
Lloyd Maxwell is carrying two cups of coffee- one of which he slides in front of Tom Wreke, who is tiredly scribbling away in a small notebook. The two men are inside the cafeteria- though the room is barren, at this time of the night cycle. He settles down into the chair beside Tom.

LLYOD MAXWELL

Thank you.

Tom looks up with a start- eyes wide in confusion for a moment. He takes the cup with a little nod of acknowledgement, sliding his reading glasses up and off of the bridge of his nose, pushing them back into his hair.

TOM WREKE

Huh?

LLYOD MAXWELL

I heard about what you put into action, in Engineering.

Lloyd reaches across the table, to lightly lay his hand over top of Tom's.

LLYOD MAXWELL

I appreciate it.

There's spots of high colour on Tom's cheeks- as he turns away slightly to the side. He doesn't move to displace Llyod's hand on top of his own, though.

TOM WREKE

Say nothing of it.

Lloyd smiles. His thumb brushes over the backs of Tom's knuckles, in a gentle, intimate gesture.

LLYOD MAXWELL

Not everyone sees the world the way we do.

He leans in conspiratorially, and Tom's blush darkens, as he looks up through the veil of his lashes at Lloyd. The pupils in his brown eyes are blown wide, mouth slightly parted.

TOM WREKE

It's only the right thing to do, even if it's hard.

LLYOD MAXWELL

You're a man of especial moral standing, Tom Wreke.

Llyod smiles, and Tom mirrors it- shy, not quite able to lock eyes.

Lloyd pats the back of his hand then, once or twice- before getting up from the table.

LLYOD MAXWELL

Try to get some sleep, Tom. Take care of yourself.

There's a tenderness that belies his last few words- even if they're tossed almost carelessly over his shoulder.

Tom's grip around the coffee cup he's been given tightens, the warmth of the cup hot against his skin.

Lloyd walks away- the bright light of the hallway haloing his head, casting long gallow's shadows behind him.

It's a closed casket funeral.

The body, presumably- was in no state to be exposed to the plain air of the curious, grieving public. The ceremony is beautiful, roses spilling over the aisles of the pew, baby's breath crushed beneath errant shoulders and backs, gardenias bleeding their scent into the room, cloyingly thick. Tom rubs a hand against his throat, as if he's choking on it- or struggling to swallow back tears, a lump in his throat.

When all is said and done, Tom is alone again, dressed in uncharacteristic black- the tags on the back of the sweater itching against his neck.

He rests his hand on top of the casket, thumb smoothing over bright rivets on it's panelled front.

TOM WREKE

...You take care of yourself now, Lloyd.

Tom heaves out a sigh, before he's walking away- the tips of his fingers still brushing contact against the wood, up until he has to wrench his hand free.

He looks over his shoulder at it, as it sits- looming, permanently marring the otherwise gentle, pastoral landscape of the chapel.

One last parting glance.

Laurel is in the hallway, haloed by overhead halogen lights- waiting with her arms outstretched and open, folding Tom up in them as he sinks to his knees in momentarily delayed grief- sobbing as he buries his face against her.

A black lace veil flutters over her face- and it casts impossibly delicate, beautiful shadows over Tom's. The white light overhead pools over them- in a rudimentary facsimile of sunlight.

Laurel rests her head lightly against him, hands rubbing soothing circles against the wrinkled fabric of his sweater, bunching up beneath her touch.

The two stand there, one kneeling until his knees bruise with the imprint of the floorboards- for hours, until Tom gets to his feet, wobbling, gait unsteady- leaning against Laurel, as she leads him silently back to their shared quarters, collapsing to the bed in a tumultuous upheaval of silken mourning.

Tom never goes to that particular chapel again, in all of the retrieved recordings from the ISS Pathfinder.
