

Orbit

"Orbiter Saturn, come in, Orbiter Saturn."

"..."

"Orbiter Saturn, come in, Orbiter Saturn."

"..."

"Orbiter Saturn, it's time for your check-in, over."

"..."

"Orbiter Saturn, check in now, over."

"..."

"Orbiter Saturn I'm going to mark this as a failure to communicate if you don't respond."

"..."

"... I'll have to write up a report and everything."

"..."

"... If you don't respond in thirty seconds I'm going to mark this."

"..."

"..."

"..."

".. Orbiter S-Saturn, responding, over."

"Jesus, where the fuck- whatever. Orbiter Saturn, what's your status? Over."

"Um yeah it's good. All clear, systems in the green. Over."

A click.

"Off the record. You might want to pull yourself together. You've only got a week left up there. Don't fuck it up at the end, Hope... Over."

"I'm sorry. I've been having trouble sleeping. Over."

"Why? Over."

"I..."

She hesitates.

"Like it up here. I'm not looking forward to being a normal civvy with a normal life again. Over."

A pause. The two think their words through. Collect their thoughts. They've had regular check-ins every day for the past six months. They know each other well.

"It's nice down here, Hope. Over."

"It is, Patrick. But I'm scared of going back. Over."

"Don't be. You'll get to move somewhere beautiful and meet good people. Over."

A click again.

"On the record. Next check-in at one-eight hundred. See you in twelve hours, Orbiter Saturn. This is Houston. Out."

The transmission cuts out. Just like so many times before. Orbiter Saturn is a manned utility satellite. Monitoring what's called Temporal Social Fluctuations. They were discovered not two years prior. A sort of energy caused by human social behaviour. Something thought intangible made tangible. Discovered by pure chance. What utility does it serve to monitor this? Could disruptions be signs of alien life? Perhaps it was all meaningless. Another number to assign to a graph nobody will read.

"Just another week."

She stumbles back towards her bed. Orbiter Saturn has an artificial gravity drive. Just another fancy machine performing magic. She switches on the monitor in her small room. A computer, connected to the highest speed connection she can get out in orbit. Her best friend.

The mission is top secret. Of course everyone can find the satellite. Every nation on earth knows somebody is up there. Nobody knows it is Hope. Nobody knows what she is monitoring.

She opens up her chatting client. A social server-based program that connects users mainly through structured group chats. However, it also has direct message functionality.

"Hope! You've got to see this."

A direct message to her. Attached is an image of a mouse holding a love heart that says "Be Mine."

"Isn't it sooo cuuute??"

She smiles. It is cute. Erika always knew what to send Hope.

"its god damn ADORABLE"

She reacts to the image with a heart. Hope's writing is messy. Never been one for correct grammar. Not online anyhow.

"Just a week until you're moving here!!! Aghhh I can't waitttt we're gonna have so much fun!!!!!"

That's the lie. The two had discussed this many times. They were close.

"yahhhh im so excited too! we can hang out for realllll"

She smiles. Erika always made Hope feel happy. If earth was a scary, uncertain place, then Erika was an anchor keeping her still between the waves.

"btwww werent u supposed to be like. sleeping??"

"Ughh riiight. Well,, maybe later!! Cauuuse you're back online !"

"not for tooo long!! got woken up lolll going to sleep some more soon and so should you"

"Awww... Love you, Hope! Sleep welllll"

"love you too!!! sleep well now too okay?"

Hope sighs. Turning off the monitor and laying down. The truth is that she's hopelessly obsessed with Erika. Painfully so. Erika is a fun lady, and she likes sending selfies. They met through a mutual server. An errant connection between the two. Purely sporadic, random chance. And now she's moving to the same town as her. Just one more week.

"Orbiter Saturn, come in, Orbiter Saturn."

"Orbiter Saturn."

"What's your status? Over."

"Systems all green. Everything looks great. Over."

That familiar click.

"Off the record. Feeling more rested? Over."

"Very. Over."

"Look, I know you want to stay out there longer... But I'm happy to see you safely return to Earth. We can't run forever. Over."

"I'm happy to hear that, Patrick. I... I think it'll be okay. It's just a big change. Over."

"I know. Over."

"See you tomorrow, Patrick. Out."

She scuffles over to the computer again. Turning on the monitor. It's been tougher mentally than she thought. After all, what she's really scared of is meeting Erika and somehow putting her off. It's a big change, but she's lived most of her life on Earth. At first she wanted to escape it all, but now she desperately clings onto hopeful dreams. Dreams of spending time with Erika. Dreams of getting along so well that things blossom into romance. Getting along so well that it affects the readings on Orbiter Saturn. Causing a strong spike in the TSF. A measurement of their love.

"Oh my god hiiii!!!"

The message from Erika was as chipper as ever.

"hii!!!"

"Umm I'm free all evening so did you wanna watch me play a game? <3"

It's something they do often. Chatting through VoIP. Hope watching Erika play some sort of game. Entertaining themselves.

"yahh that sounds fun! ive got nothing else going on rn :)"

As usual Erika was quick, pressing the call button as soon as Hope gave the all clear.

"Hey!"

"Hi!"

"Um, so I was thinking I could continue my playthrough of that detective CRPG! Since you can help me out with that big brain of yours!"

"Oh, yeah, uh, what was it called again? Phantom Alignment or something right?"

"That's the one!"

Erika's excited nature was infectious. It's hard to stay in a bad mood anytime she's around.

"I think we left off right as... Oh yeah! Right as we interviewed a key witness. Paul Le-something."

"Paul Le'blont."

"That's it! You're so good at remembering this stuff, how'd I ever get through this without you."

There was an almost flirtatious trill to her voice. She loves teasing Hope, that much is obvious.

"Okay and he was basically... Not really suspicious, right? Oh! But maybe that's what makes him suspicious..."

"Yeah, he didn't seem like he knew anything. Keyword being seem."

The two played for a long time. Chatting about the game, their lives. Talking as if there was nothing else to do in the world but share eachother's thoughts.

Hope yawns.

"Sorry, darling. It's really late, I need to sleep."

"Awww but we're having so much fun."

"I know, but in a week we can hang out for real, y'know? Sleep now and it's slightly closer sooner. At least it feels that way."

"That's true... Also did you just call me darling? Ooh la la!"

"H-hey!"

Hope blushes profusely while Erika laughs. The two had used pet names for eachother before. It wasn't unusual, but Hope always becomes flustered when it's pointed out. Something Erika takes full advantage of.

"Okay, well. Talk to you tomorrow then! Bye Hope!"

"Goodnight, Erika!"

The call ends, and she slumps down in her chair. Still blushing, and even covering her face with her hands. She looks rough. Six months without proper sunlight will do that to you. At least she has a small physical fitness room. Something to keep her occupied. It was, however, time to sleep.

The sound of runners hitting the grippy surface of a treadmill track echo through the Orbiter Saturn. Throughout the six months it was mandated that Hope keep physically fit. At least

performing some simple cardio to keep her blood pumping. She didn't mind then, and she doesn't mind now. During her teenage years, pressured into it by her peers, was when she got into the habit. Nowadays she quite enjoys it. Especially aboard the Orbiter Saturn. Her small home away from home. In front of the treadmill is a screen showing beautiful scenery. It's a pitiful simulation of what running down on Earth is like, but she enjoys it. There are various small plants littered about her living quarters. Keeping their pilots happy is mission critical, and as such they've taken care to make it a nice one. Maintaining the plants is its own daily routine, one that helps stave off boredom when other forms of entertainment won't do.

Hope steps off and turns the screen off. It's time for a shower. Besides, Erika isn't working today, so she'll probably be online to chat with. The water feels nice. Much like the International Space Station before it, the Orbiter Saturn has its own water recycling system. Unlike the ISS, Saturn has a gravity drive. Still, the Orbiter is designed to be navigated easily even during microgravity events. The potted plants have been velcroed to their stands. Luckily, Hope hadn't experienced anything. In all cases it was an extremely boring, uneventful trip. Good thing it's soon over. Even though she's scared.

She dries off, pulling on some clean panties and sitting down at her desk. She dislikes the feeling of being without underwear while sitting down. Though a bra isn't always necessary. The screen flashes bright as it turns on. The familiar operating system glows against her pale skin, so does the notification. One day she's going to message Erika first.

"Heyyy noticed you logged oooooon! Guess what !!"

"what ?"

"C'monnnnn at least guess once!! For me?"

"uhhh youre going on a date?"

"Noooo c'mon, you know me"

"you got a new job?"

"Nope! So far away. Okay listen ooone more guess, c'mon."

"you.. baked a cake?"

"I got us tickets to a concert !!!!!!!!"

"wait really?"

"Yeah! You know that band we both like? Flaunted? Welllll they're playingggg! It's in a few weeks, pretty small venue, but I got us some :D"

"wow thats really cool um... i can pay for mine"

"Noooo it's my treat!!!! For you moving over to me and all !!"

Hope smiles to herself. Erika seems to think everything's going well. After all, why shouldn't it? They've gotten along super well, and over these past six months have gotten extremely close. So many of their mutual friends seem to know what's going on. It's easy to see in the way Hope glows when Erika's around.

"ur so nice to me"

"Only cause you're so nice to meee"

Everything feels just right. Hope clenches her hands. She's so hopelessly in love with this woman. Her best friend. She can't handle it, and it feels like her insides need to explode outwards. To shower her surroundings in her love; as messy and grotesque as it can be. Just a few more days. Not long at all.

"Ready for launch. Over."

Hope sits. Cradled in the small cockpit of the landing vehicle. The scariest part about being in space is getting to space. The second scariest part is getting back down. This was no normal day. After six months and three days she was finally departing Orbiter Saturn. An uneventful six months.

"Detaching vehicle. De-orbiting. Good luck. Over."

There is no real feeling. Other than the slow increase of partial micro-gravity returning. Quickly subdued by the gravity of earth pulling her down. She is nervous. Everything has gone to plan. She doesn't want to die right at the end.

"Heat shield looking optimal. Speed okay. Target okay. Descent going as planned. Over."

The radio is the one comfort within the vehicle. Really, more like a sphere designed to plummet as inefficiently as possible. Falling as such that the parachutes could be deployed once it came time.

"It's looking good, Hope. Deploying parachutes in t-minus thirty seconds. Over."

The entire chassis is shaking. The heat can be felt, insulated as she is. It's impossible to completely prevent it.

"10."

"9."

"8."

"7."

"6."

"5."

"4."

"3."

"2."

"1."

"Parachute deployed. All clear. Almost there. Over."

She feels her heart relax. From here until the ground it's smooth sailing. In about 24 hours she'll be in her new home. Bergen. She'd always heard great things about the city. Beautiful, small, where Erika lived. Really, nothing mattered as much as being with Erika. Seeing her smile. Hearing her voice. Spending time with her. Kissing her- Hope blushes.

She really is crushing hard.

"Almost there, Hope. Welcome back to Earth. Over."

With a clunk the landing vehicle hits the ground. Small suspension rods help smooth the landing and prevent injury to Hope. She sighs with relief.

"Pressure looking stable. Welcome committee on their way. This is Houston. Out."

Earth

The ride back to the base is bumpy. After the initial cheering and praise Hope is left to her own devices. Her own thoughts. The air of relief continues, finally being able to relax. Fresh air has never felt this good before. Just a few meetings, a few questionnaires, a few more hours.

The car stops and everyone but the driver gets out. A man walks towards them. Familiar, middle-aged. Grey streaks in his hair. A well-groomed, well-kempt man.

"Patrick!"

Hope rushes over and hugs him. Other than Erika, he has been the one constant. The person keeping her company this whole time.

"Hi Hope! I'm so glad you made it safely down... Over!"

He laughs, his simple joke cracking a smile in Hope's face.

"You've got a busy day today. I'll miss you, the next pilot isn't anywhere near as interesting as you."

"Patrick!"

Again, he laughs.

"Sorry, sorry. Still, I'll miss you, kid."

"I'll miss you too Patrick. You've been good to me."

The two look at each other wistfully. Moving in for one more hug before Hope turns towards the debriefing office. She's got a long day ahead of her.

The questions are routine. Generic. Boring. She has to do them, but really there's nothing special about them. Hours of men and women asking her about her experiences. How she managed the isolation. What she felt up there. They wanted to know just how powerful the Temporal Social Fluctuations could be. Knowing about them; could she feel them? Even subtly? The reason she was sent up. Why they need pilots at all is because fully autonomous satellites are incapable of measuring frequencies properly. A singular human is all it takes. One real connection point. Two people influence it in the other direction. The readings become too strong. The social dynamic between them causes too much noise in the data. Impossible to parse.

"Besides the scheduled check-ins with Houston the readings show higher levels of TSF during the mornings and evenings. Often continuing out into the night. Not enough to spoil the data, however it does seem like your other social contact points influenced the data. Who were you talking to?"

"A friend."

"Just a friend?"

"Yes."

"Not someone you have a crush on?"

"No, I do have a crush on her."

"Noted. Interesting."

It's standard procedure. Regular questions. Still, it's embarrassing to answer them. Of course they need to know how these social contacts have influenced the data. She had signed up for exactly this. Doesn't prevent her from blushing.

"Okay, I think we have everything we need. Thank you for your cooperation, Hope. I believe you have a flight to catch."

"Yes, I do. Thank you for this opportunity, doc'."

As far as flights go, this one is alright. A bit on the long side, of course, but nothing compared to going into space. Everyone around her is completely oblivious to the excursion she took. It's probably for the best. Hope got the window seat. Her preference. They were even kind enough to get her a first-class seat of all things. Only a couple of hours left before she'd be landing in Bergen. Grabbing her bag. Leaving for her flat. A nice place, picked out

by Patrick, in fact. Spacious enough to spread her limbs. Not too big for a single woman. She has the funds to live it out for a few months without working at least. Still, she figures it's better to get into the swing of things. Being up in space was like a six month vacation in some senses anyhow. Best not to get too used to lazing about.

It is just as Patrick described it. Beautiful, decently sized, pretty central. Furnishings picked out by Patrick's wife. She ought to send them a thank you letter. She was finally home. She picks up her laptop. A bit old, a bit worn, but still keeping up. Due to its age she had swapped it to a light-weight Linux distro. It worked like a charm.

"Ohhhh is that the new girl in town I seeeee?"

It was surprising how eagle-eyed Erika was. She seemed to always know when messages were sent. Always able to respond right away. Always able to find Hope.

"hiii im here!! the place is so cute i cant wait to show you !"

"You've gotttt to send me pics okay? Hey! I'm off tomorrow, let's hang out??"

"aaa ill send some photos once i can get myself out of beddddd im knackered"

"Awwww well, no rush okay? *Darling.*"

Shivers pressed themselves down Hope's spine. God did Erika know how to tease. She was finally so close.

"um when do u wanna hang out? i can do it whenever"

"Why don't we meet up aaaat 12? Do you know where the closest light rail stop is?"

"its uh nygård."

"Great! We'll meet there. I've got loooooots to show you!!!"

"im excited!!"

"So am I aaa!!!!!!!!!! !! !! !!!!! okay. I'll let you get settled and rest, m'kay? Love you lots xoxoxoxo"

"love u too xoxo"

Erika's energy was still as infectious as ever. Hope was blushing. They were about to meet for the first time. It's exciting, scary. Her infatuation would likely swell up, making it difficult to hide her feelings for her. Hope can feel it. It'll be very hard to sleep tonight despite how tired she is. The Earth is scary, but Erika makes it seem so safe. Forever her anchor.

"Wow it's so cuuuute!!"

It's the morning before their meeting. Hope finally got around to taking some pictures of her flat, and promptly sent them to Erika. She slept terribly, as expected. Dark circles under her eyes. Her skin is paler still. In the excitement to meet her she completely forgot that she has nothing truly nice to wear. It's the summer, a nice, warm day. She's wearing a baggy tank-top, sports bra peeking out, and some comfortable shorts. Her hair, long from the trip, is messy and unkempt. For all of her life Hope has defied her pretty name. Tomboyish in nature, she's never kept up with any trends. Not even bothering with much make-up. The closest thing you can call her is butch, but she enjoys a slight feminine touch as evidenced by her dangling earring and strong eyeliner.

"haha thank u im really happy with it"

"We'll have to have a housewarming party sometime!! How about we buy some alcoholllll while we're out?"

"you know what? ye lets do it"

There she stands. Auburn hair, just enough make-up on to accentuate her feminine facial features, bright red lipstick, a sun broad sun hat on, cute leather purse, and this gorgeous sun dress on. Her breasts hugged snugly against the fabric, held back and up by her bra. Matching shoes, functional and reliable for a day like this. Hope holds her breath. Cheeks blushing, a smile spreading across her face. Speechless. She stops in her tracks to examine her, being the distant admirer like she always was before. The moment is broken as Erika's head swivels and meets Hope's. A bright smile flashes across her face and she rushes over.

"Hope! Oh my gosh hi!"

She jumps in for a hug, and Hope catches her, hugging back. The thumping of her heart must be noticeable on the Richter scale.

"Hi Erika, it's so good to see you, finally."

"I've got so many fun things planned! I was thinking we could go up Fløyen first, get a view over the city. It's such a beautiful view, and on a day like this we couldn't ask for a better time to do it."

"That sounds like a good idea."

Hope smiles warmly. She's just as excitable in person as she is online. A beam of sunlight that could brighten up anybody's day.

The two of them wander over towards the funicular. The city is as beautiful as Erika always described it. Tall buildings made insignificant by the mountains surrounding them. Houses dotted around wherever they could find the space. Never too crowded. A perfect amount of people to keep it feeling busy but never cramped. They entered the building for fløibanen, the funicular that would take them up the mountain, and purchased their tickets before entering the vehicle.

“So how come you wanted to move here? Why now?”

“I... Had a job, and I finished it. Wanted a change of pace. Figured you made this city sound so beautiful I might as well try.”

“Well, you certainly seem determined to live here based on that flat you got!”

She giggles. That infectious laugh of hers. The funicular starts moving upwards. They're seated backwards, such that they can look out at the view. Once they escape the tunnel they see the city slowly shrink beneath them.

“Wow, it's beautiful...”

“I know. *Not nearly as beautiful as you.*”

Erika giggles again, the expression on Hope's face is one of shock and fluster. Her cheeks warm from how hard she's blushing. She embraces Hope as they watch the funicular rise up the mountain.

“Aww did I fluster you? Haha, you're bright red!”

“I-I- g-g- ah...”

“Oh Hope, darling, don't stop talking now! We've got a whole day left together!”

It's hopeless. She can't get herself to say a single word, luckily the funicular comes to a rest at the end station. Something to break the tension within her. The two exit out, and are met with the view. It's spectacular. Multiple tourists are taking pictures of the view; of each other. Erika grabs Hope's hand and pulls her over to the edge.

“Look! See, what'd I tell you? It's spectacular, right? Look how small everything looks.”

“I-it's beautiful...”

Hope can't contain it. She starts to cry.

“It's just like you described it. It's perfect.”

“Let's take a picture together. Just us two!”

Erika takes out a selfie stick and poses with Hope. Only noticing her tears once she hugs next to her. Silently, she wipes them away.

“This'll be our special moment, Hope.”

As they lean in next to each other Erika sneaks a kiss in on Hope's cheek just as she takes the picture. Capturing the exact moment she flusters the poor, emotional woman.

“H-hey w-what?”

Hope can't gather her thoughts at all. Is Erika into her as well? Or is she just playing the eternal tease. It's impossible to tell, which flusters her all the more.

“Just figured I'd throw you off one more time, teehee.”

“W-well it worked!”

The two stood next to each other for a while. Staring out at the view. Erika pointed out her flat, and then helped point towards the general direction of Hope's. Bright sun beaming warmth onto them, protecting them from the cold gusts of wind. Fløyen isn't the tallest mountain around, but it's tall enough to see everything you'd need to see. The entire city. Stretches of land filled with buildings. Anywhere that is flat has some kind of building on it, and anywhere that isn't has been shaped to accommodate a building. A beacon of humanity's refusal to let nature shape our habitat. Our insolence. Our pride. Or, at least, someone's. Enough's.

The rustling of the trees created a beautiful ambience. Small paths littered around the mountaintop led people around for their walks. A place so serene makes it hard to imagine that it's right next to a city, but it is. The two walked idly about. Walking until their feet grew tired. Walking until they wanted to stop. The funicular ride down was just as pleasant as the one up. Though, as everything shrunk on the way up, everything grew on the way down. The buildings that seemed as meaningless as humanity within the universe suddenly grew to imposing sizes.

“Hope. What kind of alcohol do you like?”

She turned towards Erika.

“I was thinking we could get some booze then head to your place and fix up that manky haircut of yours. I know you like it shorter. Plus, I've got just the idea for what'd fit you perfectly!”

Erika is a hairdresser by trade. She's always loved playing with hair, ever since she was young. Though her parents didn't let her grow her hair out she was still able to experiment on her sisters' hairs. First braiding, then moving up to cutting. It wasn't until 14 that her parents gave up and let her grow long hair, figuring that a teenager should be given the choice to express herself. Ecstatic, she started experimenting, figuring out just what kind of hair she wanted. It's obvious by how perfect her hair is that she's got it all figured out, so who better to do Hope's hair than her?

“That sounds fun. I like... Vodka. Whiskey.”

“Oh come on! I'm gonna mix you something so tasty you'll never bother with that harsh crap again hahaha!”

Core

Sunlight shines through the windows of the peaceful flat. Reflecting off countertops and floors, heating them. A window is open, letting fresh air in, billowing the sheer curtains slightly. The metallic snips of scissors can be heard along with gentle humming. Tufts of hair fall to the floor with a steady pace. Hair being cut into a new shape; one more fit for its owner. All tensions are relieved. Hope sits peacefully, letting Erika give her a new look. Trusting her as much as she could trust Houston up on Orbiter Saturn. On their way back to Hope's flat they popped into Erika's to grab some supplies for the haircut. They could've done it at her place, but this was a sort of housewarming gift for Hope. Besides, she really did quite like her. It was obvious in the deliberateness of her movements. How careful she was to make it just right. How long she had thought about the kind of haircut she should give her.

"You are looking absolutely gorgeous right now."

"Y-yeah? You think so?"

"Oh, absolutely. My best work yet if I do say so myself."

In many ways she was correct. She's worked as a hairdresser for many years, but no client of hers has she cared so deeply about as Hope. She doesn't know where Hope was for so long. She doesn't know anything, but she wants to. She cannot mess this up.

"And... Voilà! Done!"

Erika holds up a mirror, showing Hope the back and sides.

"So... What do you think? Look alright?"

Hope sits and stares at Erika's handiwork. Truly the work of a woman who has spent many years perfecting her craft. She starts tearing up again.

"I love it."

"Eep! Yay! I'm so glad!"

"Thank you so so much, Erika. Seriously."

Erika blushes, proud of herself.

"Aw, well - it was nothing!"

It was everything.

"I'm just glad that you're happy with the results is all. That's all I can ask."

She could ask for more.

The warmth in the flat nestled the two women like a mother bird protecting her young. Erika started mixing the drinks, carefully concocting something with just enough sweetness that Hope might like it. Trying to wean her off drinking pure liquors. After all, the booze lasts longer when you can enjoy it slower. She finishes up and brings it over to the couch where Hope is sitting, beaming with happiness as she prepares to share a drink.

“To new beginnings.”

“To new beginnings.”

They clink their glasses together and both take a sip. She really outdid herself. Just enough of a kick while still tasting good.

“Wow, that is really good. You weren’t kidding. I might need you f-for both haircuts *and* drinking!”

Hope slipped. Not quite as suave as she wishes she could be.

“Well, if you’re offering, *darling*.”

Erika knows Hope slipped up, and she knows just how to press this beautiful woman’s buttons. It’s all simple seduction, but will it work? Does she need more of a push? They both finish up their drinks. Sitting together, talking about nothing and everything. Just like before, but in person this time.

“Let me make some more.”

Hope grabs her hand before she can get up.

“N-no. I... I don’t want to be drunk for this.”

“I-it’s fine, Hope, really, it’s just one more.”

“I-I-I want this to be something we both want.”

Hope looks deeply into Erika’s deep brown eyes. Her own blue eyes staring back. She leans forwards. Erika knows just what this is. She wants it. Hope wants it. She leans forwards as well, meeting Hope’s lips. Their lips are both soft. Erika’s lipstick pressing itself against Hope’s lips. Marking them up, proving that she’s been there. Erika opens her mouth just enough to let her tongue slide out, and Hope does the same. Meeting in the middle, pressing against each other. Hope’s hands grabbing onto Erika’s shoulders, embracing her; pulling her closer. Their tongues explore deeper. Feeling cheeky, Erika sucks on Hope’s tongue just a little bit. Greedily grabbing onto more of her for a moment. Slowly they break away.

“Y-you don’t want to know how many times I’ve thought about this. How much I’ve longed to move here and be in your arms.”

“M-me too.”

Hope starts kissing down Erika’s neck. Slowly sucking on her flesh, moving her hands lower against her supple breasts. Lifting her head to suckle on her earlobe next, eliciting a moan from Erika’s sweet lips. Erika slowly undoes her dress, loosening it just enough for Hope to move more freely underneath it. Allowing her to navigate up towards her bra.

“P-please undo it. Give me all of you.”

She doesn’t need to be told twice. Her dexterous fingers confidently undo the bra, lifting away even more pressure; allowing her access to Erika’s sensitive nipples. They’re soft, puffy. A deliciously addicting sensation. One she wants in her mouth. Hope slowly kisses down Erika’s neck again. Moving towards those soft mounds. Her mouth is practically watering. Another moan is let out. Hope’s mouth latches onto Erika’s nipple, her tongue exploring every part of its surface. Feeling the small bumps and flicking against the tip. She takes a break from exploring this nipple and moves to the next, feeling them hardening.

“O-oh god, Hope. F-fuck it fe-feels so good!”

It’s addictive. Erika’s writhing underneath her, the taste of her flesh, the beautiful sounds that flow out from her throat. She could do this all day.

“I n-need a break, sorry.”

Erika sighs. As good as it feels she has to catch her breath. She was hoping for a bit of a kiss, maybe a deeper one if they got a bit drunker. But this is even better. In the heat of things her perfect hair had gotten a bit messier. Her writhing against the couch did it no good, but what did it matter? Hope didn’t care and neither did she. The women readjusted themselves and cuddled against each other.

“I’ve really wanted this, Hope.”

“So have I.”

“Before we continue I... Need to tell you something.”

“Yes?”

“I’m in love with you. I have been for some time. My heart skipped a beat when you told me you were moving here. It made me so happy, it was like a dream come true.”

“... I’m in love with you too, Erika. Even before I knew I was moving here, before I went u-”

Hope cuts herself off. She almost revealed the mission. Almost revealed what she couldn’t tell anyone. Her deepest secret.

“Before you went where?”

“I’m sorry, I... I can’t say.”

“Well... Wherever you were, I’m glad you’re here now. That’s all that matters.”

“Thank you. I love you, Erika.”

“I love you too, Hope.”

They kiss each other once more. Once more it’s a deep kiss. Once more their tongues meet. The alcohol wasn’t really necessary in the end. All they ever needed was each other, still. Erika breaks the kiss and stands up, slinking her dress and bra off properly before walking over to the kitchen counter, mixing another drink for them.

“Oh my god you are so fucking gorgeous.”

Hope’s words blurt out before she can think to stop herself, but it’s true. Erika looks back and smiles. Her soft breasts hanging down, no longer supported by any fabric at all.

“You should know.”

Far up, out of their vision, out of anyone’s vision, the Orbiter Saturn measures Temporal Social Fluctuations. Despite no pilot being aboard, for a brief moment, the Orbiter measures a spike in TSF. Not massive. Nothing that couldn’t be ruled out as some strange artifact caused by interference. But the Orbiter knows, and deep down, Hope knows, that their love can be measured by an uncaring machine. That this romance is not just within themselves, but outside of them as well. Fluctuating out into the aether; towards the uncaring coldness of space.