

I Weep for Them

By Martin Willoughby

Pain comes in many forms. Sometimes it shows, sometimes it doesn't. People react to it in different ways, they feel it according to their own unique personalities.

There are those who can suffer every blow or cut, feel every wound, yet find the strength to carry on. But when they are hurt emotionally, they disintegrate.

There are some at the other extreme that can absorb mental or emotional torture and rise unscathed from the furnace. But at the first hint of physical hurt they collapse so deeply they never recover. Most of us feel our torment in between these two extremes.

Me? I've always known I was not able to bear much physically. But I prided myself on a deeply ingrained ability to ride out the severest emotional trauma. I have faced mental and emotional horrors and survived intact. I suffered experiences as a child that few will ever know and lived to have a normal life. But I'm no longer sure of that.

I've been abandoned. I'm alone on a beautiful world. The deep blue sky and lush greenery of this temperate world, the sweet dampness of the morning help to make this an unspoilt paradise. The gentle sounds of distant animals searching for a mate, the sweet smells of an almost permanent spring, the freshness of falling rain give a sense of freedom to any that live here.

But there is no one to share it with. Not anymore.

The house that I've built on my world is no longer a home. It is nothing more than an empty shell to keep me warm in the winter and cool in the summer. I walk around the outside sometimes and run my fingers across the stone and the wood. It's beginning to show signs of weathering now. A decade of wind, rain and sun are starting to leave their mark.

Inside I sit and stare at our handiwork. The rug our children made sits restfully in front of the fire. The furniture I built with the help of the robot gleefully gives up the signs left by young children.

In each room there are signs of life, of a family who loved it. The notches on the bedroom doors made as the children grew, the haphazard paint work in their rooms as they tried to decorate them on their own. The food stains on the wooden kitchen floor where a family cooked together.

She left me last year. Took the children too. And the robot. She left while I slept, taking our ship to who knows where. I awoke too late to stop her and watched them leave. She left me with no means of leaving myself, or of contacting anyone else in nearby systems. So I sit here alone, waiting for something, anything.

I feel my hurt deeply and have no one to share it with. Despite my years of experience of suffering I do not, it seems, have the depth of strength needed to survive alone and I

don't know how long I have left.

Maybe it's different this time. I was never alone before. In the past there were other children who knew and understood my life, other children I could share it with. We supported each other, became friends and lovers and partners. We had each other. Until two of us left for a far away world.

Why did I come here? Why pick a lonely planet far from home to live on? I didn't. I followed my partner's desires, seeking to please her. I ignored my instincts and moved to this paradise to escape the race, to make a new life far away from our shared past.

I found peace here. We had children and we had a life. But nothing was ever good enough for her. Nothing was perfect.

I built this house with the help of our robot, though it took me several years. I built a room for each new child. I built a nursery, a playroom, and a conservatory. At each step the robot instructed me and did the work I could not do.

I built a road into the forest and a cart to haul trees and rocks. I built a small smithy to fashion iron tools, a pottery, a cold store and a small solar power generator.

I planted fields of fruit and vegetables, orchards that are only now bearing fruit. I've learnt to herd animals and understand the planet. All of this I did for her and my children. Now she has taken them away, she has taken my life.

'It's not perfect,' she would say. 'Nothing ever is,' I would answer. 'We can only get near perfection, not achieve it,' I would add. It was never enough.

She would cry herself to sleep some nights, or sleep in another room. Eventually I slept elsewhere so she could sleep in comfort.

I fell asleep to the sounds of birds and insects and woke to the tears of a woman who could never be satisfied. Nothing was ever enough for her. She who was always reaching for something else to fulfil her needs. She who could not leave her past and her suffering behind.

I found fulfilment on this world, and escaped my past. I found it in building this house, planting the fields and orchard. I found it mostly in my children's unconditional love. I never found it with her.

Now she's gone and taken all she thinks she needs. But it will not be enough. Nothing ever will. She will find another world and maybe another man. She will raise our children in her image. Will they grow up equally dissatisfied with life? Will they ever come and find me?

It is my one hope. I long for them and it is sometimes all that I see in my mind. But there are days when it isn't enough.

At night I look into the sky at the stars and the three moons. I stare at the closest moon every night and, using the telescope I built, look into the large crater near the North Pole.

I study the crash site of a ship and I wonder to whom it belonged and who died there.

I think about the people who came to my world and died on the moon the same night my partner left. It couldn't be her and my children. I know it isn't. I have one hope.

The moon is full tonight and there are no clouds in the black sky. The stars shine more brightly through the unpolluted atmosphere of this world. I keep my eye to the telescope, stare at the crater and, as I do every night, I weep for the brief pain those strangers felt as they died: and for mine.