

Stay

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by [spacedogfromspace](#)

Summary

Ijeoma sees a glimpse of an alternate reality.

"Where am I?"

Ijeoma turned about, eyes open but seeing nothing but darkness. "Hello?" She called out, her voice echoing.

"Ijeoma," a kind voice said from behind her. "There you are. I was wondering when you'd get here."

That voice—it couldn't be. Ijeoma turned, and slowly, the darkness lifted to reveal the owner of the voice.

"Celia," Ijeoma breathed. She seemed so real, almost as if she could... Ijeoma cautiously reached out to her, expecting her hand to pass right through Celia's arm. But her hand touched something solid.

"How are you—" Ijeoma was at a loss for words. "How are you here?"

Celia cocked her head to one side in confusion. "What do you mean? This is our home. I've been here all day."

The darkness receded to reveal the home she and Celia had once shared on Moonbase Delta.

"Are you okay?" Celia asked, concerned. She took Ijeoma by the elbow, leading her to the couch to sit down. "What's wrong?"

Ijeoma shook her head. "But you're— you died," she stammered.

Celia laughed lightly. "Well of course I did," she said. "Did you forget that I uploaded my conscience to a computer and got a nice new android body?"

"No," Ijeoma said. "That was the plan, but Celia—the uplink failed. You died. *All* of you died."

"Have you hit your head?" Celia asked.

"I don't think so?" Ijeoma said. "But I'm certain that you didn't make it. I remember your funeral. I installed what was left of you as my ship's AI twenty years later when I earned my captaincy. But you were never really *you*, just a shell of who you used to be, with no memories."

Celia raised her eyebrows at this. "Captaincy? Of what? You were never any sort of captain. You've been living here on the moon for the last twenty years, operating an earth-moon transit shuttle. Don't you remember?"

Ijeoma shook her head. "No, that's not what—"

"Ijeoma, we've been living here together, healthy and happy, for the last twenty years, just like you always wanted," Celia insisted.

Ijeoma gave her a long look. A creeping feeling was beginning to set over her.

"Wouldn't you like to stay here with me for another twenty years?" Celia asked. "We can stay here forever. You and me."

Yes, Ijeoma wanted to say, but the word that passed her lips was a painful, *No*. "I can't," Ijeoma said. "You're dead and I have a crew that depends on me. This isn't right."

"But isn't it?" Celia asked. "Isn't this what was supposed to happen all along? You can have this, Ijeoma. You just have to stay here with me."

Ijeoma wanted to. She wanted this domestic life with the wife who had died twenty years ago. But this *wasn't* her life, even if she wanted it to be.

"No," she said, but it was hard to choke the word out. "No, this isn't right."

"Stay," Celia said.

Okay, Ijeoma thought, but she said, "I can't. I have to go." Unable to look at Celia for even a moment longer, she turned to the door.

"Ijeoma," Celia called as she approached the door. "Come back. *Please* Ijeoma. Don't leave me."

Ijeoma's hand froze to the doorknob. Why was she trying to leave? She had a perfectly good life with a wife that she loved dearly. She had a house and a job as a shuttle pilot that she enjoyed. Why would she ever want to leave this? But something nagged at the back of her mind. She knew, somehow, that she needed to listen trust it.

"I'm sorry," she said, and opened the door.

She woke up in sickbay with a gasp, Keytal leaning over her.

"Oh thank the Stars," Keytal said. "I was starting to think you wouldn't come out of that."

"What...?" Ijeoma's brain felt scrambled as the memories of two lives mixed together in her head.

"You contracted a parasite that tries to keep you hidden away in your own mind so it can use your body. Some patients never wake up from that— are you okay, Captain?" the doctor asked, seeing the grief written across Ijeoma's face.

Ijeoma choked. "No."

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