.

“But we did it! This is an achievement of the century!” The male scientist exclaimed with joy. “If it wasn’t you, I would have never managed to do this. You should name it after your name. You deserve such a recognition.”

The female scientist shook her head. “No, but I shall name is Vie.”

“Vie..., meaning life in French?”

She nodded and offered her hand to the male scientist for a handshake.

“Good work, sir,” She said.

“Good job, **Cecilia!**” He cheered.

Fin

