

Life and Death

Posted originally on the [Ad Astra :: Star Trek Fanfiction Archive](http://www.adastrafanfic.com/works/1188) at <http://www.adastrafanfic.com/works/1188>.

Rating: [Teen And Up Audiences](#)
Archive Warning: [No Archive Warnings Apply](#)
Category: [Gen](#)
Fandom: [Expanded Universes \(General\)](#)
Character: [Ijeoma Okoro](#), [Zac Holloway](#), [Ensemble Cast - JEM](#)
Additional Tags: [Weekly Challenge: Ideals](#), [Death](#), [Ficlet](#)
Language: English
Collections: [Weekly Writing Challenges](#)
Stats: Published: 2023-11-27 Words: 697 Chapters: 1/1

Life and Death

by [spacedogfromspace](#)

Summary

Ijeoma makes a life and death decision.

The world below them was exploding. The chain of volcanic eruptions that spewed fire and ash into the sky gave the observers a good idea of what the Earth had done millions of years ago that signalled the end of the dinosaurs.

The volcanic planet shot geysers of lava big enough to be seen from orbit into the sky. The violence of it was breathtaking— it was as if the planet was trying to destroy itself.

"Nors," Ijeoma commed the transporter room. "Have you retrieved our away team?" She was nervous. They had known of the coming events, and planned to have everyone back before it got dangerous. Unfortunately, it got dangerous faster than they predicted.

"Working on it," Nors answered. "Six of them are up, Lieutenant Lira is still on the planet's surface."

Ijeoma bit her lip, looking at the immolating planet below. She made a mental note to limit the number of people sent on excursions to six—the maximum their transporter could handle at once.

"Captain," Nors said tensely. "I can't get a lock on Lira. The ash in the atmosphere is interfering with the transporter."

Ijeoma's heart dropped, and a dangerous hush fell over the bridge.

"Keep trying," Ijeoma told Nors. She turned to the officer at the communications station. "Establish contact with Lira."

"Aye, Captain," she said, getting to work. "Frequencies open," she announced quickly.

"Lira, can you hear me?" Ijeoma asked.

"I can hear you, Captain," came a crackly voice. The roar of seismic activity nearly drowned out her voice. "Has my team been beamed out? Are they safe?"

"They're safe," Ijeoma assured her. "Nors is working on getting a lock on you, but—"

"—But the ash is interfering with the transporter?" Lira guessed. "Yeah, I figured. Guess I'm trapped down here, aren't I?"

Ijeoma was silent for a moment. "Nors is going to keep trying, but unfortunately, if that fails, we don't have another way to get to you."

Holloway spun around in his seat, looking appalled. "Captain, we can bring the ship down there. If the *Jemison* can get below most of the ash layer, Nors will be able to get a lock on her!"

"But we'd be risking every soul aboard this ship," Ijeoma said. "Entering that planet's atmosphere could be the last thing we do. It's too dangerous."

"But we have to *try*," Holloway insisted. "We can't just leave her to die without trying!"

"It's okay, Captain," Lira said, having heard the conversation. "I understand."

"No, this *isn't* okay," Holloway argued. "We have to go down there!"

"Lieutenant," Ijeoma said harshly. "I'm already losing one officer today. I *can't* risk the rest." Her voice softened. "Lieutenant Lira, I'm sorry."

"I told you, Captain, I understand," Lira said, remarkably calm for someone in her situation. "I wouldn't want you to risk the others for my sake, anyways. When I signed up for this job, I knew something like this might happen one day. I'm ready."

Ijeoma's face was stonily blank. "Thank you, Lieutenant. But I *am* sorry. This shouldn't be happening in the first place."

"Do me a favour and tell my parents I love them. Tell them I died without fear, doing the job I love. Tell them I said, 'stay strong,'" Lira said.

"You have my word," Ijeoma said.

There was a horrible crackling on the other end.

"Lira?" Ijeoma asked, heart beating in her throat. "Lira, are you there?"

There was no response.

"She's gone," Holloway said, bitterly. "You let her die."

"I did what I had to," Ijeoma said.

"How can say that?" he snapped. "How can you be so unfeeling about this? One of your crew is *dead*. By *your* choice!"

"Lieutenant," Ijeoma snapped. "I did what I had to, and this isn't up for debate. *I'm* the captain, and it was *my* decision, and I won't have you questioning me." The bridge was silent. Holloway seethed, but held his tongue. "Jory, you have the conn. I'll be in my ready room."

Ijeoma walked off the bridge. When the door to her ready room closed behind her, she leaned against the wall, sliding to the floor when her legs buckled, and she wept.

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