

"Holy shit, we've got her."

"For real? Double check it."

"I've triple checked it. She's here already."

"God damn. Never shoulda doubted you, sugar."

Alejandra's head hurt more than anything had ever hurt. The feeling had spread rapidly to the rest of her body as she regained feeling in her limbs. She did not recognize any of her surroundings. She was surrounded by nothing. As she regained consciousness, the two voices who seemed to be coming from inside her mind became clearer and clearer.

"You prepared for this, right?"

"Of course I did! Quiet down, she's waking up."

Alejandra Alexei Mathias looked down to find the parts of her body that most ached, only to find more nothing. She was quite certain this was wrong, and by now alarm bells were beginning to ring in her head. She wished they wouldn't. It already hurt so much.

Before she could realize it, light returned and the agony had ceased. She closed her eyes instinctively, but found that the light was still there when she shut them.

"Good morning, Ms. Mathias," came a voice, louder in her mind than her own internal monologue.

"Really? That's it?" Hissed another.

"Be silent! I'm working!" The first voice hissed back.

Who are these people? Her mind began to accelerate. What do they want with me? Where am I? Why can't I move my body or shut my eyes?

"We'll explain soon, little one. For now, I need you to listen," came the first voice again. She sounded calm, but high strung. She had the tone of a kindergarten teacher on a rough day.

What? Why are they in my mind? Who's there?

"Strictly speaking, you're not even in *your* mind right now." The second voice was rich and textured, comforting like a warm drink full of cinnamon.

The brightness etching itself into her mind began to dim and dim until it had disappeared and become the stars themselves. A trillion windows, peering out from the dark blanket. Her stress began to boil off.

"Much better. There's no cause for alarm." Alejandra could not tell if this reassurance from the first voice was for her benefit or theirs.

"Please hon, just tell her what's going on."

"Of course," She started. "Tuesday, November 3rd, at 9:42 am in the US city of Seattle, Washington, your car, a 2001 blue Mitsubishi Galant, collided with another car, a 2012 Ford Explorer in white at 45 miles per hour. In this accident you perished from your injuries only 2 minutes 41 seconds after collision."

I...

"Jesus, did you have to say it like that?"

"You're quite the critic today, Gwendolyn," spat the first voice.

The second voice scoffed at her, but quickly changed her tone for Alejandra's sake.

"Look, I know this is a lot. More than anyone's ever dealt with. Take your time, sugar."

Alejandra wanted to cry. And so she did. She cried as she never had in life, raw and unrestrained. Even as she shut her eyes as tight as she could, the universe still filled her vision. Despite its indifference it wept with her. Time passed as much as it could. As her spirit had just given out she felt a single warm, familiar finger wiping away her tears. Still, nothing could be seen but the cosmos.

"It's gonna be okay, sweetheart. You're okay now."

I want to believe you...

"Then believe."

Alejandra took a deep breath. Her throat ached.

"Thank you, Gwen. My name is Kara. I'm sorry for my rather blunt introduction. I failed to account for how a human would react to being told they've died."

Are you... not human?

"Not at all. I am as old as the light of the stars."

"And I am as old as the void between them." Gwen chimed in.

That's... lovely for you two. Does that make this like, Heaven? Or Hell, or Limbo or... something?

Gwen smiled briefly. "It's okay if you don't quite get it. You were never meant to."

Alejandra was not amused by that answer.

"Kara, could you explain?..."

"Of course. Your consciousness, as well as everything else that made up yourself, was going to be returned to the universe as all things entropically must. Before that

could happen, I managed to contain your consciousness in a bridge state between Creation and Entropy. Me and Gwen wanted to talk with you."

Me?

"Yes, you. Specifically you."

Why me?

"Precisely the question."

"We..." started Gwen, "wanted to give you another chance. To clear your mind and say your goodbyes. You of all people deserve that. You lived, you loved, you tried your best and made mistakes but you were a good person. The best you could be. Then it ended. It all ends too fast. We couldn't let that stand. So consider yourself lucky, sugar. You get to peek behind the curtain."

"Is there anything you'd like to know about... what happens?" Asked Kara.

I... what happens at my funeral?

"Let me see. Hm. Your funeral is a fairly standard affair. The lighting will be dim and yellow and your friends will give impassioned speeches about your life and all you meant. Your family will weep through all of them. Your girlfriend will touch your cheek for the last time before you are buried a week later. It will cost your family \$4,000 and your girlfriend covers the remaining \$3,125."

God...

"For a funeral, that's quite good," said Gwen.

Yeah, I suppose... How does... Robin end up?

"Well she-"

"Hang on, K. Your girlfriend turns out alright, for the most part. She finally gets to cycle through Europe, despite the financial instability after your passing. She finishes her degree and works as a geological advisor for some years."

But does she...

"No. She dies alone at 43 of a rare form of cancer."

Oh.

"I know. I'm sorry, baby."

She stared into the universe again.

"It isn't fair. It could never be fair."

Alejandra nodded through choking tears.

"As a human, you are the bridge between Creation and Entropy. What has begun must end. For what it's worth you spent it admirably." said Kara.

But it wasn't enough.

"It could never be enough. I'm sorry."

It feels like I've gone nowhere.

"You've come this far. All the tears you shed were not in vain. You are meeting us here as your true self, one who had a rich, confident life and a beautiful romantic relationship."

"Not everyone can go on for the rest of time. I've been glad to give you just a couple more minutes between here and the Void," said Gwen. "You're so, so lucky Alejandra."

How could I be lucky? How could I when I've died in vain and left my love behind?

"At the very least, you've climbed this far. I hope you can see that as we give you this last look down the mountain of your accomplishments. I'm proud of you."

Alejandra cried again. She cried her joy and pain and fear and love until there was nothing left to cry.

"I love you," said Kara. "Every inch of every mile of my being says I love you and I do."

"I do too, sugar. You are unimaginably brave."

I love you too.

The universe stared back at her.

"Are you ready to say goodbye?" Asked Gwen.

I could never be ready.

"Then it's all been worth it."

Goodbye, cosmos. Goodbye, friends. Goodbye, love.

She blinked, and Alejandra was no more.