

*April 25, 2501 – 2030 hours, Hawdon Family Compound, Saga*

Avis Hawdon stands looking out the floor to ceiling window overlooking the darkness shrouded gardens behind the family house in the capital city of Saga, lost in thought. A waiter rearranges items on a dinner table for the umpteenth time. Katie looks up from a PDA periodically then goes back to reading status reports.

A minute later, the waiter approaches Avis and says with a slightly French accent, “My lady, your dinner is getting cold. Please come and eat. I am sure your father will be along shortly.”

She turns to look at the man, her eyes are red rimmed. She is obviously upset. “Thank you Pierre, I really do not feel like eating. Please take it back to the kitchen and put it away.”

“As you wish,” he replies.

Pierre moves back to the table and prepares to move the untouched meals back to the kitchen. The door into the dining room opens and Vincent slips in and surveys the scene. He carries a box wrapped in red paper and a cloth bow.

Waving Pierre away, Vincent sits the box down on the table, walks up behind Avis, and places his hands on her shoulders. “Sorry I am late, sweetheart,” he whispers to her, “It could not be helped.”

She twists out of his grasp and spins to face him. Her face barely contains her anger. “We both know that is a load of crap, father.” She spits the last word out. “I normally understand. But people operate on your schedule, not you on theirs. What is so hard about being on time one freaking day out of the year? And with no word as to why you are an hour and a half late. Whose decision was that? I see where I fall in the order of things,” she says while pinning him with a glare.

Vincent silently endures the outburst then puts his arm around his daughter and leads her back to the table. “I am very sorry dear,” he begins, “I should have called, my mistake. You are very important to me. Here, have a seat and let’s enjoy dinner.”

She says nothing as she takes a seat and places the napkin in her lap; totally ignoring the box on the table. Avis picks up the knife and fork and begins to attack the pasta on the plate in front of her.

Vincent takes a couple of bites of his pasta then points to the box with his fork, “Are you going to open your present?”

Avis stops and looks at her father a few moments, then sits down her utensils and picks up the box. She examines the bow and wrapping then says, “It is pretty” as she unwraps it.

“Wrapped it myself,” Vincent says with a grin, “Happy Birthday Avis.”

She opens the box and pulls out a ceramic jar with multiple colors streaking through the material. Avis turns the jar over in her hands and notices her name, her birth date, and today’s date integrated into the swirls on the opposite side. The lid is sealed with a wax. There are obvious imperfections in its construction, signs that a master had not made the object. She looks up at her father puzzled.

“Your mother made it,” Vincent begins, “she sealed it and made me promise to see that you got it on your 25<sup>th</sup> birthday. Open it.”

“What’s inside?” she asks.

“I don’t know. She never told me,” he replies. Katie looks up from across the room both with concern in her eyes. Vincent glances at her and nods negatively.

With a little effort, Avis is able to break the seal and the lid pops open. She looks into the jar and extracts pieces of paper. Slowly she opens them and begins reading. By the time she finishes, she tears are streaming down her face.

“What does it say,” Vincent asks.

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Avis puts the note back into the jar and replaces the lid. After collecting herself, she sits the jar on the table and says quietly, "Just words from a mother to her daughter" and goes back to eating. After a couple of bites, she adds, "Thank you father for the gift."

"Oh that's not what I got you. This," Vincent says as he tosses something to Avis and she catches it, "is what I got for you. Enjoy. Although Katie may have some reservations about it."

Avis slowly opens her hand and sees the familiar Lawson Personal Conveyances (LPC) logo etched into a data crystal. She looks up at him with surprise. "You didn't..." she says.

He looks at her with a big smile and says, "Yep, first one off the assembly line. LPC SkySaber luxury personal transonic transport. Seats four and comes with auto-nav, variable geometry wings that adapt to the speed..."

"Where is it?" she asks.

"Out back," he says standing up. He pulls out his personal communications device, thumbs a button, and says into it, "Go."

Avis runs to the window as the personal landing pad lights up. A craft covered with a black cloth sits on the pad. Someone pulls the cloth off revealing the silver sheen body beneath it. The craft looks like it is ready to leap off the ground and take flight.

"Ohhh! I've wanted one of these since I read about them two months ago," Avis says with glee. "Let's go for a ride!" she says pulling her father towards the door.

"Ok... Ok..." Vincent says allowing himself to be dragged towards the door, "but keep in mind you have to coordinate with Katie before using it. You cannot go off gallivanting by yourself."

"I understand. Katie!" she says excitedly, "I'm coordinating. Get it in gear!"

Katie, taken completely by surprise by the burst of excited energy, fumbles around for her PDA and begins to give instructions.

Vincent's personal communications device beeps for his attention. He thumbs a switch and says, "Yes?"

A computer generated voice replies, "Level 1 Priority secured transmission pending from Charles Roublin." Avis crosses her arms with anger and frustration evident on her face.

"Sweetheart, I need to take this. It's important. I'll be right back," Vincent says as hurries into a side room.

Avis paces back and forth, anger building up with each passing moment. When it reaches a boiling point, she reacts.

"To hell with this," she growls out and begins making her way towards the door her father exited through.

Katie reaches out to stop her and says, "Avis. Please don't be angry with him..."

Avis stops and points her finger in Katie's face. "Not ... another ... freaking ... word," she says angrily.

Whatever argument Katie was going to offer dies in her throat.

Avis throws open the door and yells at her father, "You cannot stop working for a couple of hours to have dinner with your daughter, on her birthday?"

Vincent replies, "Sweetheart... I'll be there in a moment... I just need to take thi..."

Avis throws the data crystal at Vincent and says, "Keep your stupid gift. I'll celebrate my birthday myself." She slams the door shut. She then storms over to the dinner table, grabs the jar, and quickly leaves the dining room, slamming that door shut behind her as well.

Katie stands just a moment to see if Vincent comes out then hurries out of the room after Avis.