

Envy: noun \ 'en-vē\ (Latin - Invidia)

1 : Painful or resentful awareness of an advantage enjoyed by another joined with a desire to possess the same advantage.

2 : To feel a desire to have what someone else has : to feel envy because of (someone or something)
Psychological comparison – Envy prefers to destroy, where jealousy prefers to control.

"Still ... the possibilities of weightlessness are there for the ingenious to exploit. No need to carry bras into space, that's for sure. Imagine a spacecraft of the future, with a crew of a thousand ladies, off to Alpha Centauri, with two thousand breasts bobbing beautifully and quivering delightfully in response to their every weightless movement ... and I am the commander of the craft, and it is Saturday morning and time for inspection, naturally..."

Michael Collins -Command Module Pilot of Apollo 11

Quoted from his autobiography *Carrying the Fire*

(Random House Publishing Group, 1974)

Horizon's Ascension Song

Tempo: Andante e affettuoso.

slowly raises baton

The Space Academy Graduation Ceremony

Houston, Texas

May 4, 3100 AD

The sound of waning applause subsided when the Chancellor of the Space Academy moved to the podium at the center of the stage.

"Thank you for that moving presentation from our extremely talented Cyber Implant Specialist, Mrs. Savage. Now, I'd like to introduce our Valedictorian of this graduating class and future spacefarer on the next Aro Mission to Mars, Miss Isabella Swan!"

The audience response was a loud one, resoundingly supportive of the young woman as she walked slowly towards the podium, her spine erect in confidence and her smile bright with happiness, sure-stepping towards the front of the stage. She inhaled a calming breath, willing her voice not to tremble beneath the surge of her roiling nerves before opening her lips to speak.

"My fellow graduates, think about progress and how far we've come – how beautiful our song of ascension into space and strides onward have been. The collective tempo of the emergence of human progression is a powerfully diverse one, the walking pace of *andante* rising to the agile-brightness of *allegro*, with moments of sonorous arias and then quietly subtle movements softening in between.

Since the first tentative steps of mankind's earliest ancestors, the winds of intrigue and ingenuity have stirred the rising dawn of our progress as a species. A brilliant assonance has been shaped by resounding thud-forward footprints dancing across the Earth's epoch, the meter of time juxtaposing onward glances with bone-white hope."

The stadium was filled with fifty thousand in attendance, and yet one could hear a pin drop within the silent emergence of rapt attention of the audience, many leaning forward to draw themselves further into her resonant thrall, except for one. Michael Newton frowned as he listened to the beginning Swan's speech, deep lines of churlish annoyance wrinkling his forehead. He always found her and her fiancé, Edward Cullen, to be irritating road blocks to reaching first place. As salutatorian, he should've been proud of his achievements but wasn't, his bitterness clouding his mind. He frowned as he redirected his joyless attention to the reminder of yet another failure, as she continued her speech.

"The pulse of the cosmic metronome keeping humanity's cadence moving forward has continued the constant in our prospective evolution. Over a thousand years ago, some eyes were drawn to the inky-shimmering mystery in the distance, the countless stars unveiling their poetic lullaby, shining point by point where horizon kissed night sky."

Newton rolled his eyes in resentment at her condescension masked as a positive message, knowing full well that no one gave a shit about her poetic flights of fancy regarding the history of human exploration. He had an important scientific experiment waiting for his attention in the lab after the ceremony, and the longer she spoke, the more he was delayed, and the more likely Edward Cullen would take first prize in the Volturi Scientific Consortium Award – something that he would not allow to happen. The taste of copper filled Newton's mouth as he bit his tongue in frustration, jarred out of his black thoughts by Swan's annoying voice grating on his nerves.

"Looking outward towards the horizon ripened into a sweeter upward, and some among us began to consider beyond what we thought we could reach. It's *that* spirit that became the air in our inhales and exhales of change, the adaptability of our species tested."

Newton turned his gaze towards Edward Cullen, who was smiling up at his fiancé in clear admiration as she delivered her speech. Comparing himself to Edward molded his wretchedness regarding his own inadequacies, making him yearn to *test* his nemesis with conflict, because Cullen was far more impressive to look at when he was vulnerable or on the rare occasion seething in discontent and tripping over his disgusting arrogance. Edward was taller than most men, extraordinarily handsome and one of the brightest minds out of the space academy in centuries ... he was everything Michael was *not*. Cullen's memory was astounding, his mathematical theories breaking new ground in astronomical physics, and he had the esteem of not only everyone around him, but the devoted admiration and companionship of Isabella Swan, a woman of extraordinary intellectual aptitude in her own right.

From a very young age, Michael learned from his father's urging that envy could be a healthy catalyst for self-improvement because the emotion reminded him of the things he desired and should strive for, his inner-drive pushing him in pursuit of the things he wanted in life ... that a robust dose of envy could determine his future choices and his bright-hoped legacy.

Yet Michael's hopes had never been healthy or remotely realistic. His sights had been firmly set on Edward Cullen from their first few days at the Academy as freshmen. Mr. Newton and his son had always gotten ahead by cutting corners and bribing those that were malleable. Edward Cullen came from a poor family with no powerful connections in his back pocket. The Newtons held every privilege and maintained powerful connections that pushed them ahead, often times unfairly – the father always compared the son to the disadvantaged Cullen, who began showing his intellectual gifts and social ease from the very start, where his son seemed to flounder. Instead of working hard to advance with integrity and on his own merit, as Edward did, Newton decided to take out his annoyance with his

nemesis in underhanded and cruelly exploitative ways, his twisted, poisonous intentions rotting from the inside out.

In his quest to prove his father wrong and to best Cullen in every way imaginable, he grew consumed by his envy. Influenced by his fear of failing to garner and surpass the success his father now enjoyed in life, Michael Newton embraced whatever means necessary to achieve greatness himself. He believed that part of that greatness would come when he had a perfect mate who could share in his glory, in keeping with the powerful connection his own parents shared and from which they seemed to benefit.

Edward Cullen and Isabella Swan were considered the perfect couple in the eyes of all who met them, and while Michael couldn't dispute that truth, it still hurt him to admit that it was that kind of closeness, respect, and glory that he also wanted. The tide of envy and resentment surged further inward as he scornfully listened to Isabella's speech, Newton's evil-eye pinched temples and channeled eye brows throwing his contempt at Cullen one last time before directing his scorn towards the long-winded fiancé at the podium.

"In order to get to the shimmering points of light above us, we had to first sever the tethers of earth's gravitational pull on us and leave one horizon in the quest for the next by gazing far into the heavens. The action of human skull meeting cervical spine became a necessity as the Earth and humanity changed. We reached the moon and then even farther, our swelling dreams distended to the shore of goals we wished to reach, then waning back into the stilling sea of space-weariness, the problems on the Earth's surface taking precedence and stalling star-high exploration. Yet the lyrically expansive broadening of Earth's edge increased opportunities and amplified human drive and dreams, the horizon's ascension song of progress resonating throughout our solar system, pushing us to dream bigger."

Newton could feel the hostility towards Edward ignite as he listened to his fiancé use the sweeping language she was admired for, her ability for writing and poetry often extolled. The tone of her speech made him uneasy, the familiar isolation creating conflict deep within his darkening heart, tinder flaring under the heat of his unflattering prejudice. Somewhere along the way, Newton began enjoying his isolation because he grew content in his bitterness and addicted to the euphoria his pervasive envy gave him, his chemical dependence on the adrenaline high growing more acute. It was something he yearned to feel with an increasing frequency, his moderation of negativity slipping as he began asserting himself the way his very successful father had always encouraged him to.

Yet there was nothing encouraging about the way Newton's covetousness manifested as he grew up, and as he watched Edward Cullen now, he couldn't help remembering the injustices he suffered because of him, the aperture of his envy rupturing further.

The glory of success and the prominence of intellectual respect.

The most intelligent woman on his arm.

Invitations to the most exclusive clubs at the Academy.

More friends than anyone could possibly need.

Acclaim from everyone who knew him.

An intelligence that surpassed any other man he knew.

Jessica Stanley.

Michael turned in his chair and aimed his glare at the *bitch* Stanley, who sat in the row next to him as she grinned at the woman at the podium, clearly pleased with the message being conveyed. He scowled at his ex girlfriend as the bitter memories of her dumping him surfaced, for she'd almost become his

biggest *coup*, his means to the respect he sought along with the attention he'd garner with the beautiful woman on his arm just as his successful father enjoyed with his mother, a partnership Michael had grown to emulate.

When Newton first met Jessica Stanley, she was a confident and charismatic beauty who attracted the notice of every male in the freshmen class. When she began dating the alpha male Cullen, she became even more appealing by way of her surge in popularity. After her relationship with Cullen amicably fizzled out freshman year, Newton was ecstatic when she had agreed to begin dating him because he sought the popularity just as much, falling prey to rankism, believing that he'd achieve the same level of importance that Cullen seemed to possess. Yet the belonging he sought turned into the disappointment he got because Jessica was unlike his mother in all the ways that mattered to his aspirations, her outward beauty a taunting reminder of her inner-failings as someone who would help him get ahead. His mother made his father's ambitions her priority and was ruthless and conniving. Jessica was a genuinely nice person without a malicious bone in her body, always insisting on follow the straight and narrow path, remaining morally steadfast and forgiving.

Not the type of mate he was looking for.

Newton was a pro at harboring mutilated ideals and causing misfortune. He exploited the talents of others to achieve his goals and sabotaged the futures of many to secure his own happiness, believing that he deserved more despite the low standards he managed to achieve through his own means, thriving in dishonesty. He cheated on tests while attending the Academy and was ruthless in order to best the other candidates to get a spot on one of the upcoming Mars missions on the Twileye8, making sure that his father made the proper, exorbitant donations to the right people to make his trip a doubly sure thing.

So he had no qualms about taking advantage of Jessica's idealistic good-heartedness in order to *catch up* when he enviously swiped her ideas and hard work by plagiarizing one of her thesis proposals to better his chances at gaining the clearance to travel to the outer colonies. He became driven by his resentment instead of motivated by the positives in his life, placing more importance on success than happiness that he had a beautiful girlfriend who seemed to care about him.

That disconnect with Newton's own happiness was made even more acute because of his obsession with sizing himself against the most successful and popular ... and everyone seemed so enamored with the glory they attributed to Edward Cullen, placing him on a far higher pedestal than Michael ever stood a chance at being. Every woman seemed to swoon over Cullen's good looks, his brilliance, and a few even raved about the size of his dick. *Three and a half fists*. Or so Jessica crowed as she dumped him after discovering that he plagiarized her thesis, disgusted by the lengths he was willing to go to succeed, aiming to wound his manly pride.

It did, his envy becoming even more pervasive, arresting the lucid and confident life decisions he *could* have made yet didn't.

Newton's insecurities tainted any colors of happiness in his life, a dark place forming where unscrupulousness became a derivative of his burgeoning hostility towards anyone that seemed to lead a joyful existence or who enjoyed a sense of belonging with others – things that often attracted his envy. His desire to excel and acquire what he wanted came at a dangerous price. He paid dearly with his own potential inner joy, and he didn't strive to become immune to his bitterness. He embraced it, throwing kindling into self-sabotaging flame. It was a blaze that charred his emotional well-being, his envious feelings illuminating his grudges and reflecting his discontent with his own successes. His hunger never waned, the thrilling assertion of his selfish-driven influence over what once belonged to others fueling his power to take what he wanted. Jessica Stanley learned that the very hard way when she discovered his plagiarism, as did many of his peers after unearthing his rotten deceit.

Ultimately, Michael had no confidence in his own self-worth so he had no qualms about questioning the competence of others. He thought that Edward probably didn't deserve half of the success and acclaim he deserved, making him distrust the sheeny praise Cullen received even more, and so the deep-seeded hatred was fed and flourished, because what Mike was best at was lying to himself, fertilizing that envy with indistinct motivations and hanging those blurry goals on the dissipating end-trails of shooting stars.

Newton heard through various sources that Swan and Cullen were scheduled to travel on the next mission to Mars, and he was secretly relieved about that fact, especially since he'd yet to receive clearance and the funding to travel to the outer colonies and didn't want others to learn about his failures to acquire the proper credentials. *Out of sight, out of mind.* Yet at the moment, all he wanted was for the perfect fiancé of his nemesis to end her speech and be on her way, taking the beloved *golden boy* of the Academy with her. It was at that moment that the annoyance of Bella's voice brought his attention back to the podium.

" ... That ascension song was one that inspired us to build settlement on the Earth's moon, Mars, Jupiter's moons Ganymede and Europa, and most recently on Pluto, with manned missions reaching beyond the radius of the Kuiper asteroid field, bringing humanity even closer to the Alpha Centauri star system. These footfalls of progress signify something extraordinary for those of us graduating today, for each step literally means vertical energy rising for our hopes, our dreams, and our abilities to reach farther into space than we've ever been able to before. In closing, I'd like to share this poem with you, something I wrote to honor each of you as we leave the Academy in pursuit of your own dreams with our first steps into our futures ... "

Bella lifted her eyes and scanned over the classmates seated before her, making eye contact with many of her closest friends, her gaze lingering on her handsome fiancé for a longer moment before returning downcast to the paper on the podium.

"Our choice to move forward begins with a step.

Dorsiflex into the decisive track of the powerful heel,

Acceleration of hind-limb force,

Spring-massing into the future.

Our footstep continues with the decent of the calloused yet resilient

Skin of the heel into the starsighed setting-down of resolve.

Graceful arch stretched out over dreams

Beneath the pressure of our actions,

A bridge defying boundaries,

Surmounting the fear-gutting cliffs of hesitation.

Plantarflexion into the beyond,

Meta-theory meeting metatarsals.

Hello little toe bones,

Bearers of the force of our abstractive footfall,

The weight of our decisively inspiring gait powerfully

Spreading the regolith with our momentum.

The tips of our toes at the end of our step
Barely scrapes the surface of progress,
Yet our footprint leaves a reminder of our indelible persistence,
And a reason to make another one ahead of it.
One step-dream is momentum towards breathless awe,
But sometimes our trajectory needs velocity.
Both feet together now, parallel and forward-facing. Jump!"

Bella looked up from her speech with tear-filled eyes when she heard muted sniffles from the audience, trying to level her own composure with a deep breath. She lowered her eyes to continue, "When you take your next step, my fellow graduates, imagine where we'll be headed. We are about to make footprints on history, to embark on discoveries of our own. Many of us are going to Mars and the outer colonies, while others are entering into careers with the space industries operating above the Kármán line. Wherever your destination may be, I hope that your trajectory is a happy one, and that your destination is starlit and filled with positivity and warmth. Thank you for the happy memories and for helping shape me into the explorer I also hope to become. I am grateful for each of you and wish you a blissful future."

Most of the graduates had been moved to tears, for their special moment of achievement had been bitter-sweet. Many in the audience lost loved ones in the virus of 3098 AD, which swept over the Earth's surface in a matter of days, killing one-fourth of Earth's population. The death toll included entire families, as was the case with the Swans and Cullens – the losses made the graduates' journeys into the stars even more imperative, one day expanding genetic lines and transferring many of the eggs from Earth's precariously unraveling basket.

The survival of the human species depended on the fearlessness of the future explorers that just served as witness to Bella's speech. Their footfalls would become far-reaching, thus the appropriateness of the poem she'd just shared. Their tragic losses were not mentioned, but the meaning gently implied.

As the classmates and members of the audience stood to applaud Bella's speech, Newton sat solemnly and unmoving, refusing to show the positive emotions he didn't feel at first, and only offering small claps when Jessica fearlessly met his spiteful gaze, her expressive face glaring at his rudeness. She wasn't cowed despite his theft of her thesis and his sociopathic tendencies to get ahead, and she never allowed her regret of having a relationship with him keep her from positively looking forward. Her angry stare bolstered her appreciation for having escaped his clutches without her heart being truly hurt by his envious actions. He was a vile reminder of why she pitied his next girlfriend, and nothing more.

Bella made her way down the stairs to take her place next to Newton as the Chancellor walked to stand in front of the podium. She grew disconcerted by the way that Michael leaned away from her despite the considerable distance between their seats. He never failed to make her uneasy whenever she was in his presence, and she looked forward to never having to share a classroom or a laboratory with him again.

"Finally, we come to the announcements many of you have been looking forward to. The competition was incredibly challenging this year, and so the Space Academy's Board of Scientific Excellence has weighed the research results of the top ten finalists, and it's been decided that a first, second and third place should be awarded this year. The third place winner for his research in stellar radiation is Edward Cullen, who will receive a five hundred thousand dollar grant for future research."

Bella took the opportunity to get away from Newton and rushed to congratulate her fiancé, remaining

seated on his lap after the applause settled. She'd rather appear inappropriate in the presence of the Chancellor and her professors than return to her assigned seat, her skin crawling just thinking about being near the off-putting salutorian.

"The second place winner for his research in Astronautics is Michael Newton, who will receive a one million dollar grant for future research."

The applause of his classmates had been less animated, yet Newton was too excited to care. Because his envy became a kind of body chemistry, there was an adrenaline fueled rush that he sensed every time he thought of besting Cullen, the novelty of bursts of spite never dulling. It was a high that got him off when no woman was offering to, a phantom craving that always begged for more. And now that he had actually bested the *golden child* at something, he felt justified in his prior hostility and validated in every way that mattered to him most. Pulled back into reality by the sensation of a large hand grabbing his in congratulations, Newton was faced with the kind yet subdued eyes of his nemesis and was taken aback enough to offer Cullen his own dim smile and lazy-loose handshake, even if it wasn't heartfelt.

Yet Newton's euphoric celebration of self-relevance was short lived, his exuberance souring along with his faulty presumption of besting the one man he wanted to most.

"In an unprecedented move by the Assemblage of Scientific Scholars, a collaboration has taken first place. The winners for their joint collusion on Hybrid propellants are Edward Cullen and Isabella Swan, who will receive a two million dollar grant for future research."

The applause of his classmates was deafening, the cradle of Newton's aggression rocked once again by the sway of poisoned feelings of inferiority and disbelief, an uneven breath quivering past his blanching lips as he imagined a morbid daydream of Cullen and Swan laying motionless in a puddle of blood, lifeless and no longer a threat to his ambitions. Shaking his head to clear that tempting fantasy away, he watched the happy couple embrace and share in their success. Their happiness only amplified his sense of destructive isolation. Resentment surged through him as he was bested once again, his envious spitefulness forcing him to come to terms with the simple fact he couldn't top Cullen this time...but what he *could* do was set his sights on the Volturi Scientific Consortium Award. It was the most prestigious award granted to a scientist, and it was something that Newton wanted desperately. With the announcement for that award a few months away, he had lots of time to perfect his research strategies and hire specialists if he had to, on Daddy's dime of course. He would win *at all costs*.

Slipping into the cheering crowd, he kept his retreat as stealthy as possible as he sneaked behind the row that held his applauding parents, trying to avoid his father's disappointed scowl and mother's dim-bored frown.

Michael Newton knew it was time to try to turn his burning page. He hoped that justice would prevail one day soon, his legacy as bright as the sun – a sun that would keep him warm and serve as a blinding reminder to his parents that he was better and more worthy than Edward Cullen would ever be.

While the 22 year-olds had been given the clearance and awarded the funding for their journey into space immediately following the graduation ceremony, Edward and Bella decided to delay their space voyage in order to enjoy a little rest and relaxation after four years of rigorous training and preparation for off-world colony life at the Space Academy. Following graduation, they embarked on an eight month vacation which included getting married and a lengthy honeymoon trip that took them around the world. In the back of their minds, they knew that traveling into space held many risks and that circumstances might keep them from returning to Earth ever again, so they traveled and relished in the beauties of the planet.

Yet they didn't allow their fear of the unknown to keep them from answering the siren's call of the horizon's ascension song that beckoned so many previous spacefarers before them, inspiring them to finally take the leap themselves. On January 6, 3101 AD, the Cullens boarded the space shuttle and broached the Kármán Line for the first time, crossing the boundary into space and entering the orbit of the Tweyel8 Sojourn Sky Lab Space Station.

The married scientists had five days to experience the microgravity environment of the Tweyel8 before being transported to the Aro Star Ship for their eight month journey to Mars. The Sky Lab was deliberately operated with a disabled artificial gravitational system to prepare space colonists for all eventualities they might experience in the various climates, terraformed atmospheres, and artificial environments of our current space expansions.

The curiosity of living and doing *other* things as a married couple in weightlessness also appealed to those that made the Sojourn their resting place. With five days to spend in microgravity, the Cullens intended to make every moment memorable.

The moment Michael Newton floated out of the medic station after his physical examination upon boarding Tweyel8, he felt an extreme wave of nausea descend upon him, and he knew it had nothing to do with his body's adjustment to weightlessness. It had *everything* to do with the jaundiced emotions wicking through his seething rivalry with the man he spotted floating at one of the laboratory stations in the area he was headed, his suppressed feelings once again rising to the surface. The quelling look on Newton's face as he looked at his nemesis consisted of daggered hatred, a creeping green-haze forging into the crevices of his every thought, misshapen arrest of lucidity seeping into his bones.

Michael's trip to the outer colonies had been made with the intention of running away from his failures, and while his father spent a great deal of money assuring that his son's mental and academic records were squeaky clean, it appeared that more baggage accompanied him on his new journey than he'd anticipated. Newton had been under the impression that all of his former colleagues had traveled on to Mars on the previous mission, and yet there was no mistaking the truth floating before him - Edward Cullen was impossible to miss. Cullen had everything Newton desperately yearned for, and he realized with a crescendoing recognition that he'd have a very long time aboard the transport to Mars to find opportunities to best the one man who had what he wanted.

He has my life. I'll have it one day.

Revved on the high of his envious distortions, he calculatingly sewed an extra-wide smile to his wary lips as the wife floated around the corner to enter the lab. It was time to say hello and reunite with old academy chums. *Foes.*

Just the hint of looming conflict made his resentment salivate. With the residue of rivalry roughening his motives and resolve, he took one last bitter-throated swallow of his insecurities before pushing off the wall with his adrenaline-damp hands and floated towards the Cullens.

Houston, we have lift off.

Bella and Edward took a few restful moments to themselves after a mentally grueling series of lab tests on the space station, their sighing stretches propelling them back into the air behind their lab stations as they floated, the need for intensive concentration drifting away.

A thousand years ago, it was discovered that certain scientific experiments performed more accurately in orbital conditions, amplifying previously abstract notions and allowing scientists to broaden their

vision for what experiences in space would become. It was a vital reason why NASA maintained the operation of the space lab without the artificial gravitational systems activated, something that Edward and Bella appreciated more fully, their relaxing motions amplified. Every waking moment they spent aboard the newest research vessel in NASA's fleet of scientific sky labs was accounted for, so peaceful moments were few and far between, thus all the more welcome.

Bella felt Edward's left hand engulf her right one before opening her eyes in curiosity, her eyebrows quirking upward in silent inquisition as her husband pushed off of the wall of flashing lights, using his momentum to effortlessly pull her towards the long white corridor before them, floating into a small laboratory before she could ask about their destination.

The sliding partition closed, sealing them in privacy, and Edward pushed a button on his RegLink wrist band, the lock audibly clicking into place with his directive as he pushed another to turn off the lab camera for privacy.

Bella and Edward weren't aware that they'd been followed by the mosquito-sized drone Michael Newton brought on board for reconnaissance purposes. He'd used the drone during school to spy on his classmates' lab experiments and to cheat on tests. It had especially come in handy on the space station once he realized that the Cullens would share his journey. The drone was small enough to remain virtually undetected, and re-programmed to follow Edward Cullen's every move once Newton knew his archrival was accessible. It attached itself to and remained hidden behind the grates of a vent on the far wall of the small laboratory, transmitting the video-stream of the couple after they locked themselves in the small space.

Despite the months that passed since graduation, Newton's envy never waned. He actually found himself watching the couple even more critically now that he was within proximity, so much so that his obsession with their every move fueled his unrelenting desire to harness their happiness - Edward's in particular. Every action, every experiment, and every conversation was of great interest to Newton, always keeping his chief nemesis in his line of vision using the drone or his own eyes.

The fact that he could watch them alone in this private moment excited him even more, giving him a feeling of power over an opportunity they felt was theirs alone, a cruel-tinged grin slithering into his cheeks as their images were covertly transmitted to the small screen on his wrist, which also masked as a watch. He worked at his lab station as the images began streaming through, a sense of nefarious excitement coursing through him at the thought that he was about to uncover a lab experiment that would add to his own research project. He watched as they both drifted to the large window and clung to the bars surrounding it to better position themselves in the microgravity they'd slowly become accustomed to since their arrival on the Tweyel8.

Bella and Edward hadn't experienced the nausea from being subjected to the effects of near Zero-G, and they relished in the new sensation of buoyancy, knowing that their feeling of it would be finite. Becoming acclimated to the sensation of weightlessness was just a preparative step to equip colonists for the possibility of a malfunction with the pressurized systems maintaining the artificial gravity on the large transport ships or bustling human colonies of Mars and beyond. Yet acclimation to weightlessness wasn't the couple's *sole* objective. The kink factor also presented its own appeal. As long as space exploration had been conceived as a possibility by humans, sex in space had often played the setting in erotic fantasies in the human imagination, as well as in the minds of the Cullens, who floated in front of the large window looking down over the Earth. Bella's strands of long brown hair drifted in the direction of his shorter coppery ones as they floated closer to each other, chocolate eyes capturing his warm-jade gaze before smiling, unanimously turning to peer at the earth below.

"It looks like an illuminated diamond necklace draped around the neck of the Caribbean Sea!"

The excitement of Bella's observation echoed within their small hiding place. Still shrouded in a gown of pre-dawn, the Panamanian necklace scintillated off of the coast of the sea. The Tweyel8 drifted east over the dawning blue-black expanse of the Atlantic, the distillation of shadows into a shimmer-paling awakening. Husband and wife hovered in silence as they watched the sun rise over the water, blue-greens licked through sapphires, the coast of Portugal soon came into view in a captivating interplay balanced between the natural and human attributes on the surface of Earth.

Singing below them in their own primordial-tectonic aria, Tangier cinched low-heeled against the pale sands of Algeria, the base of Spain yielding and cleaving under the weight of Gibraltar and the surging Alboran Sea as it sparkled in the rising sunlight. A vast green oasis was sliding down the throat of the Nile, the wrist-cuffs of pyramids and the Valley of Kings visibly draped in the trailing sand-veil of the Egyptian Western Dessert as the turquoise Gulf of Suez loomed over the thirsty sun-bleached sand hues of Egypt.

The sensation of Edward's fingertips tracing the indentations of her ribs through her t-shirt compelled Bella to twist into his palm, hoping that his touches meant what she wanted them to.

"Place your toes to grip that bar, and hold on tight, baby. I'm suddenly ravenous."

Bella always enjoyed sharing in her husband's hunger and appreciated the spontaneity in which it often arose. She loved everything about the drive and determination he applied to every situation in life, and she especially loved the consonance of the erotic melody he created with his magical fingertips and tongue. Sighing at the sensation of his palms snaking underneath her t-shirt to tease her hardening nipples, she slipped her socked toes beneath the bar, curling them back to gain leverage. With no need for a bra in microgravity, his movements were unencumbered and swift - decidedly how she wanted him to be. Edward marveled at the sensation and shape of her flesh in his palms under the influence of weightlessness, an erotic malleability beyond his wildest dreams.

Newton's breathing increased when he realized that the couple hadn't gone into the laboratory to perform a secret experiment that might bring them closer to the Volturi award, yet that didn't compel him to turn away and return to his own research. His envious obsession with Cullen had festered too long to miss the opportunity to observe the *perfect* couple unaware, and while Michael knew that what he was about to witness might make him feel even more inadequate, he was unable to leave them some privacy.

Edward and Bella had been advised in NASA training that intimacy in Micro G would be demandingly tricky and were given tips for the helpful uses of super thin double sided Velcro filament – an antique invention that withstood the test of time, made stronger and nearly thread-thin by advances in technology. Luckily for them both, Edward carried a roll of it in his pocket at all times since they boarded the Skylab, a clairvoyant move with looming, erotic thumpbooms of promise. They'd only ever had sex aboard the space station within the privacy of their small sleeping pod, sharing a sleeping pouch made especially for couples. It was designed to aid the closeness lovers require despite the hindrances of microgravity moving them in opposite directions. The tight-fitting sleeping contraption made intimacy easier, *almost* effortless.

As the couple kissed each other and their bodies moved within the unrestrained liberation of near Zero-G, they realized that the rumors about the difficulty in having sex on the station were valid ones. They began taking the whispered recommendations to heart. *Velcro secured tightly. Strong Grip. Get ready to activate the Advanced Exhaust Technologies AdvExt in a hurry to remove any remnants of the "happy ending" from the air.* This was the only advice given to those curious enough to explore the weightless sex possibilities outside the sleeping modules on Tweyel8, and they felt especially adventurous at the moment ... and particularly grateful for the invention of industrial strength double-sided Velcro, which clearly was the best invention *ever*.

Bella sighed as Edward's fingertips ghosted down her rib cage and began tracing the inside elastic band of her grey flight shorts. He snaked his forearm around her waist and floated around to the front of her body, his back brushing against the window as he stuck his feet within the bars near the floor to gain his own leverage, pulling her shorts down with ease. The momentum of his descent caused her toes to slip from their grip in order to free the shorts from her ankles, her body lifting in a slow rise, her knees slowly drifting upward to brush against his shoulders, her thighs gaining purchase against ears as lust-laden moans lingered on her lips.

The moment Edward's tongue licked against Bella's clit, the momentum of his slightest touch sent her in the direction of the ceiling of the module, offering him easier access to the place his mouth wanted most, but the drift of her body away from his tongue hindered his pace. The challenges of weightlessness were becoming more apparent to them both.

Their obvious difficulty inspired Michael to smirk and silently chuckle, receiving great delight in their misfortune attempts at love making. He was impressed with the feminine curves of Isabella's body, the vision of the apex of her thighs, the luscious curve of her hips and long, bare legs spreading for her husband an erotic vision he began to covet, lust spiking through the bitter-toothed clenching of his jaw.

Bella's brown halo of hair swarmed around her face as her chin lowered to her sternum, brown eyes widening in excitement at seeing the salacious grin on her husband's face. They both chuckled at the sound of the teeth of Velcro releasing from the roll, and then she moaned when the sound of tearing bonds of the Velcro was replaced with Edward's arms and hands deftly bringing the long strip around her, pulling her away from the ceiling. He affixed the end of the bonds tightly behind his neck so that the force of his attentions would not send her wanting heat away from his eager mouth, making it infinitely easier for Edward's tongue and fingertips to work their magic.

The warmth of his lips scratched against her hardening clit, making her moan and spread her legs, the repetitive tilting of her hips matched the upward-downward motion of his tongue. She moaned louder when he slipped two fingers into her, her head flying back and brushing against the ceiling of the module, pushing her deeper against the Velcro bonds and his loving caresses.

When she opened her eyes to look down at her husband, she noticed the worldview beneath her feet and laughed at the thought that came to mind.

"I never realized how much the Persian Gulf looks like a cock from up here."

Edward's wet-hot mouth swept against the inside of her right thigh as he turned his neck slightly to peer beneath them, smiling into the bend of her knee.

"I'm clearly not distracting you enough, love. I've got nine inches of my own ready, if you're wet enough."

He added another finger and her lips widened in pleasure as she nodded, her tilting hips inviting him to give it to her.

"I'm ready for my Deep Space Nine-ward ..."

They both threw their heads back and laughed loudly at the old-school Trekkie nickname she'd given him when they first learned that they'd been selected to travel on the next Mars mission. Ever since that announcement, it continued on as a running joke, yet still lasciviously accurate – a fact they were both proud of.

Newton's churlish grunt affirmed his disbelief at the *three and a half fists* claim, although it was not a new concept to him given Jessica's boasting about knowing those *particular* measurements. He didn't want to believe it, and so looked on in hopes that his manly inferiority of being barely *one fist* was not

as sizable a difference from his nemesis.

Edward ripped the end of the velcro from around his neck and unraveled the strand quickly before pulling his way up Bella's body by gripping onto the sides of her t-shirt, soft cotton rubbing against his forearms as she clasped tightly onto his head and neck to thwart their ascent toward the ceiling.

With his back to the window and at eye level with her, Edward gripped Bella by the waist, spun her effortlessly to face the locked door, and then pushed off of the bar at his side to spin them both around to face the view speeding by at over one hundred and seventy thousand miles an hour.

Wrapping the velcro around their lower waists to keep their pelvic bones similarly aligned, he reached to his sides and pulled down the elastic waist of his shorts, his erection springing free and drift-swinging between Bella's opened legs. Realizing that this indeed might be more difficult to achieve than anticipated, she bent her legs and contorted the soles of her socked feet to leverage her lower body against the small metal rise surrounding the window. Curling her forearms around the bars next to the window and locking her elbows at the base of them, she offered him the perfect angle to lift her thighs into the air and draw her back onto him, impaling her to the hilt, apex swallowing thrust, her toes curling behind them as the sensations deepened.

Newton's delusions deflated with the confirmation that Cullen was indeed as large as was rumored, and perhaps even more so, he closed his eyes and seethed against the unyielding bars of his mind-cage, his painful, surging emotions of hostility and inferiority his prison once again. It hurt him to look upon the perfect couple any longer, so he gathered his wounded pride and disconnected from the stream of the drone.

He has my life. I want what they have. I'll have it one day.

Meanwhile, Edward was finding new ways to love his wife. With his own soles curled into the bar beneath the window, he bent forward to lick the side of her neck as her hair floated around them, tickling his face and compelling him to let go of one thigh long enough to drag the mass of brown strands into a ball within his fist, shoving it into the back of her T-shirt to restrain it, before gripping her thigh once more.

He paused and she opened her eyes, wondering why his movement had stilled. Their attention was immediately drawn to the Earth beneath them.

The ancient-stoned armada of the Great Wall was marching across China, segments gently hidden by a feathering scrim of mauve-wisped clouds along the vast serpentine structure below, the darkening landscape indicating the Earth's fall under the violet hued seduction of twilight once again.

"At least we saw it this time. Luck hasn't been in our favor with the cloud cover on our last few passesohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh ..."

Her words were replaced with hungry bleats as he yanked her roughly onto him in quick successive jerks, a staccato of passion building in their excitement. He reached around her hip and began rubbing her aching clitoris roughly with teasing fingers, trembles morphing into frenzied thrashing as the rush overwhelmed them, both coming within moments of the other in tenaciously mutual spasms of their mind-robbing release.

Thumpboom, indeed.

Gentling her down with soothing passes of heated fingertips on her flushed skin, Edward and Bella panted from the intense pleasure they'd just experienced as they attempted to calm their rushing breaths.

Realizing that they'd been away from their lab duties longer than planned, Edward pushed the blue

button on the RegLink, the cooling sensation of the artificially enhanced evaporation tingling the skin, before reaching out to grab their floating clothes. They both moaned in protest of movement as they tried putting on their clothes. The physical maneuvering and exertion was far more substantial than either expected.

After righting their clothes into place, Edward kissed Bella one last time before activating the unlocking mechanism from his wristband, the door slid open with quiet efficiency. They drifted past the Sky Lab's supply bay, vertical and horizontal rows of supplies lined up meticulously behind latched restraints to keep them tightly in place. As they neared the common area, they noticed an increase of activity, a reminder that it would become far more crowded in a few hours, when the next wave of space travelers would dock on the Tweyel8 in preparation for the journey to Mars.

For now, they would take advantage of the fact that there was no line for the newly installed and redesigned steam showers, because they certainly needed one after what they'd just done.

Unfortunately, there was only room enough for *one* person in each. Edward silently vowed that he'd make a note to NASA in his next log, asking them to consider the possibility of units large enough so that resources could be shared - for the sake of conservation, of course.

In the privacy of their sleeping pod, cuddled tightly within their cocoon of warmth, the couple reflected upon the day's events.

"I don't like the way he looks at you, Edward. His mouth turns downward whenever you're near him, like he's snarling, and he constantly moves into your personal space and stays closer to you than he does with anyone else. And when he shook my hand in hello, I felt he might crush it. There was no friendliness in it, more like he wanted to overpower me or hurt me. I know you can take care of yourself, but please watch him closely. I think there's some ill-will there. He always acted so strangely when we were at the Academy, so withdrawn despite your attempts to include him. He's ... I don't *know*, but I don't like how he makes me feel."

Edward nodded in agreement but said nothing in response, because he always tried to remain charitable about his thoughts of others. He believed in the goodness and potential of everyone he met, and he'd tried to befriend the withdrawn Newton many times, yet his attempts were often met with declining scowls. Michael had often struck him as an odd sort of fellow. His laboratory results were known to be substandard, he tried very hard to impress others with his father's money, was never able to maintain a serious romantic relationship and always seemed floundering in situations that most would find easy to adapt to. He seemed to Edward an under-achiever and someone who had the access to resources to blatantly buy their way through life without qualms about being selfishly opportunistic. *Utterly uninspired and unwilling to work for anything worthwhile, on his own merit.* Yet Newton thrived in certain areas in science and managed to win the salutatorian spot by senior year, so Edward knew better than to underestimate his abilities, even if they'd probably been paid for. He figured that Newton's withdrawn and strange behavior was because he was having a bad day, an assumption that reflected the fact that Edward's admirable ideals were something he lived by.

Sighing, Edward closed his eyes and gripped Bella tighter. He didn't want to give Michael Newton one more moment of his thoughts, when he could be more pleasantly engaged with his wife doing *other* things. He zipped up the top of their sleeping pouch and pulled the interior contraption tight to show her what was *really* on his mind.

As Michael made his way to the steam showers, he stopped and glared at the closed door of the

Cullens' sleep pod. Isabella was not his type, and he didn't find her nearly as attractive as other men might, yet his false sense of attraction showcased his rather dubious obsession, his poisonous contradictions ceding to self-denial – another thing he excelled at. The thought of her luscious body and what Cullen was able to give to her further poisoned his visual-darts at their door. He dropped his gaze to the latch that locked them in, and kept him *out*, unable to overcome the fact that he wanted their happiness and the undeniable emotional and physical connection they shared with one another.

The corners of his mouth pulled down beneath the weight of his vexation and poisoning onus, his eyes narrowing to slits. Floating onward before someone caught him lurking near their door, he ventured into the steam shower, where he hoped he would find a better mood and some kind of light to shine on his intentions for traveling to Mars in the first place ... to establish his own successes and find a stunningly beautiful *someone* to share them with.

To find a mate and have a family that unconditionally adored him.

Become wealthier than his father.

Receive accolades that superseded any praise Cullen received.

To be better than everyone.

Mike smiled at his mental check-list of his very attainable goals as he undressed and drifted into the shower unit before activating the proemial mechanism, warmth enveloping his epidermis - but sadly not the muscular organ beneath his sternum - the mingling acrimony and personal umbrage of disfavor pumping through his heart and veins instead, a poisonous life-source fueling a mind that began thinking of ways to eliminate the threat Cullen's existence meant to his ambitions.

Murmurs of *sotto voce* lethal longing hushed their villainous intentions as the hush-taut strings of his envy began to hum beneath the strength of the tempo of his designs as they began to alter and disintegrate.

Over the next few days, Michael struggled with making new friends. He'd hoped that he would connect with a few travelers before they embarked on the nine-month trip to Mars, and yet everyone seemed closed off to his offerings of friendship. Of course, he blamed Edward Cullen for this, because he seemed to command everyone's attention, as if he were a magnet for happiness and success, something that Newton continued to seethe against. He continued to push out the world that he wanted inside, leaving him restraint-charred as burned out cinder, growing tired of moderating his potential power over others. He became bored of trying to undermine the achievements of others in the typical ways he had previously, and was sick of being pushed aside when he believed he was more than capable of doing the kind of pushing that got absolute results ... murderous ones that would resolutely end all of his problems.

Since he was adept at creeping in shadows and remaining off of radars, his exploitation of his new-found resolve took shape dangerously and without remorse, his poisonous envy manifesting in the most insidious way possible as he floated towards Edward's lab station holding a test tube of deadly compound mislabeled as a common one with a similar appearance ... one he knew the lab team would be experimenting with after they enjoyed their lunch.

Newton thrived in situations where he could benefit off of the trusting natures of others, which was why he so easily slipped a minute trace of Elsilarc into the uncapped, empty test tube at Cullen's unlocked lab station while he and his perfect wife were eating lunch in the dining bay. A new compound discovered late in the previous century, Elsilarc was a nearly transparent powder and a poisonous compound in the form of a gas, especially when mixed with water, something that Newton

knew would be added to Edward's next step in his chemical research given the H₂O foiled packets affixed neatly to the stationary storage along the left side of his lab table. The Tweyel8 had been equipped with the latest chemical testing modules, self-contained units that allowed for complex experiments to be performed despite the hindrance of the microgravity environment – something easily susceptible now, given the fact that Edward didn't take care in securing his.

Newton learned from one of his drone's reconnaissance missions into the control module that the security cameras were experiencing problems and were currently non-operational. He was aware that the space station would have near-instant preventative reactionary protocols in place, so that only a limited amount of the time would elapse before the gas was sucked into the AdvExt system and replaced with clean air. He was confident that exposure to the gas would be long enough to take out his prime nemesis at the very least and both Cullens if he was lucky, as their lab stations were next to each other.

Knowing that the cameras were currently inoperable was reassuring enough to Newton, but to cover all his bases, he also placed a small amount in the vial centered on his own lab station to ensure that no one could point to him as the culprit of the deadly sabotage. Mislabeling of elements in space laboratories had occurred in the past, so it was conceivable that even Cullen's obnoxiously bright mind might make such a fatal error with no one the wiser.

After ensuring that his revenge was solidly put into place, Newton made sure that his drone was hidden in the vent above so he could watch the mayhem unfold as he placed the mislabeled vial in the slot intended for its harmless counterpart. He pushed off of his lab station and drifted in the direction of the cargo bay to hide, only to be distracted by the boisterous eruption of excitement of a large group gathered around Edward Cullen in the next pod.

The lead physicist on the station floated over and patted Edward's back in congratulations before announcing, "I want to commend Mr. Cullen for his breakthrough in researching Cryogenic propellants. The Academy just contacted NASA to inform us that his final project thesis successfully solved a problem those suits back on Earth have been toiling over for years! He's just been awarded the Volturi Scientific Consortium Award!"

Even *the suits* were applauding and waving from the screens displayed on the walls showing mission control in Houston.

Bella pulled her husband into a hug, sharing her pride in the joyous moment as the group hovering around the couple clapped and shouted loudly in excitement. Michael glared at the happy couple as they floated near the dining area, engaged in animated conversation with those around them and sharing in laughter. Their happiness felt tangible, everyone around them smiling in merriment, and the desperation of his loss hit Newton full force, his failure at bettering his chief nemesis overpowering his ability to reason.

Newton knew he couldn't compete with someone who'd already won his most cherished prize, but he could make sure, despite the precautionary safety filters of the Tweyel8, that he could temporarily beat that system by overloading its capabilities ... that if he couldn't win, he could at least be certain that Cullen would be deprived of enjoying the ten million dollar monetary reward too.

Understanding with chilling clarity that he had nothing left to lose now - what mattered to *him*, at least, led to Newton's last calm breath before succumbing to his rage, deciding that he wouldn't hide in a far-off part of the station after all. He'd make sure that his revenge was complete, even if it meant taking his own life to make sure it happened, and that he'd take as many of these *happy assholes* with him as possible, not caring about the consequences. He just wanted to satisfy that ravenous drive to truly and utterly destroy the man who always bested him.

If I go out, I'm doing it with a fucking bang!

He grabbed the vile of Elsilarc and shook it violently in the air, creating a small pearl-hazed powder cloud that slowly spread outward in a creeping veil of death barely detectable to the naked eye. Newton might've been a cheat, plagiarist and intellectual fraud, but he knew enough to remember that the human body was comprised of nearly sixty percent water, and blood was made up of over ninety percent H₂O, so things would get interesting as the scientists entered the lab. He was *counting* on it and couldn't wait to fuck up Cullen's handsome face before he ruined his perfect life.

As he watched Cullen kiss his wife and push back from the dining table to float towards the entrance to the laboratory, his wife gripped the back of his shirt to pull him backward, attempting to stop their momentum in confusion at the faint yet cloying smell of strawberries - something any chemist knew to be afraid of, because only one element carried that sweetly-venomous aroma, and it was one of the most deadly toxins known to man. Using Elsilarc in test samples had been quite common under controlled circumstances, but Bella knew that they would be working with water that afternoon, so she sensed intuitively that something was off. Her shout was blade-edged with dread, "Stop! No one move! Does anyone else smell strawberries?"

All of the scientists tried halting their forward movement into the laboratory, yet there was nothing but the partition walls of their lab stations to stop them, their momentum in microgravity bringing them even closer to the danger. Edward pulled at Bella's shirt to propel her away from the lab stations and he kicked at the wall to get ahead of the group, a sense of danger noxiously teeming near the entrance to laboratory.

Plagued and blinded by the crescendoing envy that was feeding the darkening in his corroded rivalry and upset by the fact that his catalyst had been detected so easily by that *meddling cunt*, Newton's jaundiced tunnel vision led him to the point of mislead action evoked by his tainted chemistry. His adrenal glands spring-boarded off the kidneys to drop-kick the heart, flooding his blood, muscles and brain with that delicious, envious high he'd grown addicted to.

He grabbed a sharp bladed lancet from the instrument storage bay on the wall and kicked off the lab partition, flinging himself past Bella and slicing her right arm and chest open with the sharp blade before slamming into Edward with such force that Cullen's head and right shoulder left dents in the metal grate before his painful moans rose from his throat, the blade painfully slashing through his handsome face from cheek to chin, and then stabbing him in the upper chest. Large blood-red orbs spewed from Bella's and Edward's wounds and drifted away from their bodies as the front of Edward's grey t-shirt revealed a spreading quagmire of plasma, the silver-savaged monument of Newton's rage protruding outward from Cullen's heaving chest as screams of horror flew through the air from the other scientists, Bella's frantic yowl's rising above the rest.

The agony radiating through his body didn't overtake Edward in a dissolution of awareness before he heard Michael yell, "You have my life!"

Bewildered by the resentment in the crazed man's voice and suddenly very frightened by the bag of water Michael lifted from the surface of the laboratory table, Edward grabbed Newton's shirt to keep him from allowing the water to get near the uncapped vial he believed to hold the Elsilarc on the surface next to them, the deadly-sheening particles of powder weightlessly floating out of the vial, into the air around the group that watched on in horror.

But Edward underestimated the villain's plan and was too late. Mike squeezed the water indiscriminately in the air, creating the deadly reaction the crazed man hoped for, the diffusion of the grassy colored fumes pouring off of the water droplets floating around the laboratory as the throbbing in Edward's chest worsened with gasping breaths, the vision of his bleeding and panicked wife the last

thing that Edward remembered before losing consciousness beneath the surge of extraordinary pain.

"Whyyyy does he always best me?! Even when I surrounded him in a deadly toxin, he was able to win!"

Painfully restrained to his seat as his face puce-twisted in rage, Newton's eyes widened as the man seated next to him on the Earth transport reached into the satchel affixed to the side of his seat and withdrew a large needled instrument.

Panicked, Newton began screaming, "Untie me! Do you know who I am?! Who my father is?! You'll be jobless in a few hours when he hears about how you've tied me down like an animal!"

The look of gratification on the stranger's face suspended the screamed threats, the unknown man's authoritative voice cutting through the fuselage, the small space craft jerking violently as it descended through the Earth's atmosphere.

"Your father's the one who sent us, you stupid fuck. When he caught wind of your homicidal actions, he made sure that we accompanied the crew to insure that you didn't do anything rash and that you made it to prison in one piece. He wants you to suffer, to pay for embarrassing the esteemed Newton family legacy. Enjoy oblivion!"

The needle surged into his thigh as the anti-psychotic sedative took effect, the dawning of true despondency of his situation drowning Newton's hopes as he re-submerged in darkness, along with the useless wish that the tears streaming down his face served some purpose – that they would inspire some compassion in the men around him so that they might appeal to his father on his behalf, to procure his freedom somehow.

They didn't, only laughing at his weakness as his eyes leaked desperation.

When he woke up from his sedative slumber, he was in a small, cold, and dirty cell not much bigger than his cot, a slit of a window revealing a sun-shaft so narrow that it was the width of finger, and not nearly enough to warm him in the after-fire of his chilling consequences.

As the minutes turned into hours, Newton guessed at the time and imagined what he would be doing at that moment, assuming that he hadn't snapped. The spacefarers would be boarding the Aro Star Ship, where he should've been among them. His once boundless horizon, filled with the possibilities of footfalls on distant planets, had now shrunk to the claustrophobic range of six human steps in any direction within his cell ... a solemn-thin column of light holding up the lonely daylight hours his only companion, all sympathy and opportunity lost.

His eyes lowered to the space beyond his cell door, feeling overwhelming envy for the freedom of the shadows that moved along the walls beyond the bars.

And even *they* evaded his grasp, besting him with their haunting privilege.

The sounds of the rhythmic beeping next to his ear alerted Edward to the fact that he was indeed still alive and strapped to a table in the medical bay. He barely distinguished his wife's frantic pleas for answers, her flagging composure evident in her tone frayed in anger – very *unlike* the cool and collected woman he married.

"That sick asshole better rot in prison! I wish I killed him with my own hands before he was taken away! How he passed the stringent mental evaluations to meet the strenuous requirements for life in any of the space settlements makes me worry for the safety of all of us if crazy people like this slip

through. I think about the deadly consequences and hope he pays for this with the rest of his disgusting life! I thought he might be jealous of my husband's accomplishments, but who knew his envy would bring him to the point of this much malice? He's delusional and dangerous!"

Edward was having a hard time re-emerging from the haze of drugs he'd been placed under, and yet he had the wherewithal enough to contemplate the seriousness of what his wife was saying. He imagined the colonists from civilizations of ancient human history as they traveled towards the unknown, having to be brave despite their fears or what they might face on the horizon, or the distance they traveled away from the protective measures of civilization. Danger. Deadly. Delusional.

So many D's and nothing resembling one of the most stable D isotopes, Deuterium ... none of these things resembling anything safe, especially not Michael Newton. I loooooove these drugs ...

An unfamiliar female voice said, "I think he's coming to, Mrs. Cullen."

Bella drifted closer to her husband and took his hand within hers, gently rubbing his knuckles with her quivering fingertips. He could feel the tension radiating off of her skin, her voice still tinged with it.

"Honey, the medical team sealed our wounds with Bio-Healant and reset your shoulder. I promise you I'm alright and so are you. Your scan shows everything is back into place in your shoulder joint and no evidence of concussion or internal bleeding in your chest. You'll be as good as new in a few days and neither of us will have any scars. Look, my wounds are already undetectable. Yours are too."

Edward's eyelids fluttered in attempted acclimation and stared at the fuzzy beauty that he knew to be his wife, who was hovering over him, wisps of her hair floating around in the dim light above where he was strapped down as she pulled up her sleeve to show him where her wound should've been. Yet words alluded him, save for one.

"Plutonium."

His voice was scratchy and dim, yet Bella nodded and laughed at how scientifically oriented her husband's mind remained despite the trauma, assuming he'd just heard her comments - the chemist in him comparing one of the most unstable elements, Plutonium, to the equally unstable and dangerous Michael Newton. The confusion on the physician's face inspired Bella to quantify what her husband meant. She didn't want their departure for Mars to be delayed because her husband was deemed mentally unfit to travel onward, all because he was floating in his residual high on sedatives.

Bella looked at the doctor when she answered, "That *unstable* little shit is already on his way back to Earth, Edward." Her gaze dropped to his when the doctor nodded in sudden understanding at the comparison, continuing. "The Space Agency's well aware of everything. He'll be met by authorities when he lands on Earth and will be transported to prison for the rest of his life. There was potential for him to have killed everyone on board the Tweyel8 with the amount of Elsilarc in the air, so there will be sixty counts of attempted murder with a deadly substance, and then the fact that he slashed me and stabbed you only puts the nails deeper in his coffin. The AdvExt exhaust system immediately detected the large amounts of liquid and poison in the air and released an agent to counteract the poisonous fumes while removing the moisture. Everyone on board survived. I promise you we're all alright, and his Daddy won't be able to save him *this* time."

Edward sighed in relief, relishing in the fact that he wasn't feeling any pain after doing so and that his beautiful Bella was safe too. He was even more relieved that Michael Newton would pay dearly for his actions ... yet he felt disturbingly pinned against the truth of Newton's envy, and shocked by it. It was almost too much to wrap his mind around. Edward had always thought of himself as perceptive and felt disappointed by the fact that he was blindsided by the extent of the disturbed man's hostility.

During their years at the Space Academy prior to dating Bella, he'd tried many times to befriend

Newton by inviting him to social gatherings, and his extension of kindness was continually rebuffed...but he'd *tried*, never wanting to exclude anyone, understanding the stressful demands of the Academy and the need to have moments of fun too. After he began dating Bella, he noticed Newton growing even more distant and agitated. Seeing someone like Michael excluded made Edward feel badly for him. He also saw the underlying benefit of being thoughtful and considerate of his potential future colonists, a forward-thinking approach knowing that it was probable that he'd spend years in the distant colonies interacting with them, everyone depending on each other for 's innate positivity and kindness towards others made the digestion of *you have my life* too dark a delusion to mentally grasp.

You have my life.

Edward's scientific mind slipped sideways in an attempt to reach a solution ... or at least a general understanding.

$g = GM / r \text{ squared}$

Newtonian dynamics were clearly at work despite the advent of more complex and cosmically relevant formulas created in the millennia since its inception, yet the proverbial constant was that one Newton didn't subscribe to the mathematical and relevant genius of the other - proven by Michael's faulty computations regarding the gravity of his actions. Considering the mass of his covetous yearning and the distance between green-tinged fantasy and reality, the fuzzy delineation of his radius subverted *deux fois* and was doubly ... Fucked. Up.

That apple fell far from the tree, rolled down the hill and landed in a steamy pile of shit miles away.

Michael Newton's invidious blindness proved that the value of repercussions mattered, the gravitational constant of his envy sending him back where he belonged - tethered to Earth's surface beneath the looming reminder that the Kármán line was a boundary he would never again transcend ... his opportunities squandered, his horizon finite behind unrelenting prison bars.

Just as in the fairytales, myths, and legends he remembered from his childhood, Edward couldn't help but be reminded of the stories that featured villains who enviously coveted something that the protagonist had. In reflecting on the disturbed man's actions and the fact that he was always trying to surpass everyone else, Edward frowned. *That* was the deadliest part of Newton's envy – how it murdered his future opportunities, his physical being, and his explorer's spirit held to the deadening surface of his new reality by the envious daggers of his own making.

You.

Have.

My.

Life.

In retrospect, Edward realized with a great deal of sadness that Newton would probably never understand the true moral of his sad story because he never learned the lesson that the only person he needed to impress was *himself*. The only life he needed to live was *his own*. Michael had failed to consider the effects of his poisonous envy, thus depriving himself his own happiness and tragically ending his future within the stifling parameters of a prison cell. The self-indulgence of his feeling worthless compared to Cullen turned into a self-fulfilling prophecy of his potential being wasted behind the bars of worthlessness, a permanent confinement of his own making.

Your squandered life now has you chained to the prison cell wall, fool.

You.

Have.

The.

Life.

You.

DESERVE.

Edward felt incredible relief flood through him at the fact that it was probable that he'd never have to deal with the sullied non-Isaac ever again, and that *their* fairytale had a happier ending ... yet the bend of his thoughts regarding Newtonian dynamics of motion directed his mind in another deliciously lascivious direction entirely. Bella's eyebrows met her forehead in curiosity when she watched her husband's smile grow a little more wicked, a playful curve to one side of his lips telling her he was up to something. Or *wanted* to be.

With the expansion of his vision and his wife's beautiful features clearly defined, he decided to be bold as he thought about fairytales, *happy endings* and the atomic number 69, whispering, "Thulium."

The doctor blushed at the innuendo and so did his wife, who was openly laughing at her husband's flirty brazenness in front of the doctor - someone who held the power to veritably nix their future travel plans. The doctor only laughed and nodded, handing Bella a small envelope before taping her wrist, causing her patient to rise and tilt upward.

"No need to make propositions to your wife through atomic numbers, Mr. Cullen, because they won't make a difference. You are on strict orders not to use that shoulder for three days, and I mean it. Microgravity keeps you from feeling the worst of it now, but once you get on board the Aro Star Ship and artificial gravity takes full effect, you're going to be very, VERY sore. If you rest it now, you'll be much better off. Understood?"

He masked the saucy rebelliousness of his thoughts and nodded at the doctor as she released the latches of medical bindings that were keeping him to the table, drifting upward as he slowly rotated the shoulder to stretch it out. It was a measured movement meant as assurance of compliance ... until they got to somewhere more private. A quick glance at his wife, with her blush slowly creeping up her cheeks, confirmed his own suspicions that her thoughts were on the same track and that she was appreciative of his meager deception. Another look at the doctor revealed an arched eyebrow and a quirky, skeptical twist of the lips. Edward wasn't fooling anyone in the room, and quite frankly, he didn't give a shit. Dropping the charade and crossing his arms across his chest, he waited to be discharged.

Bella pushed off the wall and drifted over to shake the doctor's hand. "Thanks, Alice."

Alice smiled and pulled Bella into a hug. "You're going to love visiting the farthest colonies, I just know it. And keep in touch. I may transfer to the Pluto settlement soon. Our paths will definitely cross again."

Bella nodded at Alice one last time and turned to her perplexed looking husband before taking his hand, using her velocity to pull him out of the medic bay using his good arm.

"Come on, DS9. I finished up the remaining experiments and packed. You need to go back to the sleep pod and get some extra rest."

Bella floated into Edward's arms as he pulled her towards his chest, his eyes dilated in hunger and disbelief.

"Baby, are you crazy? Rest is the *last* thing on my mind. We've got less than two hours left in

microgravity, and you think I'm going to let the fear of pain get in the way of weightless sex while we can have it? After the shock of Newton's crazed actions and the stress of what's just happened, I think we could both benefit from a release. Bella, do you not know me at all?"

She laughed as she held up the envelope Alice handed her in the Medic Bay.

"You place one of these under your tongue when the pain becomes intolerable. It's supposed to last for 24 Earth hours, yet I told her I thought you might need some extra, no recreational prophecy required. There are twenty doses in here. So you still think I don't know you well enough by now, DS9?"

Her smile pushed the blushing apples of her cheeks towards her laughing eyes as Edward's own smirk became a full-on, teeth-baring smile of his own, his eyebrows jumping into his forehead in silent insinuation. Before they floated any closer to the back module, Edward pulled Bella into his chest to face him.

"What was all of that back there about? The doc mentioned colonies. *Plural*. I thought your heart was set on the Mars Margaritifer Terra Settlement."

Bella lifted her shoulders in response before answering, "And after what we've just survived, it makes our opportunities even more precious, and I talked about those feelings with the doc while you were sedated. Alice said that she had a sense about us, and that we'd change our minds and want to see all of the settlements before returning to Earth ... *If* we decide to."

Edward nodded, the mass of coppered disarray on his head swarming in movement, answering, "I'd say she was right ... no recreational prophecy required."

Leaning into her left ear, he whispered, "Now, how about Thulium?"

He pulled back when she shook her head, affecting dubiously arched eyebrows announcing his surprise that she would decline the offer since it was one of her favorite sexual positions. She responded, "I think that since we only have a little while left, we go back to that lab and make you earn your nickname, and not just down my throat. Seeing you strapped to that table ... "

She leaned into his neck and licked his bobbing Adam's apple, his breath shuddered out as a staccatoed sigh, the sensation of her lush-coated tongue stretched the pleased groans from deep within his chest.

" ... got me very wet, and gave me an idea. Do you have that Velcro on you, DS9?"

He nodded excitedly as she kicked off the wall and spun around, dragging him past the cargo hold, slipping into the small lab and activating the closing of the door before they could be seen, pulling him over to the small area in front of the window.

"I see the islands of Hawaii, which means I'll get to fuck you somewhere over Houston in a few minutes, for old-times sake."

Bella pushed off the window and guided him towards the floor of the module, pulling off his shorts and underwear, allowing the articles of clothing to float by them as she grabbed the Velcro from Edward's pocket before his shorts could drift away from the landing they hovered over.

Unraveling the end, she wrapped the Velcro numerous times through the divot on the metal grated floor just beneath her smiling husband, and then brought it around his waist securely, manacling him into submission and thwarting his drift as she took control. Laddering hand over fist at his t-shirt to aid her motion down his panting chest and trembling stomach, she drifted over the erect length of him, licking the tip as she floated over it, using his muscular legs as leverage to reach and secure his ankles in the same manner.

"That was ingenious of ... "

The compliment died on his lips when she pulled her t-shirt over her head, her luscious breasts quivered in the weightlessness, distracting him into mouth-watering silence. He'd remembered an interview he once read given by Michael Collins, one of the first pioneers from Earth's early space missions on Apollo 11, about the beauty and appeal of woman's breasts in weightlessness. Edward couldn't agree more.

And the fact that there was no evidence of Michael's attack on her flawless skin made his smile grow wider in relief.

Bella pushed her left hip against the window sill and flew towards the ceiling, performing a space-slow version of a back flip while pulling off her own shorts and underwear, allowing them to float in the direction of Edward's drifting clothes. When she reached the ceiling, she pushed off with her elbows and moved in the direction of her awe-struck husband, who said, "You're going to be covered in bruises tomorrow."

Once she reached the floor, Bella nodded silently as she used the metal grates beneath her husband to shift down his body because the front of his t-shirt had drifted to bunch up below his armpits, her hard nipples dragging along the bare skin of his torso as she reached her target, her tensile sighs colliding with unsubtle desires.

"I certainly hope so."

Opening her mouth wide to take him as deep as she could, she gripped the half-moon metal indentations in the floor on either side of his hips, pulling her forearms into her biceps as she used the momentum to move up and down his length, humming as she worked him towards the back of her throat, his crave-need mewling trembling the air.

She could feel him harden even further and her impatience and growing urgency compelled her to change tactics. She reached for the third roll of Velcro floating near her head, pulled her mouth from his stone-hard length before she straightened her arms and spun around above him to kneel on his muscular legs to face away from him, her tibias to his upper thighs, using the divots on the floor as leverage for maneuvering. She sighed as he allowed his chest to float upwards so that he could run his fingertips down the rise and fall of each vertebrae as she bent forward to wrap the Velcro under his thighs, fastening the end of the strip behind her knees. She crooned as the leverage and angle allowed her to rise up and sink onto him without the momentum of her shifts causing her to drift, both moaning loudly into the air as she sat all the way down, burying him to the hilt.

"Edward, don't ... "

She kept him deep within her as she bent slightly forward to bring her right hand between her legs so she could create a hard-pressed tension on her clit as she felt her orgasm approaching fast, her voice drifting off with her control.

Amused by her sudden inability to speak and turned on by the undulating muscles beginning to roll over his cock and the vision of her luscious ass bouncing on his lap, he huskily whispered, "Yes, love?"

Gasping in reply as she leaned further forward, Edward's fingers wrapped around the crest of her hips as his thumbs drifted downward, the soft pads tracing broad circles down the thin aperture beginning at the base of her waist, and slowly around the dark-puckered, sensitive skin of her most guarded, intimate secret. Bella had always expressed fear about experimenting with anal sex because of his large size. Two and a half fists would frighten most. On occasion, he'd slip a finger in if he was taking her from behind, and she seemed to enjoy that additional sensation - but she'd never considered allowing more than that. Yet this moment felt different, dulled inhibitions dimmed further as the excitement of their last opportunity to fuck in weightlessness hit Bella full force. A heady power overtook her,

knowing instinctually that the weightlessness and her position on top would allow her to have complete control of any pace she set - something that fed her previous hesitations. And with their frightening, life-threatening experience in the lab, it was never so clear to Bella how precious their life together was. And fleeting. *Carpe Diem*.

The potent feelings encouraged her new intrepid desires as she kept him in her thrall. She knew that if there was a time to try something new ... It. Was. *Now*.

Turning her head to look at him over her shoulder, his eyes widened when her smirk came into view, her voice the softest silk swathed in temptation, her shyness to share that secret falling away.

"Don't come yet. I want your release in my ass."

The piquant admission burned as it passed her brazen-hued lips, and she could feel the color of fire crawl up her face as the impact of her demand collided with her nerves. Edward's awe-struck face darkened with realization and hunger as his heartbeat kicked against his sternum with the pressure of thumpboom hell-years of a thousand parabolic arcs, reflexively gripping her waist tighter. Red-round finger grips marred her skin as he guided her thrusts backward. Downward. In. The gravity of her invitation pulled at his heart in the most erotic of ways.

Her bold admission nearly forced him to do what she ordered him not to, and he growled to gain his own control as she lost hers, all the while keeping eye contact over the creamy skin of her shoulder. She squeezed him with an orgasm so strong that he was sure that one of the Sky Lab's monitors would detect the compression waves of her cunt as he tried desperately not to release into the veritable internal tug of the spasms milking him down from tip to base.

As soon as the shaking of her body subsided, she lifted up at her knees until she was able to push the tip of him back, towards the firm raised-ring of puckered skin, gently guiding his soaking wet shaft until the wet tip pushed up into the ridged-rise, and then ever so carefully in, begging her secret's release with subtle movements. Edward was stunned by how erotic it was to see the surface tension of her release cling to his dick in a shiny, sensual lubrication perfect for what she needed. His wife had clearly given the micro-gravitational physics of this necessary lubrication more thought than he ever considered himself, something he was grateful for.

Slowly, so slowly, Bella set free a deep breath when she realized that there was no pain, just the gradual stretching sensation of adjustment. The weightlessness offered her complete control over the pressure she applied, and as she sat slowly back, Edward's eyes widened at the extreme pleasure of the new kind of sensation of compression, and the almost unbelievable visual of her sinking down onto him, in the one part of her body he'd never be given admittance - with the full length of *him*. The realization of that surprise offering, that gift, is what finally sent him flying over the edge. The spasms of release rocked his body as his chest met her spine, his arms encircled her waist and the fingers of his right hand rubbed hard against her clit while he snaked three fingers into her slit, slipping them *ininindeeperinininnnn*, creating such an extreme sense of fullness that she felt overwhelmed, his presence filling her in so many places at once.

Bella shook so violently from her second release that her throat burned painfully from having swallowed her screams, and her right shoulder throbbed from the sensation of Edward's teeth leaving deep imprints while trying to stifle his own screams of intense pleasure of his own unraveling.

Violently panting and bonelessly sated, Bella flexed her thighs to lift off of her quivering husband enough to allow him to drift from her backside, yet he refused to release her, bringing his essence-clinged fingers around her waist, up her body and over her shoulder to his eager tongue, while his left arm held her spine hostage to his chest. When she hit the blue button on her RegLink, the remainder of their release disappeared from their bodies, both moaned at the cool sensation as it evaporated off of

their pleasure-sensitive skin.

"Aw, look, you did what you said you would, and most decidedly, I might add." Edward's words and chuckle reverberated through Bella's spine as she slowly straightened her knees to pull at the ends of the Velcro, the bite of millions of black teeth tearing apart as weightlessness reclaimed her. She leaned towards her husband's ankles to free his legs, and then used the grates on the floor with her fingers to angle towards his chest, where his waist was untethered. The motion of the last bonds breaking sent them towards the window, which showed the majestic, meandering veins of North America flowing into the foot of Louisiana, just below them.

"Yup. I think we gave Houston quite a ... I think my orgasm just had another orgasm, and I'm too exhausted to move. Can we just float here for a while? What time is it?" Her quiet voice made it difficult for Edward to hear the last part of her question, but when he looked at his watch, he sped into action, grabbing at their clothes, guiding her underwear and shorts over her weary legs before pulling on his own garments, their t-shirts the last article of clothing to be righted. After grabbing the floating Velcro strands and shoving them into his pockets, he said, "I wish we could, baby, but we've got to get our new suits on before they seal off the tunnel to the Aro, which should've docked by now. Let's go before we miss it!"

Smiling at her husband's contagious spike in energy, she accepted his outstretched palm and unlocked the door, ready to face their future and relieved beyond measure that Newton's envious homicidal tendencies hadn't deprived them of the monumental achievement at hand ... an adventure they'd worked hard for and dreamt about for so long.

Their time to begin their voyage was *now*, and they couldn't wait.

They floated effortlessly across the sky bridge that had unfurled for them in welcome aboard the Aro Star Ship, the massive, circular shaped vessel that would be their home for the next few months. A clear tube lit by soothing blue lights illuminated their greeting, the bridge leading to the innermost hub of the wheel-like structure as it spun in the sky. The rolling ship created the motion mimicking the rotation of the Earth, reproducing the gravitational pressure humans were used to. They'd never seen a Star Ship of this size and felt overwhelmed by the scope of technology that went into its assembly - the same technology that would deliver them to the far reaches of the solar system one day.

As Edward and Bella held hands tightly and floated towards the large metal doors leading to the gravitational orientation chamber ahead, their gaze was drawn beyond the lights of the tunnel, and beyond the bowed horizon of the Earth below them. The vastness of space hymned-wide with stars, spilled like the glitter on the artwork they used to make as children - bursts of brilliance humming within the cosmic consonance of space.

Then their gaze was drawn to the Earth.

Struck by fact that they were looking upon the gorgeous beauty of their home-world, perhaps for the last time, they stilled their forward path using the bars at their sides and paused as they took in the stirring colors of the majestic continents below - gently and so beautifully embraced by seas of blue. The time-hewn shades of earth were as vivid as their memories, of happy remembrances shared with loved ones no longer living, and of the journeys that led them both to this decisive point.

Edward and Bella smiled as they recognized the unmistakable Mid-Eastern portion of Southeastern Asia come into view, the beautiful crown of Vietnam and the lips of Cambodia gracing a small smile as the arm of Thailand jutted out to lift the unfurled and waving hand of Malaysia, as if lightly grasping Sumatra as a handkerchief waving in the air as goodbye.

Until we meet again, brave adventurers.

Their last pause had been brief, yet belied their final purpose, the siren's song of their infinite horizon beckoned them to move forward - an anthem of courage to inspire them onward. *Seize opportunities. Take risks. Desire to look onward. Fear not, and ascend.* The swell of their dreams began taking shape as they let go of the bars of the tunnel and drifted towards the docking port to the Aro and their new life ... the surf of their fearlessness and adventurous resolve one day breaking as stars, distant galaxies the shore they would one day rest on and call home. Until then, the bitten-red planet of Mars awaited to welcome them.

Edward and Bella floated over the threshold that delineated their past and their future, and through the portal into their most daring journey - Their new ascension song had begun with the chorus of the Earth beneath them and the lyrical movement of the shining points of light in their future, enlightening their brilliant momentum into their beautiful unknown.

Dreamdrenched and bold, they joined the crescendoing movement, and sang.

slowly lowers baton and closes musical score

~~ **Fine** ~~

Note for readers:

If you're curious about the science behind what sex in space might be like, or are interested in viewing any of my research links for this story, you can find all of that information on my blog at Gothictemptress.com - Special thanks to my Beta for this story, CarrieZM, and to LayAtHomeMom, Planetblue, Nkubie, Shay Savage, RoseArcadia and Milk40 for their help and inspiration on this project.

I dedicate this story to Shawna, who was instrumental with the aspects of Envy found in this piece, and to Levi ... with three and a half fists, you most definitely *earned it*.

This story was initially posted as part of The Sinners 7 Deadly Sins compilation on March 4, 2014. It also features **DazzledIn2008**, **JonesnInDaHood**, **LayAtHomeMom**, **Planetblue**, **Robsmyyummy**, **Cabanaboy** and **SexiLexiCullen**. A link to [The Sinners](#) can also be found on my blog, in my profile or in my favorites. Please go check out their amazingly sinful stories!