If there was one thing that Violet would never grow tired of, it would be waking up and watching the Earth floating hundreds of kilometres below her. In her classes they told her that the earth was uninhabitable now—toxic and treacherous—but from where she was, it just looked peaceful. The white clouds swirled against the deep blue and she couldn’t help but wonder whether it’s true what they say: you always want what you can’t have. The sound of a fist banging against metal jolted her out of her daydream and at the touch of a button, her door slid open with a gentle whirring sound. Ash was standing in her doorway wearing the same cheeky grin that had gotten the pair into trouble countless times. He threw an arm around Violet and kissed her on the cheek.

“Happy birthday, Vi!”

On the station, there weren’t any birthdays anymore. Sure, everyone had one, but the rules said that there would be no gift giving, happy music or cake eating, which the elders had told them used to happen on Earth. Not that they had any of these things anymore—he’s sure it was something the cranky old lady who always smelt of something stale in the rationing office had nightmares about. However, Violet was Ash’s best friend and never really cared much for rules anyway. Predictably, Violet rolled her eyes and was about to give her yearly speech about how irrelevant birthdays are but he cut her off and started rummaging through his backpack.

“Come on, you don’t turn eighteen every day! God, that’s so old. Is that I wrinkle I see?”

He peered at her face mockingly and Violet stuck her tongue out at him.

“Oh, please. You’re only a year younger than me anyway.”

He ignored her, pulled a tie out of his bag and held it up triumphantly. She raised a sceptical eyebrow but he just turned her around and covered her eyes with it, her vision now shrouded in darkness. Violet reached around wildly in the air until she found Ash’s arm.

“Is this a kidnapping? Should I be worried?”
He laughed and guided her out of her room and into the labyrinth of corridors.

“You said all you wanted was to be able to leave the station. I’m not exactly going to send you off to the radiation-soaked wasteland that was the home of our ancestors, so this seemed like the next best thing.”

After a few minutes and lots of stumbling, Ash stopped suddenly and removed the tie.

“Now … open your eyes!”

Once she adjusted to the light, she gasped. She took in the scraps of exposed metal, frayed wires and the strong smell of petrol. He threw something round and heavy at her: a space helmet.

She didn’t want to get her hopes up, but a wave of excitement flooded through her. “Does this mean what I think it means?”

He shrugged. “I figured it’d be a step up from your bedroom window.”

Violet’s eyes widened and she looked frantically around the room, eyes landing on the security cameras. He waved a hand in the direction of the monitor screen, which was turned off.

“You don’t need to worry about them seeing. I’ve got it covered.”

He may or may not have had to bribe the man working at the security office with his father’s last bottle of whiskey – he opted to leave that part out of his story. The growing smile on Vi’s face made it more than worthwhile.

Once she was dressed in the large astronaut suit, its padded white exterior meaning that she had to waddle towards the chamber, Ash started to set up the controls just like he was taught during his apprenticeship. The set-up and launch was over so quickly it passed like a blur. All Violet knew was that one moment she was standing in a chamber then … she was in space! Just her, alone in the dark atmosphere, and yet she’d never felt more warm and exuberated. This was as close as she’d ever been—and quite possibly will ever be—to Earth. Her bones ached for the freedom it promised, for the feeling of soil crunching beneath her feet and the scent of the very flower she’d been named after, yet never seen before. She never wanted to go back; she had never been anywhere but the station, yet it never felt like home to her. The people on it were the children of elitist snobs and selfish socialites who used their money to find a way off their dying planet and leaving millions to die. She just wanted to—
The sound of an alarm started to screech in her ear and cut off her train of thought. She tried to turn around, but her legs flailed helplessly and she felt as if her heart was moving its way up into her throat. She tried to speak but it felt as if all the oxygen was been slowly sucked out of her lungs. Back on the station, Ash shoved the lever down, causing the blaring noise to stop. Violet could feel herself being pulled back in and when the gate closed behind her and the oxygen started coming back, she had never felt more relieved in her entire life.

Ash sighed and leant back against the wall, ignoring the way his hands were shaking. He watched as Violet removed the suit, still trying to catch her breath.

“You okay if we never try anything like this again?”

She gave a small laugh. “Yeah. I’m far too young to die of a heart attack. Thanks, though. It was incredible.”

He smiled to himself, and as he began to shut down the controls he glanced down at the small screen next to him. The entire time they had been in here, the camera feed had been off, thanks to his dad’s booze. Now, the small screen was displaying the control room. This was bad. This was very, very bad. Ash knew what was going to happen. Violet was eighteen now and if they found her here, she would be locked away for the rest of her life – if not worse. He, on the other hand, was only seventeen – a cocky, troublesome minor. The guards would take one look at him and would see him for just that – no need to check the security cameras, no need for them to punish Violet.

“Hey, I’m going to finish up in here. Go get us a table in the mess hall, okay?”

She frowned. “Is everything okay?”

“Yeah, yeah. Just go okay?” He pushed Violet towards the door before she could argue and locked it behind him.

Ash quickly started putting as much of the space gear on as he could, jumping and flailing around as he did so. On the screen, she could see a swarm of station guards dressed head to toe in tough, black material about to break through the door, their guns pointed right where he was standing. He pushed his fear to the back of his mind and forced his famous grin to settle on his face before turning to fully face them.
“Jeez! Who called the fun police?”

A large, balding man stepped forward from the group of guards, grabbed Ash’s wrists and pulled them painfully behind his back. They marched him through the corridors he’d walked down with Violet less than an hour ago and threw him into the detainment cell. He let his fake smile fall, the thick steel walls closing in on him and leaving him with an empty feeling in the pit of his stomach. Maybe he just threw the rest of his life away, but the memory of watching Violet on the top of the world – literally – made it worth it.