

## The Air We Breathe

Rayner pulled the thick quilt to his chin and tilted the recliner all the way back.

‘You warm enough?’ Camden asked, securing the blanket firmly under his kid brother’s side. ‘The cold air’s not good for you.’

‘I’m alright for now.’

‘Well, let me know if you want my jumper.’ Camden zipped up his padded jacket, then laid flat on his back with a hand tucked under his head. ‘Any minute now, Ray. You’re gonna love it.’

‘Where do I look?’

‘See there?’ The older boy pointed to a constellation shaped like a stick-figure house. ‘That’s *Domus Nostra*. The faint star on the bottom right is Sol. Look just below that.’

‘Sol looks so far away.’

‘It is far, bud.’

‘Do you ever wonder what it’s like to live there?’

‘No, not really. We’ve got it good here. We have everything we need. Besides, it’s peaceful.’

‘Yeah.’

Some minutes passed before the first vibrant meteor blazed across the sky and vanished almost as soon as it appeared.

‘Whoa!’ Rayner exclaimed. ‘Did you see that?’

His brother laughed. ‘That was only a teaser. Just wait.’

For the next half-hour, the boys watched in awe as brilliant trails of light illuminated the sky again and again. Nature’s nocturnal laser show—courtesy of millions-of-years-old space dust left behind by splintered asteroids.

‘This happens every night?’ Rayner asked.

‘Yup. Just before dawn.’ Camden sat up and sniffed the musty air, then looked towards the northwest where the first hint of sunlight blushed above the horizon. From their domed, rooftop vantage point, he could just make out Zone Sigma’s lagoon in the distance; an immense, bio-engineered marvel of dazzling, life-sustaining pink.

Rayner turned to his side. ‘I can’t believe I’ve been missing out all these years.’

‘You don’t have to, you know... miss out. Now that your lungs are developed and strong enough to breathe the outside air.’ Camden said, tousling his brother’s curly brown hair. ‘You doing okay? We’ve been out here awhile.’

Rayner straightened, then inhaled deeply before slowly releasing his breath. ‘All good,’ he said, giving two thumbs-up.

Camden smiled. ‘Good.’

‘I wish we were born fully adapted to this place. Waiting sucks.’

‘These things take time, Ray. Multiple generations,’ he said. ‘But we’re getting there, atmosphere-wise. We’ve reached 19.4 percent oxygen during daylight. I reckon we’ll be at a constant twenty by the time we’re old men, so long as the algae continue to reproduce and photosynthesise. Our great-grandchildren may never have to live in a bubble.’

‘Fingers crossed.’

‘Fingers crossed.’

‘What time is it?’ Rayner asked when the sun hung dim, but wholly visible in the indigo sky.

Camden glanced at his wrist monitor. ‘Nearly seven. We should probably go back inside. I’ve got to get to the lab, and you have to get ready for school.’

Rayner groaned. ‘Can’t we stay a little longer? Please?’

Camden looked towards the northwest. ‘Sure, buddy,’ he said, patting Rayner’s shoulder. ‘Ten more minutes. Just long enough to watch the second sun rise.’