

What They Told Her

Vignettes from Azuaveria — Episode 1

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They told her that if you concentrated real deeply, like listening to your own soul and shit like that, then you would find that your heart beats in a rhythm that's always in sync with the world around you. The rhythm is forever true, ceaseless but never irritating. It's necessary. It adds structure, a sort of skeleton to the fabric of time, like propping up a tent while camping underneath a sublime night sky, and everyone ought to work within this structure—unless you brazenly desire a directionless and eternally disorienting life.

They told her that it is the only true constant. Maybe *your* heart will beat until it cannot beat any more, but someone else's heart will pick it up right where it left off. Oceans will dry up, forests will burn and the wind will whisk their ashes away, and even mountains will crumble entirely, but hearts will never stop beating. They remind her that the very first ocean began as just a puddle, but the very first heart there ever was, was beating right from the start.

They told her why it is important to step back every once in a while, and remember how to ground yourself, get realigned. Whenever you are in trouble, or out of equilibrium, just remember that you can always resynchronize to the steady rhythm inside you, inside all of us, and bask in the warm knowledge that this song goes back all the way to the very first one of us. The continuity is utterly unbroken.

But every time Bisky listened, even when it was quiet late at night after all of the cranes and forklifts were shut down, she could never tap her paws on the floor in time. She was always off. “Just not musical enough,” she shrugged.

It was easier to give up and just idly hum the melody of the “The very first heart there was, was beating right from the start” song—whatever it was called—that she learned as a pup in Mephitidae school. You don't need to be precise. You just sing it. As long as the words are basically right, and as long as

you've got the gist of it, it's fine, any other one of you will be able to recognize it. And they might even join you in a joyous chorus. At least one of them will be musical enough. And then all the other animals around you will wonder what the hell are these full-grown adults doing, singing songs made for little skunk kits? But you won't recognize that's what they're doing, because you're a patient Mephitidaeon who lives their life and lets other animals live their lives, because the beatitude you feel as a Mephitidaeon literally cannot be comprehended by any other species, because life is perfect and nobody can knock you out of your special place in this world, because you are lucky to be skunk.

That's what they told her. And she knew it was a lie.