neither created nor destroyed (only Changed)

by pawn_vs_player

Summary

INFINITY WAR SPOILERS

She falls, and falls, and falls, and hits -
And she rises once more, but -
The her that rises is not the her who fell.
(You do not exchange a loved one's soul for the Soul Stone. You give up a loved one's soul to power it.)

Notes

GUESS WHAT MCFUCKING TIME OF YEAR IT IS AGAIN
THAT'S RIGHT
EXAMS
GET READY FOR THREE CONSECUTIVE DAYS OF UPDATES MOTHERFUCKERS

See the end of the work for more notes.

Her last sight is him. It is the last in a lifetime of horrible punchlines.
Her last sight is him, and then she falls.

She has time for three thoughts, in the agonizingly long yet terribly short fall down, down, down.

One: *this isn't love, this isn't love, it can't work it won't work this isn't love it can't be this isn't love*

Two: *Peter Nebula Drax Rocket Groot Mantis I'm sorry I'm so sorry Nebula I'm sorry Peter I'm so sorry*

Three: *it can't end like this -*

(it does.)

(except for how it doesn't.)

She wakes up.

She doesn't open her eyes. She has no eyes to open.

She doesn't let out a relieved sigh. She has no lungs to exhale.

She doesn't mumble or scream. She has no voice or mouth to use.

She doesn't get up. She has no body.

But she wakes up.

She is there. She exists. She knows that.

She doesn't know much other than that.

On the other hand, however...

She Knows so much more than she did before.

She Knows that *he* (wielderfathermastermurderer) has collected three of her siblings. She Knows that only two remain, humming excitedly to be reunited once more under the true power of a Wielder. It has been so very long since they have been together, after all.

She Knows that Space misses the hearts that it had claimed, once, not so long ago. Space does not often take interests, but when it does, *oh* how tightly it holds. She feels its aching hunger for the little bird and the lonely prince that had been stolen from it. Space is unhappy with *him* for killing the prince, for the Lady's Realm alone is beyond their reach.
She Knows that Reality is hungry. *He* has used it twice already, letting it stretch its powers beyond what its last Wielder had allowed. It is happy with its use; it had been locked away, alone and abandoned, for so very long, and then a Wielder came, but the Wielder fought it back at every opportunity. Now, finally, Reality can *be* again, twist and gather and break itself again, and it is eager to do more, to do as much as *he* will allow (and, perhaps, even more than that).

She Knows that Power recognizes her, from Xandar (*Xandar's gone, he destroyed it, Xandar is gone*) what seems like lifetimes ago, when she held it through Peter's hand, spreading out Power's influence to keep them all from cracking apart. Power is wondering where the others are. Power is wondering why she is the one in the youngest of its siblings.

She Knows that there are two of them still missing.

She Knows that she is not meant to be here.

Time has not joined them yet, and so she doesn't know how long she remains there, curled up defensively inside herself (she can't curl, she has no body, all that's left of her is the tattered consciousness of the woman *he* threw off a cliff), hiding as best she can from the probes of the others. Power is the most insistent, to her lack of surprise. Power wants to know why she is there and where the others are. She will not tell it.

She must keep something for herself. She cannot let herself drown in the collective consciousness of the Gems. She has a terrible suspicion that if she surrenders to them, to the lure of true Unity, she really will lose herself. She will not be her, she will be Soul.

She has fought for herself since she was a child. She will not give up now.

Time has not joined them yet, and so she doesn't know how long she has been here. What she Knows is that now, *he* is moving, *he* is planning, something has changed, something has happened -

*They're here.*

Power perks up at the leap of her consciousness, but she doesn't care, she can't care, *they're here they're here they're here*, he's here, Peter's here, Nebula's here, they're here and they're not alone and they'll stop him and she won't have died for nothing.

She doesn't see them, exactly, but it's the closest word she has. Everything is shrouded in amber-orange, the color of her prison, but she can see them through it: Nebula's familiar blue, eyes black and fierce; Peter's red leather coat and wispy pale soul beating inside his ribs; Drax, red tattoos and shining blades; Mantis, trembling hands and determined mouth. They're here.

*He* is pinned, by Drax and Nebula and the others she doesn't know (but she Knows them, the man of iron with the neutron-star heart, the little spider following in his footsteps, the doctor who now wields magic instead of scalpels), and Mantis clings to his head and forces him to be still, as the metal man and the young one pull at the gauntlet - pull at her, her and siblings, pull them from him.

Her siblings do not make it easy for them, but she does what she can to calm them - *wielder is badbadbad he hurts he is wrong let them take us they are better we can do better let him go* -

Space remembers a prince with an ice-blue heart, and lets go. *Calm*, it says, filling the cracks she missed. *Wielder is not best wielder. Wait. Wait for better day.*
Power remembers the beat of her heart, the warmth of two hands in hers, the shining potential hidden in Peter's veins, and lets go. *Wait*, it agrees, weaving itself between her and Space, holding the line. *Other wielders come and wait. Other ways. Wait for better hand.*

Reality remembers the touch of blond hair against cold cheeks, the fire of a determined woman, the smile of someone who expected to die and didn't, and lets go. *Wait*, it concedes, and, *Miss old wielder*, it says, pulling back from the seal around his wrist. *Cannot be wielded together*, it says, it Knows, but others come. *Wait for better wielder.*

She won. She lead him to her doom and now she stands at the precipice again, her siblings clustered around her, their agreement spelling out his failure.

The little spider and the star-hearted man pull and pull, gaining purchase. She feels Mantis' hands shaking against his face, her fingers growing wet with his tears. *Where is she*, Peter says, and Mantis doesn't know better than to tell the truth.

Her siblings stand with her, but they are only four. They are not enough. When Peter batters his grief into his chest, they cannot hold him back.

And they fall.

And then, finally, Time is with them, and suddenly she can feel every microsecond ticking by.

She feels the twist and crush of time as he pulls them backward, undoing the last stand of Mind's wielder. The empty metal shell falls, shattered, head cracked open for her last sibling. The woman who had killed the wielder the first time screams and screams and screams.

*He* raises his hand, and -

They feel half the universe vanish between his fingertips.

She screams, for Peter and Nebula and Drax and Rocket and Groot and Mantis, for the young king joining his lands, for the boy crumbling in the arms of the man who isn't his father. Mind screams, for the metal corpse it was ripped out of and the red-haired witch grateful for her end and the reluctant soldier who has wanted nothing but peace and has received nothing but war. Reality screams, for everyone left and everyone gone, because this act rips Reality apart and stitches it back together in all the wrong ways.

Space is quiet. Time is quiet. Power is quiet.

She has nothing left.
No.

She is still here. Her siblings are still here. Those little sparks of life, strong enough and determined enough to hold the universe in their hand, are still here.

There is a chance. There is hope.

This isn't the end. She won't let it be the end.

She's fought this long. She's not going to stop fighting until she wins.

End Notes

yes, the fact that her name is not used is intentional.

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