

Nobody can hear a scream in the vacuum of space, or so they say. Me personally, I can't hear much of anything else. Floating out here, alone, there's not much of a difference in silence and a scream. It's all just as deafening. It's all just a wall of something imperceptibly loud. It's the screams you can't hear, but that travel silently through the abyss, that might be the loudest of all. I don't think they could hear me if they wanted to, but I can hear them just fine. If I could plug my ears, it would do nothing. The sound isn't there, and yet, it is.

I'm floating, or falling, rather, farther and farther away, I don't know how fast, watching some trillions of tonnes of steel and fuel igniting in the black. Tip to tip, I can see it all from here: the cracks in the hull stretching out from top to bottom, and the jets of fire spewing from ruptured fuel lines. Plain-clothed bodies being spat out through the crannies. Nobody was as quick to put on a suit as me. I was good for that, if nothing else. I see someone in a suit come rocketing out and I think I might have a friend, but then he goes right through a stream of fire. It doesn't take to his arms or his body, but it roasts through and ignites his oxygen. A little fountain of fire starts spewing from the hose in his back and sends him spinning out even faster. He looks like a firework, if fireworks could be terrified of themselves. He screams like a firework.

And that's what I mean, I can hear him panicking. Not in my ears, though, it's in my head. I can hear him panting and screaming while he thrashes and tries to stop the fire from shrinking into his suit. I can hear it like he's in my helmet with me. I guess I don't really know what he's saying, though. Is he calling out for his mother? Did he swear just now? Is he praying? I have no idea, but I can hear it clearly. His new orange tail disappears into his back and not a second later shows up at his face. From there, it's just a dull *pop* between my ears and he's gone. I turn away from the broiled viscera.

Dr. Hadid would call it psychosomatic: a physical response to my mental stress, and of course he'd be right, but I prefer to think of myself as just that special. I can see the medical bay from here. I wonder if he's dead yet. For his sake, I hope so. Dying in the fire of an exploding ship is the easy part of this whole ordeal. My suit came with the short straw: starving alone in the darkness. If I'm lucky, my filter'll stop working and my recycled water will build up with ammonia and kill me quicker. I find my straw knocking against my face and take a sip. It's clean as ever. Rats.

Sure, I could just pull my plug right now and save myself the bother, but I also can't, if for no other reason than the laugh I get thinking of some

wayward spaceman out and about his daily runs picking up my body and finding a skeleton in a spacesuit. I wonder what stories he'd come up with?

"She was a pilgrim," he might say, "Moving about from station to station with nothing but the clothes on her back. She must have gotten lost on her way, poor dear."

And his partner would say, "What makes you think it's a woman?"

And he would sage reply, "I don't know, but if this decaying skull had a face, I imagine it'd be a pretty one. Besides, I think I see some makeup in the putrefaction."

Or maybe he'd say I was a once great warrior who finally met my match in an epic battle lost to time. Maybe I was a politician that rubbed some Big-Wigs the wrong way and they had to take me out and send my body off. I don't mind that thought. At least then I was important. At least I died for something.

Realistically though? I'll float on for a few years, maybe a couple decades, and get sucked into a star and vanish like I never existed. If I'm lucky, maybe I'll keep floating for eons until I finally outrun the edge of space and get lost in a truly infinite darkness. I wonder, maybe, if I made it outside of space and time, would I come back again? Would time forget I was supposed to be dead and wrap my bones back up in muscle? If I made it that far, would I already be truly forgotten?

Shit. I've been alone for 45 seconds and I'm already too far gone. I can still feel the heat of the explosions. (Not really, but you get it by now). I can feel it burning. The heat keeps me grounded but it's getting colder. It'll be a few days until I can't see the ship anymore. I can count those days at least before I really start losing my mind. I don't think I'm scared to die, I think I'd just rather not. At least not so slowly.

And if I have to die slowly, I'd rather not do it so alone. And I'd rather do it where my skull isn't splitting from the lack of the loudest sound I've ever heard. At least the ship looks pretty, in a horrifying way. Bathed in the light of it's own blood, more brightly coloured than it's been since it was christened back home. The more I look at it, though, the more sick I feel. I look away, 'cause there's no way to evacuate if I do throw up in here. I look back over to the Rocket Man and get a little closer to puking as what remains of him drifts closer to me. I shut my eyes. If I see anymore, I might not be able to cope and keep my sanity.

I need to fill the silence with the sound of something softer. I need something gentle. Something calm. I say hello into my own helmet, to test

the limits, and I almost scream for fear of it. I try to whisper, and it's still too much to handle. Now I'm scared. My heart beats harder, and the harder it beats, the faster I breathe, and the faster I breathe, the louder it is, and the louder it is, the harder my heart beats. I remember a time when I was back home, lying in bed with my husband. I don't remember why, but I was scared a lot like I am right now. He tried to talk, but his voice was too much for me to process then. So he said nothing. He crawled over, put his arms around me, and I latched onto him. He laid down and let me squeeze the life out of him, figuratively of course, while he checked to make sure his breathing wasn't too loud. He breathed away from me, compressing my body and letting me hug away my fear. Soon enough after that, I fell asleep. I wish he was here.

Something hits me in the chest and I grab onto it. I don't know what it is, but I can't open my eyes to see it, not yet. I just need to hold something right now.

I can still hear the screaming. I can still feel the heat. I can still here my breathing, but it's not as loud anymore. Maybe I'll fall asleep here; there's nothing I can do anyway. By the time a rescue comes along, I won't be here anymore. I'll be dead, or a light-year from here.

Oh God, please, I don't wanna die.