

Don't Panic By Lucia R.

Jax and Ruui, the only resident twin sisters on board of the Virtual Training System Ursa Major BETA, were finally taking a rest after the hours of training exercises they had completed that day. In truth, the relentless conditioning was the test that at age 15, every cadet of the ship would undergo. They slept and slept, only to be awoken by the horror of being alone.

RUUI

A flash of light, a searing heat. I was woken by my sister, Jax, screaming into the vast, empty hole that was our ship, our home, destroyed by a massive explosion. "RUUI! RU-" Jax shrieked, her voice weighed down by the sound of shock and surprise. My shaking hand was covering her mouth, and I hugged her, sure that these would be our last moments in this reality.

But we waited, and Jax's heartbeat, a foreign sound until now, slowed down considerably. I opened my eyes, waiting to see the gates of the legendary place the dead's souls went. Instead, I saw once again the scene of traumatizing calamity surrounding our huddled bodies. I was so confused. It had happened so fast. What was going on here? I squeezed my eyes shut once more, but Jax, always the braver one of us, put her shaky hand on my shoulder. An audible sentence, over the few working alarms, was all she said. "It's the sun." These few words seemed to steady me. Slowly, I turned my head to the usually thick glass panes, cracked, listening to the hiss of our precious air escaping, watching our sun swell.

JAX

Like that, me and Ruui began our run to safety, all the way to the other end of our mile wide, half destroyed ship to look for remaining survivors and a way of fleeing from this nightmare. Every step, a memory of our times here came back, worse than a punch in the chest. I could see Ruui staggering, holding a bleeding arm, but judging by the glassy look in her eyes, she hadn't even noticed. We arrived at a smoldering infirmary and at last, got a reasonable look at why our childhood had to end like this. The sun, usually a small flickering dot in the distance, had expanded to a giant flaming mass, closer than ever before. That must mean... the Earth, the place we had dreamed of going home too... gone. But instead of cowering away once more, I got to work. My sister wasn't going to save herself. She looked up at me, confused, as I reviewed her arm. It had been hit by a piece of shrapnel. She must have mistaken the pain in her arm for the shock of the explosions. I gritted my teeth at this thought. I didn't want my sister to be reduced to this. She was usually so calm and ready...

RUUI

We exited the infirmary, and started running again. As we ran, Jax explained the situation to me. "Look. Ruui, a piece of shrapnel pierced your arm, so please try not to move it." I looked down at my arm and saw my blood seeping through the bandages. I wasn't worried though, I had faith in Jax's doctoring. After more running,

Jax came to a stop. "Ruui, you might want to step back." she said steadily. "It's Palett." *Palett?* I thought. *Oh. Palett.* Jax's best friend. I had a bad feeling he was the first of the dead. Jax looked me straight in the eye, a desperate look on her face. "Find me some medical supplies. Quick!" she added. She yelled again when I saw Palett's face and hesitated. I felt like the image was burned into my eyes. His face, drained of color, had small pieces of debris jutting out at unnatural places, making him look like a human crystal. I ran to get the emergency medical reserves, knowing that my speed would determine whether Palett would heal.

JAX

I stared at Palett, speaking softly in the tones Ruui always did when I was sick. He stirred, and I realized my mistake too late. Most likely, the pain from his face and possible his leg, lying at an odd angle, would consume him. I remembered earlier this very day... He had asked me to the honorary celebration for new graduates. I almost told Ruui, but now I'm not even sure he'll survive. His bloodshot eyes flickered open, then widened. "JAX! JAX, YOU'VE GOT TO RUN, HURRY!" he shrieked. "Please, Palett, go to sleep. It's okay." I whispered, choking back a noise in my throat. What he did next surprised me. "You're dead." he murmured, tears leaking from his closed eyes. "I'm dead too, right? So why does it-" he breathed. "Palett." I looked into his striking green eyes, only noticing their bright color until now. "You're not dead. I'm not dead." I gently held his head up, level to mine. "We'll be fine together." Behind me, I heard boxes drop and a squeak of surprise behind me.

RUUI

I looked from behind the boxes, and stifled a laugh. My sister and Palett? Were they going to kiss? I couldn't hide my smile as Jax looked up, more embarrassed than I had ever seen her before, her pale face flushed as red as the sun. The sun. I shuddered, but looked at Palett's state and hurried the supplies over to Jax. Jax worked hard and long, for what seemed like hours. Palett was in no condition to run, but just seeing my sister seemed to motivate him, making me laugh. And after a while, we had nearly reached our chance of survival. Escape Pod #138, the only pod identified by Palett to still have working life support. Jax ran ahead for some reason, probably smiling, so I caught up with her. That was the my one big mistake. I dropped like a stone, into darkness, and onto a cold, metal floor. The ground had gave way beneath me. My sister's screams of surprise were oblivious to me. Slowly, I regained my breath and curled up, ignoring the fact that now my stomach had been torn by one of the various pieces of debris in the empty cargo bay. I died, watching my blood trickle onto the concrete.

JAX

She didn't answer me. I couldn't see her draw breath, but she couldn't be dead. I would save her. I wasn't trained for nothing. Palett, constructing a ladder to reach Ruui, looked up at me, sorrow in his eyes. "I think she's dead." steadily, I rose, walking to Palett. My hand hit his face with force I usually used for combat practice, and I yelled. "She's NOT dead! I believe in her strength." He accepted my anger and finished the ladder. As I climbed down, doubts filled my head. *Was she dead? Am I*

no longer a twin? No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't dismiss these thoughts. I grasped my sister's hand firmly. She couldn't be dead. Yet still, there was no heartbeat. No breath. And my sister, my twin, my first and best friend's hand... was cold.

JAX

Slowly, I reached the pod. Seemingly, the pod was for escape. From what? I would never be able to escape this place, the chaos where my sister died, where all my friends died, where my home burned. This charred, pitiful escape pod? Suddenly, I realized something that almost overwhelmed me. I wanted to die. With my sister, together. Slowly, I walked away from the pod. I grabbed a fragment of the pod and slowly brought it towards me, hoping to impale myself. Palett, not noticing a thing, still sat calmly at the pod's controls. Though right before the metal struck me, it stopped. I tried again and again, but I couldn't. *Why can't I just die?* I thought in frustration. I was trying again when suddenly, I thought of Ruui. Of all the times we spent playing, and laughing. Just then, I realized why I couldn't die. Because I wouldn't be able to think of Ruui, or remember our life together. I stopped, and walked over to a window. I stared at the sun, at the beautiful colors reflecting in every which way. It seemed that my fate had been decided. I walked into the pod, smiling at Palett, and waved one last goodbye to our solar system.