

Prologue

Long Ago

“Jeanie Carlson is one crazy bitch,” they used to say.

How cruel some could be.

It was true that from the moment she first learned to speak, Jeanie had been anything but ordinary. Her parents had known it as soon as she’d been born.

“She was always destined for something,” they said. “We never thought it would be this.”

How hard should it be to satisfy one's own parents?

In school, Jeanie breezed through her history and grammar lessons like they were nothing because to her, that’s exactly what they were. Nothing. Useless. Her passion was science, the way the world worked, and that showed in her choice of university.

Dozens of schools clamored to gain her as a student, but Jeanie only cared about one: Vathaylia SciTech, where the school’s students and faculty alike pushed the boundaries of science. Upon receiving her acceptance letter from the university, she packed up her things and left, saying not a single word to her friends and family.

She was eleven.

“Jeanie was an... interesting student,” her professors said.

She hadn’t come to university to please them.

As with her primary schools. Vathaylia’s top university failed to provide Jeanie with a challenge. The only place she could truly test herself was in the lab, but even there, the school’s established safety measures held her in check.

Despite that, Jeanie thrived at Vathaylia SciTech. She learned, grew older, and developed into the person most would remember. On her commencement from university, it was time for her to enter the real world.

“Dr. Jeanie Carlson is utterly brilliant,” her colleagues in the scientific community said, “but she’s so young and a woman. Eventually, she’ll crash and burn. She’s not cut out for our work.”

As if the body she’d been born in could limit her potential.

Jeanie struggled for years to find a job before deciding to start her own business, and for the first few years after this, life went her way. Her company flourished with the novelty of her consumer products creating a stir around the globe. She quickly accumulated a comfortable safety net, enough money to indefinitely fund her side projects: all the ways she focused on fringe sciences and other, similar subjects.

Around her twenty-first birthday, however, her circumstances changed. Dramatically.

Her parents died in a freak accident. Several of her business's once successful projects started failing in an explosive fashion, and the fast-rising star that her company had become soon plummeted toward bankruptcy. At the end of an exceptionally rough quarter, Jeanie went on sabbatical.

"When she came home, she was different. Driven," her friends said. "It was like something was haunting her."

Something did haunt her: what she'd learned about the future.

On returning, Jeanie used her remaining funds to construct what amounted to a space station on a spot of land that she claimed would prove mineral rich soil. She released a press statement, inviting any and all to wait for the world's end with her there.

The backlash across Vathaylia was immediate and deriding. People said she'd cracked while on sabbatical. Her name became synonymous with the 'hysterical female', someone who'd been unable to stand the pressure of her life, and her claims were met with laughter.

Jeanie Carlson, the crazy bitch.

That didn't stop her from pouring her heart and soul into her new project, all the while doing what she could to convince others about what was coming.

Some listened. They gathered their belongings and joined Jeanie in her sanctuary.

Days passed. Months. A year.

The mocking never stopped, or at least, it didn't stop until the Event, and then, screaming briefly replaced that ridicule. When the cries of the dying eventually fell silent, only silence remained, and into that hush, Jeanie flung a never-to-be-received radio transmission.

"Who's crazy now, bitches?"