

Space Highway

The Awakened

A20 ~ Kitty's Legacy

This place changed a lot... quite obvious. More than a thousand years have passed. Plus, there was that earthquake...

Even so, I like this neighborhood of New Angeles and brings back memories from my past. Many memories from the twentieth and twenty-first century come back when I'm wandering through the old streets.

The strongest memories are those related to Kathy... I can't help to remember her... My interactions with Aia and Enya make them flourish every so often. Mostly Enya...

Kathy... I can't avoid the mark she left on me so many years ago... That bronzed, slightly plump yet sweet woman. My *intimate* friend...

That's the main reason why she pops up when I'm with Enya. There are similarities in our relationships and both are quite felines. Well, Enya really *is* feline, and Kathy *was* feline-like...

I sigh deeply as my feet guide me through alleys I haven't explored yet. Aia, Enya... what do I do about these women? I—Yes... I love them. But... why am I so uncertain? What would Kathy tell me? She always knew how to give advice. She knew me so well...

This neighborhood has really changed... I can't find any recognizable building... But it brings me peace. Since I had found it again three weeks ago, I've been wandering through it in my free time. It truly calms me and lets me think. Plus, I'm able to escape from Aia and her continuous flirting while avoiding me. Also,

I can avoid Enya's pushing. She isn't pushing to have *real* sex with her but to get things worked out with Aia.

I sigh again. How can I work things out with Aia when she is too undecided? I feel like I need to await her, no matter what. But, am I able to do so? Can I really wait for her? I have to... I don't feel attracted to any other girl then the two. So strange... I know I wanted to change, but this is too strange... Right now, in the past, I would have several lovers and fuckbuddies. But... I'm longing for one woman and waiting for her while I have a *barely* sexual relationship with another. For how long can I go on with this?

How strange... I'm able to think this stuff through while thinking of Kathy... How would she feel if she knew that I feel relaxed while thinking of her and resolving my love-problems...

Thoughtful, I keep wandering the alleys. I double a corner and...

"Kitty!"

My legs shake... Sudden tears well up... I fall to my knees... A drown outcry emerges my throat...

"Are you all right, son?" asks a feminine voice roughened by the pass of time.

I lift my head and I'm able to discern the affable face of an old woman.

I stutter, "Kit...ty..." My words do not come out...

The old woman looks at me astonished, turns her head to the center of the small plaza, and turns back to me.

"You know of Kitty?" Shocked, I nod. "Oh, my... Come, son. Take a seat and have a drink."

She leads me to a bench and I sit down. She gets something from a vending machine.

"Here, son. Take," she says handing me a coke.

"Tha—thanks..."

I open the can and take a sip.

My eyes lie on the small bronze bust standing on a pedestal in the midst of the small plaza. It's the splitting image of Kathy.

"It's a tribute to the legendary Kitty..." she sighs while I look at her shocked. "It is told that she lived many adventures together with her partner, the Phoenix..."

"Huh?" I blink even more shocked.

"That's right, son. There are many legends and stories about this couple."

"Le—legends? Couple?"

The gentle smile of the old woman turns to sadness.

"That is, until the day the Phoenix disappeared from the face to the earth." I swallow empty. "It's said that Kathy, sorry, Kitty, also disappeared, out of despair, several weeks later. Nobody knows with certainty what happened to them..."

"I—I can't believe it... Kathy..." I tremble. "You've promised me—" I can't go on... my voice shivers, my throat clamps down, and my eyes are watery.

"She promised?" The old woman looks at me surprised. "Who are you, son?"

Still unable to believe it, my words come out in dribs and drabs, "I... am... Kira... the... Phoenix..."

"Oh, my..." The old woman lets her can fall and looks at me as if she had seen a ghost. "I'm so sorry, son," she finally says, "I didn't—"

"It's... okay..." I interrupt her stammering. "Tell me more, please..."

A gentle, warm smile appears in her old rugged face.

"I am unsure on how accurate the stories are. There are, still, many legends floating around this old neighborhood.

"What is for sure, is that both of you disappeared around the year two thousand and twelve. It's said that Kitty couldn't bear the Phoenix's disappearance and went out of her mind. She disappeared one night. Not even a farewell letter. This plaza is the place where her home stood."

I listen to her in silence, still with tears in my eyes.

"I can't believe it..." I sigh deeply. "Kathy, you promised not to wait for me, nor look back..."

“Son...” I feel her old hand on my shoulder. “You truly must be the Phoenix. You are the first in my hundred and twenty-one years to cry your heart out in front of the bust of my aunt—”

“Aunt?” I cry out in surprise.

“Yes,” she nods slowly. “I am a descendant of Kitty’s brother...”

“Emilio’s niece?” I ask baffled.

Her eyes widen.

“You truly have to be the true Phoenix... Yes,” she nods again, “I am Catarina, in honor of my lost aunt.”

“Catarina...”

“Come with me. I want to show you something...”

Bewildered, I follow Kathy’s elderly niece. Kathy...

.

In the cozy living room of the second-floor apartment facing Kitty’s plaza, Catarina offers me some algae tea and brings some old, visibly aged books out. One is a photo album.

My tears begin to flow again... There’s an old photo of us together with the Grand Canyon at the back. I remember it clearly, it was a year and a half before I was cryopreserved.

“Oh, my...” Catarina gasps comparing the photo and me. “You truly are the Phoenix, you haven’t aged a bit...”

“Yeah,” I nod slowly. “I’m an Awakened.”

“You are? Then you were cryopreserved?”

“Yeah...” I nod again in a sigh. “In the year two thousand and twelve. Kitty knew about it. It should have been a few weeks long experiment. I’ve awakened January the seventh of this year...”

“Oh, my...”

“Kathy knew about the experiment. She was the only one. We met the last weekend before the tests began. She promised me she won’t look back, that she

would begin a new life if it failed... Why didn't she take it to heart? Why did she have to disappear too? Where did she go?"

"I'm sorry, son... I do not know... Perhaps, this will give you the answers you are seeking for..."

"A letter?"

Catarina hands me a clearly aged and yellowish envelope. *To Kira, the Phoenix; Para Kira, el Fénix* can still be read on it.

"No way..." I sigh emotionally while I take the envelope and look at the carefully drawn letters. "It's Kathy's handwriting." My hands shiver.

"Nobody else knows about this letter but my family. I'm sorry, I didn't mean to lie to you before..."

"It's okay, Catarina," I shake my head. "You didn't know who I am..."

"Indeed... Twenty-nine generations kept this letter save. Finally, I am able to hand it to its addressee."

"Thank you, Catarina," I say with mixed feelings and a deep sigh.

Carefully, I open the envelope and unfold the letter.

"Dear Kira," I begin to read aloud. "If you are reading this letter, it means you have survived the experiment and I have gone..."

"I'm sorry, from the bottom of my heart. I cannot live with the anguish of not knowing if you are alive or not. I'll change my life, I'll go to Australia. Far away from where you could die... If you're still alive, please look for me. I have to tell you something, it is really important for me..."

I swallow empty and my hand looks for the teacup.

After I washed my hoarse throat clean with the tea, I go on reading.

"The last few years of our relationship as intimate friends as we were used to, has changed me. And just when I was sure about my feelings, you go and disappear. During our last date and night I couldn't tell you... I fell for you, madly. Kira, *amor*, I wanted to tell you. *Te amo, locamente*. Then you came with this stupid promise... I cannot forget you, nor begin a new life, not without you..." Tears roll

down my cheeks as I go on. "I wanted to tell you in person, Kira. *Te amo*. I love you."

I look out of the window and at Kitty's bust in the midst of the plaza.

"Kathy..." I sigh deeply. Catarina serves me more tea with a gentle smile. "Thanks, Catarina."

"Kira," I read on after a sip from the tea, "if you still have some feelings towards me, look for me. I have to tell you, say it to you. I don't know if you will ever love me back. You already have found Maria, even with all the bad stuff with her father. I am unsure if you will ever trust a girl after all that... But if you can, I'd love to be the one who fills your life. I know, it is not appropriate to tell you in a letter.

"It broke my heart watching you fall into Maria's father's hands. She was a wonderful girl. Even so, I felt terrible. There it was that I found that I truly love you... You looked so happy with her. My heart shattered.

"When that happened with her father, I'm sorry to say it, I was, somehow, relieved... I still had an opportunity. On the other hand, it hurt watching you being dragged into the dirt by those mafiosi..."

I look at one of the pictures Catarina took out of an album. There she is, at the wheel of her truck, laughing with the sunset in her eyes. I took this picture, now I remember it clearly. We had a wonderful night afterward.

"Kathy... I didn't know anything..." I sigh. "You've never told... We weren't supposed to—"

I interrupt myself and take another sip from the soothing tea.

"*Lo siento*, I'm sorry, Kira. This is the only way I am able to lighten myself from the huge weight I port..."

"I don't want you to feel bad for the decisions we took. We were supposed to not have this kind of relationship. We were all right, it was all right. But I couldn't avoid it... I fell in love with you, *amor*."

"Please, look for me, I want to tell you in person. Even if your answer is a blunt 'no', I want to hear it from you.

"*Con amor*, Catarina Muñoz.

“P.S.: I might have a surprise for you, if you come to see me.”

I lay the letter on the table and look at it.

“Kathy...” I sigh. “Your letter arrived over a thousand years late...”

My emotions break down completely and I begin to cry like a child...

I don't know for how long I have been crying in the arms of Kathy's elderly niece... I can't remember how long it was since I've cried so much. I must have been a kid...

I didn't think that my past would follow me so deeply... Kathy... you shouldn't have left me this letter...

“Kira, do you feel better now?” Catarina asks me in a caring voice.

“Thank you, Catarina,” I say wiping my tears after blowing my nose with a handkerchief she handed me.

“I'm sorry, son. I didn't know the content of the letter. If I did, I wouldn't—”

“No, Catarina,” I interrupt her. “You did the right thing.”

“I am sorry,” she repeats. “I don't know the details about your relationship... Now I'm confused...”

Trying to relax, I take another sip from the delicious tea.

“You see, Catarina, our relationship wasn't what you would call conventional, nor a proper one...”

“What do you mean?”

“Ugh~ I don't know how to say it... We were *intimate* friends... friends with benefits. Every time we met in a town or city, we slept together.”

“Oh, my... Tales tell that you were a couple.”

“Almost a couple...” I sigh. “We tried it once but it didn't work out for us and we kept being friends. Ugh~ How to say it properly?”

The old Catarina begins to giggle.

“You don’t have to be formal just because I am an *old lady*...” she giggles drawing inverted commas into the air. “You were fuckbuddies, right?”

I blink thrice at her statement.

“Ye—yeah... that’s right. Each of us went each’s way, with our lovers, and hookups. But, every time we met, we slept together.”

“Oh, my. That’s truly not how the tales and stories go...”

“What do you know, Catarina?” I ask wavering.

“Hmm...” she thinks for a while and takes a sip from her cup. “It’s said that you were in an open relationship due to your work, as you rarely met. It seems the tales were wrong...”

“It’s also said that Kathy, despite having many lovers, had only eyes for you. The disappearance of Kathy created many rumors... I don’t know how accurate they are...”

“Tell me, please.”

The elderly woman takes another sip of her cup while she flips through one of the books filled with cutouts of news articles.

“Some say that Kathy lost her mind after your disappearance and killed herself... Honestly, I doubt it. And this letter is the proof. Others told that the two of you have eloped... Sadly, not true, as you are here now,” she sighs. “Yet others theorized that Kathy went abroad because she couldn’t bear being alone... That’s quite more probable, more so after reading this letter.

“Each and every rumor kept in my family are about on why Kathy left. But very few about the Phoenix, as far as I know.”

I sigh deeply. Seems like I am the bad guy in these rumors...

“But there is one rumor which always intrigued me,” Catarina says while I look at her perplexed. “It’s said that Kathy was last seen leaving a gynecologist’s office beaming in happiness...”

“What?” I jump up.

“Yes,” she nods with a smile. “It’s said that she left Los Angeles being pregnant.”

“Pregnant?” I flip out.

"Indeed," she nods again. "With your child..."

I'm unable to close my mouth, nor to utter a single word. Kathy... my child? During the last few months we met, she was on the pill...

"Ah!" I jump up as Catarina jolts in surprise. "Kathy... I can't believe it!" I slump into the couch. "You stopped taking the pill? Why? Without telling me..." I sigh and look at my elderly host. "Some months before the experiment, Kathy told me she was on the pill. That there is no need for condoms... She said that's just for me..."

"Oh?" Kathy's elder niece blinks. "You think that—"

"Yeah, she wasn't... it seems..."

"Oh, my..."

"This means..." I swallow empty and tremble. "There must be... still a descendant alive... our—" I bite my tongue.

"Kira..."

"I—I don't know how to react... I'm in love... I love Aia and—What should I do if suddenly a grandchild of mine appears?"

Catarina stands up and hugs me.

"If she loves you, there will be no problem..."

"But... she isn't yet prepared... she needs more time..." Me too... me too...

"Son... Get rid of the doubts. You'll see, if she truly loves you, she will accept it no matter what. But you'll have to confront it first, Kira. Go to Australia and look for Kitty's legacy."

"Ye—yeah..."

.

Hurriedly I enter our apartment. Aia is lying on the sofa reading something on her DigiBook, seems like a magazine. I have no time for that.

She jumps up startled by my sudden entrance. I don't let her speak...

"Aia, please lend me your Ferrari..." I hastily tell.

"Huh? Why? What happened?" she asks bewildered.

"I have to go to Australia for some days. It's important for me."

"What happened?" she asks again.

"I'm sorry, Aia. It's something from my past, I don't want you to be entangled in it too..."

"No," she harshly says.

"Huh?"

"That's not how stuff works... If it's something that's affecting you that much, I need to be part of it." She *needs?*

"But Aia..."

"No. I've never lent my ride to anyone. I'm going with you. And no buts."

"Aah~ Aia..." I sigh and hold my head.

She suddenly turns violetish, her cheek burn...

"Your past concerns me too, Kira."

I'm unable to say anything else...

.

We're flying over the Pacific Ocean, Aia is piloting her *baby*, me in the passenger seat, and a cooler sits on the backseat.

Finally Aia asks me the dreaded question...

"Kira, tell me what you need to find in Australia."

"Aia," I sigh. "It's really complicated. I don't know if it is good to find what I want, for us."

"What? Why do you say so?"

"I mean—" I sigh again and look at her. "I mean, our actual and future relationship..."

"So deep it is?"

“Yeah, possibly deeper...”

“Kira... tell me. You're frightening me...”

“Yeah,” I sigh yet again. “Last Thursday I found something unexpected... Most are rumors but—”

“Kira...” she takes my hand and squeezes me gently, “let's solve this together. I know that I still need time and that you are desperately awaiting... Let me help you. There's nothing I—”

“I might have kids...” I interrupt her.

“What?” she asks me surprised. Not the kind of surprise I expected... She grips my hand stronger, yet so gently...

“It seems,” I sigh again, “that one of my lovers from the twenty-first century became pregnant just before my cryopreservation...”

“Really?” Aia squeezes my hand again.

“Yeah,” I nod. “The woman was a trucker too. We called her Kitty, while she called herself Kathy. Her real name was Catarina Muñoz, a second generation immigrant from El Salvador. We had a special kind of relationship...”

I begin to tell her everything I've learned from the elderly Catarina...

“Incredible... Kira...” Aia sighs after I finished. “How do you feel?” she asks me.

“Huh?” I blink thrice. Not the question I feared for. “Well...” I sigh. “Confused...”

“I figure...” she sighs again. “I understand now why you were reluctant to tell me. Don't worry, Kira...” She gently caresses my hand in hers. “I have to confess... I was afraid of such possibility...”

“What?”

“Well... The Phoenix was always known to be a womanizer...”

“Aia...”

“Thus, I prepared myself for this possibility, to the day you'll tell me that you have kids.”

“But...”

“Don't worry, Kira. It doesn't matter.”

“It does matter, Aia...”

“Uhh~” She tightens her grip on my hand.

“I fear it will bind me to my past...” I sigh profoundly turning my head to the window.

“Not necessarily, Kira,” she says with her most caring voice.

“What do you mean?” I ask her turning my head back to her. She wears a gentle smile.

“You don't even know for sure that those rumors are true, don't you? Not even if there were more descendants, right?”

“Ugh~ Yeah, true.”

“Then don't rack your brain over it. Let's first see what we find, then we'll see how things develop. We'll figure what to do then, okay?”

“Yeah, okay,” I sigh deeply, this time relaxed.

“I'll help you,” she says while gently squeezing my hand.

Australia... First stop, Canberra.

We visit the country's administration and ask for past records.

As such requests are unusual, at least to go back so much in time, we met resistance. But after explaining to them that I am an Awakened and that I am searching for my past *family*, they let us search the old records.

“Now I know why they are so reluctant...” I sigh standing in the corridor of a surely hundred meters long shelves.

“Yeah...” sighs Aia too. “It didn't help that all digital data from your times was lost. Luckily, they still have the paper records...”

We were guided to the approximate location of all US immigrants around the two suspected months in which Kathy would have immigrated.

“You take June, I take July...” I tell Aia in a deep sigh.

“No problem,” she tells with a smile. “Her real name was Catarina Muñoz, right?”

“Yeah.” I nod and begin to browse the endless paper files.

A security guard stands at our side. He has to check that we won't research into others' files. A large roller and a mobile elevator sit behind us.

We have to take each box with the elevator down and put them on the roller to take them to a separate room where we can go through each of them.

Each of us can only take ten boxes to the special room to sift through.

“Aargh-” I'm about to throw a whole box through the room but I'm able to hold myself back.

“Let's try August...” tells Aia calmly.

“I'm not yet through...” I sigh.

“Let me help you,” says Aia and opens the last box from my pile.

“I need to go out and have a fag...” I tell standing up.

“Wait!”

“Huh?”

“Catarina Muñoz! Found her!” shouts Aia excited.

“Really?”

“What's her birthday?” asks Aia.

“December the fourth, nineteen eighty-one. In Tucson, Arizona.”

“It's her!” Aia exclaims again taken the file out of the box. “Look...”

Truly... Kathy's file...

With trembling hands, I take the file from Aia. I open it.

“It's her signature...” I sigh while I try to hold back a tear.

“She legally immigrated on August the thirtieth, twenty-twelve,” says Aia calmly.

“Look, her first address is in Sidney.”

"Why is her picture barely showing? Her face... I can barely see the outline of it..." I ask the guard.

"I'm sorry, sir. Most photographic pictures from that time were lost due to inadequate storage. That's all I know..." he sighs. "I am truly sorry..."

"It's okay," I sigh deeply.

"Kira, let's go to Sydney and check if there is any hint, okay?" proposes Aia.

"Yeah..."

"Can I take a picture of this file?" Aia asks the guard.

"Sure," the guard says. "It is clear that you know this person. I am only here to guard the privacy of those not related to you."

"Thank you," Aia smiles and begins to take a picture of each sheet of Kathy's file.

After returning all the boxes to their places, and thanking all the people who helped us and let us in, we flit to Sydney.

To our disbelief, the whole street we search for does not exist... at least not anymore.

In the city hall, we are told that the whole city was rebuilt shortly after the Third World War. Even if most of the streets are back on the map nowadays, some were lost forever...

After further inquiring, we only find a record of a parking ticket under her name. The most important details of this ticket, however, are the nickname she put in, *Kitty*, and the fine is for parking a truck on the wrong lot.

"Now, at least, we know that she was here, and that she was a trucker..." asses Aia. "And now we know that the vehicle was registered in Perth."

"Yeah..." I sigh.

"Let's stop for today, Kira. We're exhausted."

"Right..."

We find a nice hotel looking over what once was Sydney Harbour and the iconic, still existing Opera House. It's just the harbor that does not exist anymore, despite being called that. Just some smaller boats and leisure ships anchor in the designated *new* harbors.

We are flying towards Perth.

Right now, just the sea is beneath us. We left the ground shortly after a brief stop in Adelaide.

I'm exhausted... I couldn't sleep at all last night. Aia embraced me and fell asleep on the spot.

Last afternoon and night, we wandered a bit around and visited the Opera House...

Even if I was beaten... I couldn't sleep...

Finally, Perth is highlighted in the AR...

Aia slows down and reaches ground level, and we enter the suburbs.

I look around while Aia concentrates on piloting her trusty Ferrari.

"Stop! Aia! Stop!"

She slows down.

"What?"

"There!"

I point at her left side. The AR highlights the name of the place...

"Kitty Square?" she almost shouts and immediately veers into a parking lot.

We rush out of the car onto the plaza.

"Kira! Look!"

Aia grabs my hand and pulls me to a plaque.

I'm getting even more nervous...

We reach the sizable plaque.

"Homage to Catarina 'Kitty' Muñoz. The trucker who saved this neighborhood in a heroic act. The city of Perth. February the fifth, twenty-seventy-three..." Aia reads.

My knees falter again...

"Kira?" Aia exclaims and holds me just in time...

She gently guides me to my knees while I begin to pour my soul out.

"It's okay, Kira..." she gently whispers. "I'm with you... I'm here..." she repeats while she takes me into her arms.

"Sorry..." I weep.

"Don't worry, Kira," she says brushing her hands through my hair. "I didn't know it affects you that much..."

"What's the matter?" A sudden voice makes us look up. "Are you not feeling well?" The police officer asks preoccupied as he comes nearer.

Only one word leaves my lips...

"Ki-Kitty..." I stutter.

"Ah~" He looks at the plaque, then back at us. Proudly he says, "She is the hero of this neighborhood. We are keeping this square clean and in order for about a thousand years." He blinks at my reactions. "Are you all right, sir?"

I am unable to utter a word... I'm shaken from all this. Kathy... I shouldn't have pursued your legacy...

"What's known about her?" intervenes Aia. "Are there documents about her, anything?"

"Oh, yes, indeed..." The officer nods quite proudly. "She lived, after all, in this neighborhood."

"We absolutely need to learn more about her," says Aia while I try to regain my usual self. "It's really important for him. *Ub-un*," she shakes her head, "for us. It's important for us." Aia...

"Then, you should follow me..." he simply says and points to the other side of the plaza.

Aia looks at me with a gentle smile and helps me up.

"Are you able to, Kira?" she asks in a sweet voice filled with care.

"Ye—yeah..." With you... I may... I cannot tell her right now...

"A museum?" both Aia and I ask in unison while looking at each other astonished.

"It is," tells the young officer proudly again. "A small museum dedicated to the most exceptional trucker ever driving through this continent."

"Woow..." Aia exclaims astonished, then turns to me, "Why is there no museum dedicated to you then, Kira?"

"Don't ask me..." I sigh deeply still wavering.

"What do you mean?" asks the officer perplexed.

"Ah," Aia turns to him. "Kira, my friend, is an Awakened..."

"Woowooow..." the officer exhales stunned and inspects me from tip to toe.

I ignore the dumbfounded officer and enter the museum.

"Kathy!" I cry out. "It's really you!" I almost fall in front of a big picture of her.

"Wow..." Aia sighs emotionally at my side. "Such a beauty..." She takes my hand again and grips me gently but with determination. "No wonder you liked her, Kira."

"Yeah..." I sigh. "Just as I remember her..."

"Don't—Don't say you have met her?" A sudden worked up older voice nears.

An elderly man nears us hastily.

“Yeah...” I simply say while I lay my free hand against the protective glass of Kathy's picture.

Right now, I only see her image while I feel Aia's warmth through our joined hands.

“Kathy...” I sigh. “You really have come to Australia... Seems things went all right for you. Imagine... they even set a museum up, just for you...” Some tears dribble down my cheek.

“Kira...” Aia gently says bringing me back. “They are saying that her grave is in the outskirts.” She produces a handkerchief and dries my tears up. “Want to meet her?”

I simply nod while all my emotions are a hell...

Now I realize that we are surrounded by some people... A strange mixture of faces of bewilderment, happiness, and sorrow.

Aia takes my hand again and we follow in silence the young officer and the elderly man.

We follow our guides through the cemetery until we reach a small mausoleum. No way...

A single tombstone stands in the small building. *Catarina “Kitty” Muñoz* is carefully engraved in it.

“Kathy...” I stumble slowly to the gravestone. “*Tadaima*¹, Kathy...” I fall to my knees on her tomb. “It took me...” I stutter, “over a thousand years to receive your letter and your feelings... *Honto ni gomen ne*²! I'm so sorry! *Watashi wo yurushite kudasai*³. Forgive... me...”

My emotions overflow again and I begin to cry over Kathy's grave. My tears flow while my hands form fists and I bow down, my forehead touching her cold stone slab.

¹ ただいま Japanese: “Hello”, “Here I am”, “I'm home”. Literally: “right now”.

² 本当にごめんね。ほんとうに ごめんね。 Japanese: “I am really sorry.”

³ [私を]許してください。 Japanese: “Please forgive me.”

Softly and gently, two arms embrace and hold me. Such warmth... This soothing fragrance... This gentle touch...

My senses come back to life slowly yet steadily.

Slowly, yet so slowly, I sit up, still embraced. One hand gently caressing my head and face. Not the slightest whisper... Just a reassuring embrace... Another hand lies on my heart. More warmth, more peace, more affection, more...

My hand floats over the one hovering my heart and I hold her gently. A deep sigh leaves my lungs and lips, and slowly I calm down.

“She has already forgiven you...” I jolt at Aia’s gentle whisper. “I feel she has forgiven you, time ago...”

“Aia...”

Her embrace gets tighter, even if gentle.

“Take all the time you need, Kira.”

I look up at the gravestone.

“Kathy,” I sigh.

“Kira, do you want to be alone to say goodbye to her?” she gently whispers with her warm, caring voice.

“Stay, please...” I can only say.

She answers by tensing her hug.

I lay my hand on the slab covering Kitty’s grave.

“Your letter... I received it... Your niece from the twenty-ninths generation handed it to me. Forgive me for having taken so long until reading it. I came to give you the answer to your long sought question... It was supposed that... we were meant... that we have not...” I stutter emotionally. “I didn’t realize...”

“I love you too, Kathy...” I finally say. “If—if I wasn’t cryopreserved... if I’d awoken when I was supposed to... I’d have told you in person. *Ai shiteru*⁴, Kathy, I love you.

⁴愛している Japanese: “I love you” (Committed love)

"I'm sorry, Kathy... Things are different now..." I sigh deeply. "Thank you for your feelings. I'm afraid there are—there is a woman I love even more..." The arms around me shudder. "You know, Kathy? She is a trucker too... in outer space. Nowadays, we haul goods to other planets, even galaxies. A true shame you can't see it..."

I sigh deeply again and dry another tear rolling down my cheek.

"Thank you, Kathy," I whisper. "Thank you for having waited for a whole millennium. *Te quiero, te amo*⁵, Catarina."

My tee-shirt is getting wet. Long, silken blue hair covers my hand placed on Kitty's grave.

I lift my other hand and reach Aia's cheek, her chin rests on my shoulder. I caress her cheek while her tears drop onto the fabric of my clothes.

"Thank you, Aia," I whisper.

"*Uh-un~ Thank you, Kira~*" she says sobbing.

"Aia... I wait for you..." I tell her convinced albeit still shaken. "Whatever it takes, for as long you need."

"*Hm~*" she hums gently while I wipe her tears.

We kept for a good while in that position. We both needed it.

Finally, our emotions settled a bit.

"Kira..." she whispers.

"Don't worry, Aia," I reassure. "Thank you for being here with me. Take all the time you need. I wait for your decision."

"*Hm~*" she hums and sighs. "Just a bit more... I'll never let you wait for that long..."

"Aia..."

She frees me from her embrace and kneels at my side.

⁵ Spanish: "I love you." Both mean "I love you", *Te quiero* also means "I like you." or "I want you."

“Sorry, Kitty,” she says lying her hand on Kathy’s grave. “I met Kira the moment he awakened. I fear, he is now the one waiting... I need to be stronger to be like you. I don’t want to replace you... I’d wish to have met you and we could be friends. I hope you can forgive me and rest in peace...”

We are back at the small museum drinking some soothing algae tea around a table.

Until now, none of the people who accompanied us to the cemetery and back had said a single word. Now they all ask questions, trying not to be rude.

They already have seen me break down... no harm in telling them now.

I tell them what happened. From my relationship with Kathy to her letter and what we have discovered since.

“Cool story! Can I write an article about it?” asks a teenage girl.

“Of course,” I sigh. I’m already a public figure... “But, please, don’t write too personal and intimate details down.”

“Sure. Of course. I’m May. I want to be a journalist,” she giggles.

“Nice to have your future so clear, dearie,” Aia tells her caresses her scalp. “I have to ask for a favor...”

“Sure thing,” May happily nods.

“Please, don’t mention me. At least, don’t name me.”

“Huh? Why?”

“You see...” Aia squirms. “I’m not ready yet...”

“I don’t get it... But I’ll do so,” energetically says May.

“Thanks.”

“Mister Phoenix...” the old man suddenly says with an aged envelope in his hands, “This is one of our most guarded treasures... But given the circumstances...”

He hands me the envelope. *To Kira Matsumoto, el Phoenix* is written on it. I don't think I have the strengths to read it...

My hands shiver while I look at the envelope.

"Kira..." Aia softly says. "Don't want to read it?"

"I—I don't think... I have the strengths..." I stutter. Without thinking it through, I tell her, "Can you... read it for me?"

"Uh~" she jolts. "I don't think I should..."

"Please..."

"*Hm~*" She nods. "Then..." She takes the envelope from me and carefully opens it.

"Uh~ Should we give you space?" asks the officer.

I look at the people who had seen and heard everything. They look at me filled with emotions and gentle smiles.

"No..." I finally say. "You have witnessed it already..." I sigh. "Aia..."

"Yeah, Kira?"

"Please..."

She nods with a hum and carefully unfolds the letter.

"Ah! The date... It's just the day before she passed away..." She jolts and looks at me. "Sorry, Kira..."

I simply nod and she takes a deep breath.

"Dear Kira,

"I don't know if you will ever receive this letter. It seems that the first one never reached you... But I have to write this one too, more now, when my hour is coming..."

"I never stopped loving you, Kira, *amor*. I know it may seem selfish, but you were my one and only life-partner. The only man in my life. There were no others... Ah... don't say sorry now, I know you would. I would never blame you for anything. I lived a good and fruitful life since I have come here. But not as good

and fruitful as I would have loved... you weren't at my side. Our life was intenser together.

"I write you to tell you, if you survived, not to drive into despair after having received my first letter. I know that the possibility is minute.

"The experiment was supposed to last some weeks, and you would have been awakened then, if I recall correctly. My memory isn't as good as it was time ago...

"A small flame of hope told me you might awaken someday. It seems it wasn't meant to be in my lifetime... Now I realized how brief life really is...

"My love for you has kept me alive for all these years... Kira, *amor mío*, even now, in my deathbed I cannot stop loving you..."

Aia halts the reading to produce her handkerchief and dry the tears rolling down her cheeks.

"I know I'm repeating myself..." Aia sighs and goes on reading. "Please, don't feel guilty, it's not what I want. For all these years, I was sure about your answer. I knew it... I knew you did love me. You always were as easy to see through as you are stubborn.

"You were too obstinate that our relationship could not evolve the way it did. Your relationship with Maria showed it..."

"Remember the last weekend together? Once, even just once, you shouted 'I love you, Kathy,' when you cu—"

Aia interrupts her reading flustering. Her cheeks are on fire...

"We get it, Aia. You don't need to say it," I tell her. Shit... Kathy... I sigh.

Aia recomposes and takes a sip of her tea.

"Ah~ Yeah..."

"You can't imagine how happy I was. I know your feelings towards me. I couldn't say anything... I was so happy that I couldn't disagree when you asked me *that*... I couldn't keep our promise, Kira *querido*.

"I wanted to go back together, with you, when the experiment was over. When you didn't come back, I had to go... everything reminded me of you. I couldn't stand everyone asking about you.

"I left America. Do you remember? Once we discussed how it would be if we would, hypothetically, get married... When I asked where you would love to go for our honeymoon you said—"

"Australia," I interrupt Aia in a deep sigh.

I signal Aia to go on. She simply nods.

"I'm sorry, Kira, *tesoro*. I went without you for our honeymoon..."

"But I wasn't alone, *amor*. I know it is not wise to tell you, but I have to... Here, in Australia, I gave birth to Kenichi, your first son."

Aia begins to shiver, I notice her emotions, she seems to be happy. I, however, I don't know what to feel...

"Aia..."

"Kira... Congratulations! You had a son..."

"Yeah..." I sigh deeply. "And I wasn't there for him..."

"Kira..."

"I—I'm so sorry..." I hold my slump head. "I am a horrible father... I've never met my own son..."

"No, Kira..."

"Ouch..."

She just pinched me.

"Listen first to what Kitty has to tell..."

"Kira *querido*, I know you... I know you'll think you were a bad father. No. You aren't, you weren't. *Nunca*. I gave him the name you said you would love to give your firstborn son. You gave him his name.

"Kenichi grew fast and strong. A week ago, your first great-granddaughter was born.

"Know what? He is proud of being the Phoenix's son. He knows what happened to you. He never had hard feelings towards you for not being here. Sad, yes... he was very sad but does not hate you. He couldn't... He is my son too... He couldn't hate the man I love so deeply.

“You won’t believe what name he gave your first grandson. Kira. He gave him your name, in honor of his father, the man I loved the most... *Sniff...*”

Aia had to stop reading, her emotions don’t let her...

“Sorry, Kira...” she sniffs. “I can’t stop the tears...”

“Sorry, Aia.” I hand her a handkerchief. “Sorry for making you read this—”

“No...” she shakes her head, “it’s okay. I want to read it for you.”

She dries her tears.

“*Amor*, I don’t know how many years must have passed when you read this letter. Nor if you will receive it ever...

“I only want to let you know that nobody in your family resents you. You haven’t abandoned us. You haven’t abandoned me. You did what you had to do under the given circumstances. Please, don’t—*amargues?*”

“Huh? I don’t get it...” Aia takes a closer look. “It says *amargues*, but is stricken through. Another word is halfway written over it... something *bitter*... Ah! *Embitter!* Sorry...” Aia sighs. “Please, don’t embitter your life...”

“It’s a bit strange...” Aia sighs again. “English wasn’t her first language, right?”

“It actually was, but with some Spanish mixed in...”

“Makes sense, then...” Aia smiles. She takes a breath and goes on.

“If you read this letter, it means you have, finally, awakened from your long sleep. I hope you have dreamt of me. That sounded a bit childish...”

“This letter is my goodbye, Kira. *Te amo*, I love you, Kira, *mi cielo*.

“I really hope that, when you awake, you’ll find someone you may love even more than me...”

“*Con amor*, with love, Catarina.”

The long silence becomes unbearable...

Aia looks at me with tears rolling down her beautiful, violetish tinted cheeks.

“Kira...” she sighs.

“Thanks, Aia...” I sigh too. “I—I need...”

Aia embraces me tenderly. That is what I need, a gentle hug.

.

Finally somewhat calmed, I address the elderly museum director.

“Do you know something about her, our, descendants?” I ask.

“Just some vague bits and pieces, I fear,” he says.

“It doesn't matter, anything...”

At that moment, everyone seems to have awakened from a spell...

“Incredible.” “Amazing.” “Impressive.” “So... cute... *Sniff.*”

Even so, they only comment on the story and do not question me more.

Relieved, I look at Aia. She smiles heartily.

“Let's search for your descendants...” she says.

“I don't think I should, Aia,” I tell sighing.

“Huh? Why not?” She blinks thrice.

“And what should I say if we found them? ‘Hi, I'm your great-great-great-great-great-great-great-grandpa, how are you?’”

“Uh~ Dunno...” she says downcast.

“I think I should leave it here and don't dwell too much in it. But I need to know more about Kenichi.”

“Yeah,” Aia nods. “You're right. Let's.”

.

During two days we research several surviving archives of the city of Perth.

Thanks to the involvement of the Kitty Museum's director and May, we were able to gather quite a lot of data. Despite her young age, May helped out a lot. She was able to open doors we wouldn't have been able.

We sit around a large table in the library of the city hall.

“Sheesh... So many paper documents...” sighs Aia.

“But it is not much...” sighs May. “Too many archives were lost. Not to mention the digital ones...”

“Better than nothing,” I sigh too. “Let’s see what we got.”

“I’ll start. Okay, Kira?”

“Yeah,” I affirm at Aia’s question.

“Kenichi married Anabel at the age of twenty, in Sydney,” Aia tells with her DigiBook in hand. “A year after their wedding, they had a son. They called him Kira in honor to his lost grandfather. Three years later, Anabel gave birth to twins, Katherine and Anna.”

“Kira had one son,” May continues. “Only child. Both Katherine and Anna had two kids each, one of each gender. From there on, each couple had at least one child until we cannot find any data...”

“Yeah,” I sigh and read my part, “It seems that Kira’s branch was lost... Either he had no great-grandchildren or the files were lost. The same happens with Anna’s descendants. Only four generations are registered here...”

“Katherine’s branch seems to have gone further, six generations,” tells Aia. “There is an emigration-file of one girl leaving Australia for the US, it seems she went to Huston. We’ll need to search there for more...”

“No, Aia. I’ve told you, not more...”

“Sorry,” Aia smiles sheepishly. “I was too into this investigation...”

“Yeah,” I sigh. “More about Kenichi.”

“Ah, yes...” Aia nods. “He sat for an Aeronautical Bachelor of Technology at the Edith Cowan University. It’s where he met Anabel, it seems. She studied something related to Information Sciences. After they graduated, they moved to Sydney to do their master’s degrees. They ended forming their family there, in Sydney. But they always had Perth as their second residence.”

“A bit far away...” I remark.

“*Hm~*” Aia nods. “Surely they wanted to keep near Kathy...”

“True...”

“Interestingly,” adds May, “their three children were born here, in Perth. That’s why they are registered here. It seems that Kathy was always present...”

“Wow... He must really have loved his mom...” says Aia blinking.

“Yeah...” I nod.

Another day comes to an end...

I lie on the bed browsing the pictures we took of the old documents on my DigiBook.

Aia enters the bedroom and the air fills with the scent of her shampoo. As usual, she only wears a pair of panties. The only towel she wears is enveloping her silken hair...

She sits on the bed at my right side and glances over at my DigiBook.

“He really looks like you...” she says wearing a gentle smile.

“Yeah...” I sigh looking at one of the few surviving pictures. “He has Kathy’s eyes...” I say touching Kenichi’s image.

“Do you want to research more in Sydney?” she asks embracing me.

“No, Aia. It was enough... I want to honor Kathy’s last words and not go crazy over it...” I sigh deeply.

“Yeah...” she says in a relaxed sigh and blushes deeply.

Her embrace tenses and she cuddles against me.

“Kira...” she sighs.

“Yeah?”

“What are you gonna do now?”

“What do you mean, Aia?”

“Well... What goes through your mind now?”

“I—I’m trashed...” I confess. “Now my feelings and emotions are even more confused than ever.”

"I noticed..." she sighs again. "What can I do for you, Kira?"

"Huh?"

"I still need more time... Sorry, Kira... I'm a mess too..."

"Don't worry about me, Aia," I tell the shuddering bluish alien. I place my DigiBook on the nightstand and embrace her too.

"But I do..." she says. "I worry about you, Kira. I can't not worry..."

"Aia..." I sigh.

"I want to—" She shakes her head.

"Huh?"

She sighs deeply.

"Sorry," she says blushing. "The only thing I can offer you right now is just a simple hug..."

"That's more than enough, Aia. More than enough..."

We embrace gently, caressing each other's backs.



I awake and find Aia's beautiful blue eyes.

She is cuddling onto me and brushes a lock out of my face.

"Good morning, Kira. How do you feel?"

"Better," I sigh. "Good morning, Aia."

I embrace her. I just need another hug. Too much happened these last days...

She embraces me tenderly and keeps caressing me.

"Do you need more time here?" she asks me.

"No..." I sigh. "I can't dwell in my past too much. Better we go home."

"*Hm~*" she hums lying her head onto my chest. "Kira?"

"Yeah?"

"Don't let all this to change you too much... I like you how you are..."

"Yeah," I sigh. "I'll try..."

"*Hm~*"

"I want to visit Kathy's grave before we leave. Want to come with me?" I ask her.

"I think..." she lifts her head and looks at me, "you should go alone. I'll come later. You need some time alone."

"Thanks, Aia. I will. After breakfast."

"*Hm~*"

Blushing deeply, she gives me soft, short-lived peck.

.

Aia is so caring... I sigh to myself wandering towards the cemetery. I'd wish...

.

"Hi, Kathy..." I kneel down in her mausoleum. "I had to come back after reading your letter. Thank you for everything."

"You don't even know what a weight you have lifted from me. I think, I know what to do now. But I am still unsure about many things..."

"You see, the woman who is with me, Aia, I love her deeply. And..." I sigh, "there is another woman I also love deeply... Both are space-truckers and I can't decide... I love both too much to hurt them..."

"I'm sorry for telling this.... But I have to tell you... You'll always be in my heart and memories, you'll always be with me. You saved me so many times... I'd loved to form a family with you. Now it's impossible... it took me over a millennium to understand your feelings..."

"Know what, Kathy? I'm changing... I'm not the womanizer you knew anymore... I'm only interested in two... even if it tears me apart. Now I only want to wait for Aia and her decision. I'm not interested in other women anymore, beside these two. Isn't it ironic? Me, a helpless Don Juan. The ladykiller Phoenix... who has

been with so many women..." I sigh. "Do you think it would have happened with you too? I don't know... But right now... now I'm waiting for my perfect girl's decision..."

Tears dribble down my cheeks again.

"Sorry, Kathy." I sigh. "I don't want to tell you my problems... I only want to tell you that I already have found the girl you desired to find. I found her the same moment I've awakened in this era. At least, I'll be able to fulfill one of your last wishes..." I sigh. Even if it is not Aia... Enya is also here... I do not know what will happen from now on... But I will, at least fulfill this last wish of hers.

"I won't chase after the lineage we left," I tell the gravestone. "I won't be able to do it. Emotionally, it might destroy me... Sorry... *Watashi wo yurushite kudasai.*

"I know that you brought Kenichi up splendidly. I can't ask you for more..."

"Kathy... I'm so sorry that I wasn't able to be together with you. Once more, you have saved me from the depths..."

I caress the harsh stone-slab of her grave. I feel Aia's presence at my back. Her fragrance reaches me. It's time...

"Thank you for everything, Kathy... I have to go now... The girl you have wished for me is awaiting me.

"I'll be back next December the fourth. See? I still remember your birthday..."

"*Sayonara*, Kathy... you'll always be with me..."



To be continued in:

Space Highway: The Awakened ~ A21 ~ Cargo 66: Crushmont

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TL;DR:

The author does not identify himself with any character.
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