

The Forgotten Return

by Michael Olsen

Character: Ora, 20s, (f)

In the darkness we hear the gentle sound of waves washing against a wall. Lights come up on ORA, crawling onstage. Her hair is wet. She wears a thin shiny one-piece suit. She is breathing heavily, adapting to the gravity. She falls back on her haunches. She taps the communication device implanted in her ear..

(shouting with false bravado:) I have landed, Control. Can you hear me? Control? Control? Talk to me! Control!

Pause

(shouting:) You think fear will work on me, don't you? You told me all the way down "It's not safe! It's not safe!" You think this place will overwhelm me. Sky. Wind. Water. You think I will beg to return to the Station. But I won't!

ORA slowly stands, again breathing heavily, adjusting to the gravity.

You never even considered the possibility that I'd make it but the drop pod worked perfectly. From all the dust on it I knew you'd forgotten all about it. You'd placed no security around it at all. Tell me at the very least you are impressed. Tell me!

Pause

You thought the kisses and the warm words of the others and the extra dose of relaxon would make me want to stay on the Station, didn't you? As if all that comfort and pity would change how I felt. You assumed no-one would ever contemplate leaving.

ORA takes a deep breath

All that time I spent at the windows staring at the Planet, and the Planet stared into me, and now here I am. Looking up instead of looking down. Looking out.

Pause

I know you can see what I see via my optic uplink.

ORA closes her eyes for a few seconds, then opens them again.

I'm in the centre of what was once—what would you call it? A “metropolis”? There are—there are towers dotted all around. They just stand there, like—like fingers poking up through deep green water.

Pause

It's obvious these towers were built before the water rose. So where are the people? Maybe they moved upwards, level by level until they were at the top, and then—what? Did they—die? No food, perhaps? No fresh water?

ORA licks her fingers, spits out the water.

The water of the Planet seems to be chemically undrinkable.

Pause

From my calculations the city covered an area of nearly 10,000 square kilometres. Millions of people must have lived here at one time. How did they live their lives? Did they couple and love? Birth children? Have dreams and fight wars? What happened to them? Maybe they escaped in rockets. So where are they now? Are they somewhere in space?

Pause

Why don't you answer me? Don't you have anything to say? Don't you wonder about this place? The towers? The water? The colour of the sky?

Pause

(quietly:) It would've made me so happy to share all this with Genta. Being a Tech she would have studied these towers so closely: what they're made of, how many levels there are. I would've made up wild stories about the people who lived here years and years ago, and Genta would have laughed, she would have—I don't even have a picture of Genta because I never thought I would need one. When you see someone every day you think every day is its own memento.

Pause

When I lay against her, her breath was like a wave that held me, up and down, and I thought there could never be as comforting a feeling as that.

Pause

She had others. Of course she did. We're supposed to. What do they say?—Deep Feelings Lead To Deep Sadness, and no-one wants that. I had Deep Feelings—but only ever for Genta.