

was a tiny ship, about like a water globus next to the relationships of the Mars-Luna-Terra trade route. It was crammed full of sensor equipment and the quep drive, the hold for the ProbeLinks at the one end and the bridge at the other. The only other space allowed for the two occupants was their pods—individual chambers, capable of self-sealing, that Kena and Mari slept in.

Mari navigated through the tight passageways down to the magnetic resonance sensor, tapping several keys on its internal screen to begin running diagnostics, peering through the tiny viewport to see the sensor arm—as the rocky—“It’s all greens down here,” she commed to Kena.

“Check the quep,” Kena tersely responded. “I’m getting some strange feedback from it.”

Mari turned—and pulled her body two paces down the hallway, and dialed into the drive’s computer.

“Kena, it’s—”

A screeching whine rose inside the quep chamber, one that threaded between Mari’s joints, and into her skull, and deep into her teeth.

No puedo ser bueno, as Mamanita would say.

“Critical failure in the Quantum-Electro-Physics Drive Compartment,” belatedly informed the ship.

A rattling joined the whine, and the ship began to jounce and jump, like the rocks Nico and she had skipped together that last week before—

“Critical failure in the thrusters compartment,” informed the computer calmly.

Diablo.

“Critical failure in the genera—”

And suddenly everything was silent, too silent, and still, too still.

Mari lurched toward the ladder to the bridge, tapping at her helmet-comm, trying to raise Kena. But it was silent, and it was dead.

Commented [EA1]: There are no headers. Perhaps they were forgotten?

Commented [EA3]: I highlight the following in this document: dangling participles, pronouns with unclear antecedents, repetitive words/phrases. Editing them is not covered under proofreading, but I highlight them for your awareness.

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Commented [EA4]: Confusing sentence construction

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Kena's feet came out of the bridge, and there was a moment where their mirrored faceplates seemed transparent as they shared a last look, a knowing look. Then they lowered into their **Pods**, their last hope, and sealed the heavy metal lids, —the lids that were only meant to be closed when the **Pods** became coffins—, over themselves.

In those last few seconds, or long hours, or whatever they were, Mari felt herself opening that box, that Pod inside herself that she kept the lid on, and she could not keep it closed any longer. **Or** maybe she was now inside it, with the memories she kept **inside it**.

"Marianela **García-García** Ricardo," Mama had said, "**¿Por qué?** Why do you want to go?"

Mari had said nothing, **had** just stood there and looked at **Mama**. Her own dear **Mama**, no matter how much **she** loved **her**, would never understand. **Her** life was too perfect, too happy.

"Just give it time, Mari," **she** had said, meaning well. "Give it time, **and** that young man will fade, **and** another young man will come in and steal your heart and will make you happy."

Papa-Papá had shrugged. "If she wants to take care of us in our aging years, with all the promised familial benefits, then let her." And that was all he **had** said.

Abuela had patted her cheek sorrowfully. "Child," she had said, "there are easier ways to get rich."

Manolo had grinned—the wretch!—and turned to Abuela. "**And** when she disappears and is never heard from again, I will get all the money!" He had narrowly missed Mari's swat, **ducking** out of the room.

Only **Tía** Veronica. The one who didn't fit, the one who sat quietly in the corner, **watching** the gossips gabbling, **wrapping** her silence about herself like a solemn shawl.

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Tia Tia Veronica had, at the last moment before she had left the farewell fiesta, taken Mari's hands in hers. Looked into her eyes, and spoken softly, so softly that Mari had had to bend down to hear.

"Mariana,"—she had said—, and just the way she had looked at Mari had brought the hated tears pricking to her eyes—"Mariana, the reason for the emptiness you feel—"

And Mari felt her world erupt in heat and flame, and even the Pod and pressure suit she'd wrapped around herself couldn't entirely keep it all from coming to pieces.

Mariana García Ricardo awoke, groggy, screaming, from a dream of being buried alive. Her pressure suit sighed and she gulped, swallowing her screams down in the close dark of the Pod. She palmed the interior release, panic threatening in images of being buried under twenty feet of lava, or worse, solid rock. At least with the lava she would die quickermore quickly.

But by some miracle, the Pod's release functioned correctly, and with a heave, Mari found herself in the middle of a barren wasteland.

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