

"*...And if you gaze for long into an abyss, the abyss gazes also into you*." - Nietzsche

Nothingness. A beautiful vast void of nothing enveloped her and all six senses. Her body felt weightless. Burned skin soothed by a tingling chill danced along her skin. The sounds and feelings of others' suffering felt so distant, as if it was a memory of long ago, lost to time. Perfect stillness enveloped. There was no thought, no sound, simply *nothing.*

Slowly the faintest twinkle of lights in the distance flickered to life. One by one they ignited like flames on a wax candle wick, growing brighter and brighter, warming the space until a brilliant flash extinguished them. Once one had flashed a cascading escalation of blinking of the lights started, from one to another, the symptoms spread until finally the last ones remain all at once evaporate with a single, violent yet silent eruption.

Again, there was *nothing*.

This time, it was not beautiful, the cold was not a balm to open wounds, all felt hollow.

Voidlike eyes stared out into the nothingness, wondering, waiting for the lights to return.

A soft white halo of light sparked life in the void once more. Closer and closer, larger and larger, the glow grew into a vibrant blaze of white and gold, and as she stared directly into its light, she felt the image burn itself onto her dark eyes.

It was then she realized it was not the light she should have focused on, but what was at the center.

((Bridge, Deck 1, USS Octavia E. Butler))

Sevantha Saa opened her eyes and found herself standing on the bridge of the Octavia E. Butler once again. Fingers brushed gently along the top of the console to ground herself in the tangible. The smell of burning plastic certainly helped remind her they were in the middle of a crisis, though she hadn’t the faintest clue where the last few moments of time had gone.

What *had* happened?

Immediately, she searched for her commanding officer, Toxin Arlill, and watched him discover the charred side panels on the Captain’s chair. When had *that* happened? And why didn’t she *feel* him?

Once again, Sevantha felt a chill run down her spine. When she focused, she sensed him, but when she tried to listen to the ship's occupants, she could barely perceive their thoughts and feelings.

Arlill: What happened?

Yavok: I'm not sure sir. I'd just gotten back when the bright flash happened, and then the fires. ::beat:: was it the warp core? Did it overload??

Bright flash? *What* bright flash? It took her a moment to recall the blinding flash, but she didn't remember fire, all she remembered was the soothing touch of the void.

Saa: …I don't know, Sir. ::staring at the console hair covering her face:: I think we would be in a worse state if we'd had complete core failure.

Arlill: Right, if it had overloaded someone must have rerouted the energy to avoid a core failure. ::looking around the room for a moment:: Right. Well. We need to start over. Let's see what systems we still have and let's get those stabilized. ::beat:: We still need comms online and, dammit, someone get me a status of Life Support.

Saa: Life support should take priority, we still have means to communicate…

She *hoped.* Commander Arlill sounded real just as ensign Yavok did, but they offered her only a modicum more feeling than a hologram or NR species might. She tap her finger on the console hard, wincing a little in pain to remind herself that she was in fact real and they were, despite she didn't understand what was happening.

Arlill: Right, good point. Yavok, you take Life Support. ::turning back to Saa: Can you, well, ::unsure how to say this:: hear anyone? I mean, is anyone sending you more information that might helpful?

Saa: Not currently…I am trying to listen but it is quiet…

When Arlill turned to face Sevantha something would become abundantly clear something was amiss. Long, almost pristinely straightened locks had replaced her messy golden curls.

Arlill: Thank you Lieutenant.

Without her senses, Sevantha could only judge his body language, voice tone, she avoided looking directly at him as she hovered over the console hoping to divine a new solution with miracle data that may have happened. He was clearly upset-

Sevantha paused, she heard something, and looked at Toxin to open her mouth to inform him.

Saa: Commander-

oO *Sevantha Saa* Oo

It was like a volume dial in her head was being turned from minimum to maximum, without consideration for a gradual increase for user comfort. All at once, she could hear them, *all* of them. So many were afraid, so many were confused, so many were hurting. The pressure brought her to her knees as she tried to parse through the voices, to find the right one that had *called* to her.

Arlill: Response

oO *this is* *Lia Rouiancet* *in the* *arboretum.*

oO *Help us.* ***Help us****,* ***please!*** *Balaux is* ***dying*** *. Oo*

Saa: …The Captain… ::Grasping her head:: is… someone, they're *dying,* Commander.

oO *We* ***need*** *transport out, or* *medical* *equipment*…Oo

Arlill: Response

Saa: I… arb… arboretum. ::She tries to focus:: …Sir, something is wrong.

When Sevantha finally regained enough stability, she finally looked fully up to Commander Toxin. Her Betazoid solid black eyes had a white gold ring of light burned into them around the region a human iris would be, breaking up their unusual solid onyx coloration. Her facial features were largely the same as they'd been, one could still look at her and see a combination of her parents' genetics, yet it favored her mother's side more than her father's in this print unlike the previous. The burns from earlier were gone, her skin and hair pristine, as though she'd not experienced any of the chaos of the past few hours. Though notably, these details were only visible because the woman's entire uniform was missing.

The oddest part, Sevantha herself did not appear to realize these changes yet.

Saa: They… someone needs transport or … medical ::trying to stabilize herself:: Lia… ::correcting self:: C-captain said they're dying.

Arlill: Response

[[Tags and TBC]]