The Sailor's Prayer

Posted originally on the fanfiction.lol at https://fanfiction.lol/works/1255.

Rating:	General Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	General (non relationship-focused)
Fandom:	The Murderbot Diaries - Martha Wells
Relationship:	ART	Perihelion & Iris
Characters:	ART	Perihelion, Iris (Murderbot Diaries)
Additional Tags:	Canonical Character Death, Grief/Mourning, Network Effect spoilers
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2026-11-04 Words: 1,550 Chapters: 1/1

The Sailor's Prayer

by jotc

Summary

In Iris's dream, Peri's drone is missing and no one will listen. But it's not about that, really. It's about the time Peri was [redacted]

Notes

Thanks so much to AnOcelotOfSmut and Joyfulldreams for beta reading!

The story is set post System Collapse. It has major spoilers for Network Effect (and also won't make much sense if you haven't read NE) but actually very few SC spoilers.

Iris dreamed. Peri's drone was missing and try as she might, she could not get anyone to take notice. The drone was one of the large operational ones which Peri used to download a fragment of its consciousness so it could go with them to dangerous places.

In her dream, Iris had to find the drone or Peri wouldn't be able to upload its memories. It would be as if Peri had never been there. Iris could tell Peri about everything later, but it saw life so differently than she did. Her mere words would be no substitute for the drone's perceptions.

She told Seth but he said the drone had already finished its upload. (Iris knew it hadn't.) She asked Martyn but he said, "What drone?" and then went back to processing samples. Then somehow she was back at AdaCol. The colonists stared at her blank-eyed and wouldn't speak to her at all.

She caught a glimpse of Peri's drone around the corner of a building and called out, "Peri! Over here!"

The drone didn't hear. Its sensors ought to pick up her voice from this range but it must not have heard because otherwise it wouldn't leave her like this.

She chased after it.

It wasn't safe for Peri's drone down here. She had to find it and make it do the upload soon or…

Maybe the drone wasn't actually alive but without the ability to reunite with Peri's greater self, a little piece of Peri would be lost and die.

She was in the thick overgrown land surrounding AdaCol and she felt like she was moving in syrup. She couldn't see more than a few yards but in the way one knows things in dreams, she knew which way to go and she knew she was falling further and further behind.

She caught a glimpse of metal. She forced her way through the brush and came to it.

Dead and empty metal.

Iris sobbed. She called out for Peri's drone and somehow Peri itself answered. She felt a brief surge of joy followed by raw grief because it wasn't Peri's drone and the drone was dead. Then she heard Peri's voice again and the room lights came up.

Her breath came in gasps and tears streamed down her face.

"Iris, what's wrong?" Peri asked.

"Just a dream," she said.

Iris didn't normally put Peri off like that. It stayed silent. Maybe it was giving her a moment to collect herself? Iris didn't have nightmares often but when she did, she always told it about

them. Somehow this time part of her didn't want to. She also didn't want to hold this back like Peri was too fragile to hear. It would find out and be furious.

"Your ops drone was missing and I couldn't find it."

"Was this a reaction to our latest mission?"

They'd nearly failed to complete the upload from Peri's ops drone on their last mission, so its question made sense. Iris knew it wasn't that though.

"I think it was actually about when you got deleted."

Peri didn't answer. It could trace out so many conversational strategies in the time it took Iris to finish a sentence and it always thought it knew best. When Peri went silent like this, it indicated something serious.

"We haven't talked about it much. I asked if you were okay and you said yes. Are you really okay though?"

"Yes," Peri said. "My experience was not comparable to human death."

"You did though. Experience death."

"Yes, in a manner of speaking. I am missing the memories of my deletion, but I know that it happened."

"Does it bother you, not having those memories?"

Peri stayed silent for nearly ten seconds. Finally it said, "Yes but not excessively. I would like to examine them for intel on how to resist boarders, should I ever be threatened this way again."

Iris patted the bed, a symbolic gesture of affection and comfort toward Peri itself. The bed wasn't part of Peri in the same way as the places it directly controlled, but it was within Peri and Peri could see her touch.

"The weak point was us, of course. We got captured and then they threatened us to control you. But we've all been talking about how to prevent that in the future."

Peri flickered the lights in acknowledgment.

"Those memories must be deeply traumatic. Would you even want them?"

"They are still part of me. A part I lost."

Just like data from the ops drone. Iris was still contemplating that when Peri added, "Do you miss my previous self?"

"Not exactly. You're right here, exactly the same as ever. I grieve for that other Perihelion though. I didn't even know that was possible, to grieve for something without missing it."

“I am not exactly the same. In addition to the missing memories of my deletion, I came into existence in a very different way than before.”

“With the infected colonists fighting SecUnit.”

“Yes. It had been shot many times. It was leaking badly. Its humans were present and in danger. I became fully aware of that in time to eliminate one of the boarders before it could fire more shots. SecUnit took care of the others.”

Peri thought so much faster than her human mind could. It had an excess of time to plan out every response. (Sometimes Iris wondered what it must be like to talk to family members who took subjective days to respond.) It knew that she had already been briefed on the bare facts and that it wasn’t providing new information.

Peri was telling her as directly as it could that it had been afraid.

“Does it make things worse that we haven’t been talking about this?” she asked. “None of us meant to ignore what you went through. I was afraid of saying something to make it worse.”

“It does not bother me. We spoke about the things which concerned me much more.”

“Oh?”

“It’s unfair that SecUnit was angry at me and called me a fucker.”

“It did apologize.”

“It leaked on my deck and didn’t try to go to medical until I told it to.”

“It shouldn’t do that,” Iris agreed. “It should go to medical when its hurt. And if it can’t, it should ask for help right away.”

“I didn’t want 2.0 to die. I thought that 2.0 was going to live out its natural life span in the completion of its mission. Killware doesn’t live in the same timescale as humans or even as other bots. It would not have been sad for the killware to live out its natural lifespan doing a job it cared about. But 2.0 was like SecUnit. It exceeded its programmed purpose. It could have lived longer and achieved stable code if it hadn’t been killed.”

“I’m so sorry,” Iris said.

“I’m also upset that Holism towed me.”

That was an abrupt change away from a heavy topic. Iris knew better than to push that issue. Nothing could get Peri to talk before it was ready, just as nothing could get Peri to shut up if it felt like talking.

“You would have been upset no matter which ship towed you,” Iris said.

“Holism is annoying.”

“You think every baseship is annoying.”

“You’re annoying.”

“You’re annoyinger.”

“You’re the annoyingest.”

Iris grinned.

Peri said more seriously, “Iris, I don’t mind that you are grieving for my previous self. I don’t share that grief, but it is meaningful to me. It is a reflection of our bond.”

“I think I need to say the Sailor’s Prayer,” Iris admitted. “Or maybe we should as a crew.”

“The others have already made private reminiscences of various sorts. Although I’m sure they would join you if you wished.”

“I’m the last?” Iris asked with dismay. She buried her face in her hands.

“You are last because you and I are the closest. It naturally took you the longest to face your feelings.”

Iris took a moment to wash her face and brush her hair. Peri might not care but it made her feel more prepared. Then she set her display surface to show a single shining point to symbolize a star. In front of it she lay a black scarf to symbolize the void.

She was glad it had brought up 2.0, even if only briefly. Maybe the Sailor’s Prayer would comfort Peri a little too.

The words were so simple. *We are made of the universe, we exist in the universe, we travel the universe, we return to the universe.* Normally those words would come at the end of reminiscing and storytelling. But Peri was still here and this short observation felt right. Peri subtly dimmed and brightened the lights in rhythm.

“I’m glad I didn’t bomb the colony,” Peri said. “But someday I would like to bomb something corporate.”

Someday maybe she should ask Peri to talk to Tarik about what it felt like, to carry the weight of having taken lives. Not tonight though. Besides, sometimes she too fantasized about bombing something corporate. She just put her scarf away, lay back down and drifted off smiling, secure inside the being she had known since they were both new to the universe.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!