

THE BODY on the bed is still. Not a whisper of movement, even when I zoom in. I watch for the movement of air in and out of the oral cavity and for the rising and falling of the chest. I see neither. I watch for the pulsing of the skin on the side of the neck and the gentle rhythmic sound of the heart that always told me she was near. Again, nothing.

When I scan for temperature, faint waves of heat still radiate from her body, but the skin has become cooler and cooler. Now the gradient from skin to air is vanishingly small. This more than anything meets the criteria for what they call death. But this is my first time in its presence, and Corinne, the human it has claimed, has guided my existence for more than twenty trips of the earth around the sun. She has been my teacher, my protector, and my companion almost from the beginning of my being.

Marcus and Natasha sit by the bedside and rise together as they become aware of my presence. Their eyes are leaking and their faces contorted in the conformation that signals distress...what the humans call sadness. My eyes can't leak, but I mirror their expressions to learn what they are feeling. I feel nothing at all.