

Finally, Somebody

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There is nothing more crushing than being adrift.

Like a baby, you'll crave the comfort of society's breast. You'd never noticed the impact the everyday stranger had until they were gone, until there was nobody. And out here, there are blocks and blocks and blocks of nobody. A spaceman without a ship or crew to depend on, you find yourself stranded in the cosmic desert with nothing and no one to save you. When you are alone, floating aimlessly with no direction, no purpose, you'll begin to count the blessings you took for granted: the giggle you garnered from another when telling a joke, the flash of a child's first smile, the taste of beer and good times, the feeling of a lover's sweaty skin and the smell of it.

In space, there is nothing but you. You'll flow through the air with no resistance. Destiny and the universe decide your course and duration of your trip. You'll tumble, endlessly, flipped around and around again. Your direction is as useless up here as your memories. One small push in any direction will send you traveling forever. Not that direction matters. Which way is west when you're on the moon? On mars? In a different solar system? Where's home when you're in space? You'll already be too defeated to ponder such philosophical conundrums. You'd rather think about your life, and every single character in it.

However, without time, your memories bleed together, forming an endless ocean of despair that pulls you under with every last breath. You'll stare down at your planet as it cruises past your helmet. What could your partner be doing, all the way down there? Maybe it's morning and they're pulling soft fabrics down over their collarbones, chilly without your arms to wake up in. Maybe it's the afternoon, and they're wiping the stickiness off your son's cheeks. Or, God help you, it's night time and their face is buried in a pillow and their body shakes with worry. In space, there is no time and there is no love.

It wasn't supposed to be like this, you'll think. But in space, there is no God. Destiny, maybe, but she is as cruel and uncaring as the environment you find yourself in. Only a vengeful, heartbroken vixen would play a hand of computer failure and meteor shower, tossing in four human lives as chips—all in. An even crueler witch would kill your fellow astronauts immediately and send you to your grave, spinning and screaming. Not that anyone can hear you scream, there is no sound in space.

Sick of your pity and loneliness, you'll continue to try and problem solve, as you were taught to do your whole life. You'll blink away tears and your child's face, unclench your jaw, and attempt to defeat the forces acting as your enemies. You'll organize every single facet of your suit into mental compartments. You'll scan the horizons. You'll see nothing. You'll start to panic. Your son's laugh will echo in your ears, your chest will fill with liquid steel, your eyes will bleed your new world away until everything in front of you is as uncertain as your ending.

Then, you'll take a deep breath, steady yourself, clench your jaw, and look around. You'll see endless darkness, stars blinking out from distant galaxies, and a run-down space station.

A run-down space station?! You panic again, now because you might actually have to put up a fight for your life. You'll do anything in your power to slow your spinning; a panicked flailing of the limbs should do the trick. You slow, catch your breath, but you're still drifting in a specific direction: towards the station.

Your mind floods with dopamine and imaginary scenarios. You won't even be thinking straight when your radio catches a cackling, yet alive transmission:

Hey, you alive out there? The voice bounces around your helmet, tickling your ears and pressing sweet kisses to your brain.

Yes! You shout back.

They say, *Congrats, you don't have to shout about it.* And you laugh, because they're funny. There's somebody up here, finally, and they're funny. *So they left you up here too, huh?*

You nod as you inch closer. *Costs too much to save our lives.*

You got that right. You aren't able to see them yet, there in the docking window, but the very faintest of movement behind glass is enough to cast out your hopelessness and reawaken your desire to survive. You glance down at your planet again, imagining the officials muting your radio as you cry for their help. A whole planet with its back turned towards you.

Hey, you got anything on you? They lean closer to the window, trying to get a better look at you. You see them, adorned in the same lonely suit as you. They seem to press closer in anticipation, filled with the same anxious happiness.

No. You feel ashamed. *My station and crew are gone. It's only me.*

Damn, I was really jonesing for a cigarette.

Your eyes meet, or at least your helmets do. *Is your station working?*

They chuckle in a way that makes you feel more shame, *Would I be up here with you if it was?*

You stare off into the void. You know the whole solar system is there with resources for you to grasp, but you also know you'd die before you ever even glimpse another planet's surface. There is no "close by" in space. With your feet firmly rooted to the Earth's surface, space seems small enough to hold in your hand, to count every planet and name every star. But when you're up there, a single human life is nothing but a piece of pollen, carried away by the wind.

Space to spaceman, hello! The voice snaps you out of existentialism and back into presentism. *You're drifting through space right now. Daydreaming can wait.*

Are there enough resources for both of us?

They laugh, a genuine laugh, deep and full of comfort. For a moment, the tightness in their shoulders releases, they cease their fidgeting. *I got everything we need. Just need a co-pilot.* You're almost to the station now. Your drifting will be over. You think of your lover's lips when you kissed for the first time, the sweet rush of being young and secretly in love. Or your friends with their casual understanding, having known your deepest thoughts before you even thought them. Or your child, their eyes ablaze with curiosity when you showed them the night sky, their soft body pressed into your chest. You feel all the love from your life fill you up and slosh out the sides.

You're safe now.

The sun escapes up over Earth's shadow for the first time since your isolation. You are so close to the glass. A beam of yellow light cuts through the window, illuminating the spot your eyes strained to see. There is nobody there. You are staring at your own reflection, a lonely spaceman in his puffy spacesuit, a dead, glassy fish eye protecting the truth from the astronaut in the window.

You'll be confused, then it'll be clear. The station will evaporate into the darkness, taking with it all your human hopes, however foolish they may be. You will continue to drift until your lungs squeeze out your last breath, choking you from the inside. Until your mouth runs dry, sandpaper covering your tongue and throat. Until your stomach twists and churns, burning holes in itself, digesting anything it can. And then, you'll keep drifting.

There is nothing more crushing than the cold vacuum of space.