

## Lucidity - Amelie, Year 9, NSW

Hm.

This wasn't supposed to happen, eh? In your perspective, at the absolute least. In mine, it's rather deserved for someone who crashed into my terrain.

But, ah, life is inevitable, Little Aquanaut, and so is the end of it. What do I mean? Well, Little Aquanaut, you're dead.

...

For someone who's dead, your brain is very loud. Always screaming. You don't like the mortal truth, hm?

Well, you don't have a heartbeat, your lungs are devoid of air, and you're, well, you see... on second thought, you don't see. Let me set the picture.

You, of course, recall that you're underwater, right? Right. In the Abyssopelagic Zone - fitting name, for a human of all pests to label it as - and you're dead. Need any more information?

Yes? Oh, fine.

The sun can't reach you down here, not anymore. You are beyond the twilight, beyond your own kind, in a place that's less known than the surface of the red planet. The only semblance of light is the spectral shine of luciferin on the cracked glass of your helmet's visor. You are at rest- supposed to be at rest, in a leviathan's cave.

You are trapped in a mass of unbleached coral, and you're, as I've said... three times now, dead. Ta-da. Are we done now?

... Okay, you are not. Was that not enough, pest? Want me to describe even more?? Stars above and seas below, we're done after this. No arguing.

Beneath the turbulent ocean, the noise is brutal and earthshaking. If you were conscious, you would hear the eerie, struggling pulses of your suit's failing heart monitor. The vibrations made, as whales warn each other from kilometers away of the harpoons that threaten their delicate peace, send shockwaves through your bones that rattle the surface and make the delicious marrow run. The strand-like tentacles of bioluminescent jellyfish, which swarm in masses, trace precariously around your helmet, a shy, timid curiosity that would thinly deceive you of their highly toxic nature.

A school of slow yet majestic fish, their scales a soft reddish brown, flutter around you, avoiding the bloom of hydromedusae as they open their mouths, eating carrion that were swimming idly around the corals. The psychrolutes flounder away after, nearly unrecognizable to you now that they aren't crushed by pressure loss.

The aluminium frame of your suit, which once reflected the glow of bioluminescence, is slowly peeled away by my hands, as I prepare to eat y-

...

Why aren't you screaming anymore?

Hello? Aquanaut?

I can't hear- oh.

Uhm.. why are you making.. Choking sounds inside your mind? I don't like it.

Hello?? Are you- oh murky stars above, why are you crying!? You're supposed to scream as I peel your flesh off, not- not- not....

No, no- you can't have-! Damn it, you weren't the ones that speared us! You aren't the ones who poisoned our waters!! You're- you- you can't be-

...

... You are not dead.

You feel your suit be put back into place, the cracks of your visor blown out with oxygen from titanic gills, and clamped with the suckers of a writhing tentacle.

You hear the echoed whoosh as the jellyfish, carrion and psychrolutes flock like sheep and evacuate the leviathan's den.

You see the eyes staring into yours, unblinking, the pupils watching you, holding you like- what's it called... -a fragile, porcelain doll, precious and valuable.

It's quiet as the pressure slowly lessens on your delicate frame, the darkness of the voidal layer of the Abyssopelagic making free for the deep, celestial waters of the Midnight zone as you ascend.

Do you see anything as you ascend, Little Aquanaut? Are the waters as clear for you as they are for me?

Are you cold?

Curious squid tickle the waterproof skin that protects your metal shell, getting flicked away defensively as they peek too close to your visor.

Your heart is quiet when I press my ear against your chest, compared to the long, sinuous strand of high pitch from the monitor on the other side.

Do you feel anything as you ascend, Little Aquanaut? Can your fingers grasp at your gloves, at my own hand?

Are you conscious?

As you are carried above the Midnight and into the nebulaic expanse of the Twilight, the schools of smaller finned critters across the liquid sky as they see us. You, the shell of who you are. Me, the writhing mass around you.

Do you smell anything as you ascend, Little Aquanaut? Can you detect the salt that carves at your tender skin, can you breathe?

Are you lucid?

Slowly, the star above you, us, comes into view as you enter the sunkissed layer of the underwater. Some of the tentacles that previously coiled around your body try to cleave through the layer of scrap that floats on the surface, as you are carried above the water.

Your suit is delicately removed from your soaked skin, your chest rising only when the gills pressed against your mouth forcefully rush oxygen into your aching lungs. Your throat is red as blood, your skin as pallid as bone, your lips as blue as the ocean around you.

Can you shift your form in my limbs, Little Aquanaut? Can you move?

Are you alive?