

EXCERPT
PAGES 1 – 10

of
Limit
Written by
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Directed by Shannon Rush
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Setting

2022. A space ship on its way to Mars. There is space for a bunk bed with two beds, a control panel where messages can be sent and received, a workbench, and an area for exercise and activities to be done. There is a large window that space can be seen through. There is a door that leads to another space where a small bathroom/airlock area might be. There are several cameras throughout the space which have a light to signify when they are on.

Characters

Marc: The winner of a competition to go to Mars.

Sarah: The winner of a competition to go to Mars.

(V.O) Carl: Producer of the television show, The Mars Project.

(V.O) Sally: Host of a commercial radio program.

SCENE ONE
212 DAYS IN SPACE

Space sounds blend into silence. Sarah sits looking out at space through a large window. Marc lays face down on the ground, he could be sleeping. It's dark except for a blue light flashing in a slow rhythmic pulse.

Sarah: We're going to make it.

When I was a kid I looked at photos of the universe...

I saw that image from the Hubble telescope, with all the millions of little golden galaxies, I cried. I cried because I suddenly felt so small, but also so happy that I was a part of something so beautiful.

It's so big isn't it?

I'm right in the middle of it all, and everything is spreading out around me.

But there is no middle, really. It's all just the same stuff, oscillating around itself.

The silence is endless.

And you can't see the edges, they stretch out and around, overlapping and blending into everything else.

Like one big intake of breath, a cosmic inhale. It seems like the universe is always on the cusp of saying something.

Last night I dreamt that I was running straight into it. I thought that if I could catch it, if I could hear what it was about to say then I'd be home. But I couldn't move my legs fast enough. It was like I was running through quicksand. I started sinking down deeper and it was stretching out getting further and further away. When I looked down my whole body was gone and I was just stars... an endless sea of stars.

We're jellyfish. That's what you said wasn't it? Floating through the emptiness.

Sometimes the absence of something is almost equal to what you felt before.

Then there's the absence after the absence... and then the absence after that

It keeps going

When I hold out my hands I can feel it swallowing me

Can you feel it Marc?

Feeling something means you're alive.

Right Marc?

It means you're alive

SCENE TWO
AUDITION 1

Sarah: Hi, I'm Sarah Jacobs and I want to go to Mars!

Marc: Hey there, I'm Marc Andrews and I want to go to Mars.

Sarah: I want to do something no one's ever done before. "One giant leap..." That kind of thing.

Marc: I want a statue built of me.

Sarah: Help change the world, make a better future for everybody.

Marc: Nah I dunno, I just want my life to actually count for something you know? To feel like I actually matter.

Sarah: For us to keep evolving as a species we have to adapt, find new ways to survive. That's what humans do don't they? They survive.

Marc: Yeah it's dangerous. But explorers always do crazy stuff like this. We *know* we won't be coming back! It's almost better in a way...

Sarah: Progress always takes a certain amount of sacrifice. I'm prepared to do whatever I have to, and if that means leaving the world behind, then I'm ready.

Marc: You know how they say "The sky's the limit? Well the sky's not my limit.

Sarah: I know I have the skills. I know I'm strong enough. This is all I've ever wanted... I'm ready to see what I'm truly capable of.

SCENE THREE

RADIO 1

Sally: Welcome back listeners, if you've just joined us I'm here with the always charming Carl Jefferson, billionaire entrepreneur and creative genius behind everyone's favourite new reality TV show, The Mars Project. It's an extremely risky mission that's making history and giving a whole new meaning to the phrase 'one giant leap'.

Carl: Thank you Sally it's a real pleasure to be here and I must say you look radiant today.

Sally: *(Warmly.)* You're too kind.

Carl: Not at all, not at all. Let's just say I wouldn't mind being stuck on a shuttle with you for 8 months.

Sally: He's cheeky too! But let's get back to the mission... it's your baby isn't it?

Carl: Oh yes. It's very close to my heart.

Sally: A huge project, over 10 years in the making, the first of its kind in Australia, or perhaps even the world! Part reality television show, part history making space mission. How did you come up with such a thing!

Carl: You'll never believe it; I saw it in a dream. Clear as day. A fresh start for humanity.

Sally: And your dream has become a reality.

Carl: *(A gentle chuckle.)* It's better than I ever could have hoped.

Sally: Now you had more than 200,000 hopefuls apply for the one-way trip to Mars. After rigorous physical and psychological tests, the public have voted and you have your final two astronauts. How does it feel?

The following text begins to merge with the sound of static and a spaceship being launched.

Carl: Look it's... it's hard to describe. But I think I'd have to say that most of all I feel... proud. Incredibly proud. Not just of myself but of all of humanity. They looked at these two people and said: Yes. You two represent the best in all of us. We finally put our differences aside and, through the power of television, we're making something truly good happen. The beginning of a new world.

The text fades into the cacophony of the launch sounds, which build in volume and intensity until it's almost too much, then, silence.

SCENE FOUR
1 DAY IN SPACE

Sarah and Marc stand looking out at space through the window. Maybe they silently cry. They are completely awestruck. A long, comfortable silence passes between them as they take in what they are seeing.

Marc: Woah...

They look at each other and laugh. They take each other's hand, an instinctive move between them, and then continue looking out the window.

SCENE FIVE
AUDITION 2

Sarah: I've dreamt about space my whole life.

Marc: Uh... how about my whole life! Look I'm not gonna lie I read a lot of science fiction as a kid!

Sarah: I used to bounce as high as I could on the trampoline staring straight up at the sky. My parents were always terrified I'd fly off and break my leg or something but, I don't know, I loved it so much I didn't care what happened to me.

Marc: I've never really felt at 'home' on Earth, I know that probably sounds really weird, I just always thought there might be something more for me somewhere else.

Sarah: Space has always been my dream. It's the ultimate goal for humanity. The bravest thing anyone could ever do.

Marc: Not that I'm an alien or anything. But... actually that's what I'd be on Mars. Oh no wait. A Martian. *(Realising.)* Yeah I'd be a Martian! *(Laughs.)*

SCENE SIX
8 DAYS IN SPACE

Sarah and Marc are midway through an exercise routine.

Marc: We moved back to Germany for three years because of dad's work.

Sarah: Wow.

Marc: Yeah, I was halfway through my final year of school.

Sarah: That's 12 different schools. In five different countries.

Marc: Yeah.

Sarah: Crazy!

Marc: It wasn't so bad. I got used to it after a while.

Sarah: But what about your friends?

Marc: Ah you know... You send a few emails here and there but after a while it just becomes too hard... you stop having things to say. People change, life moves on.

Sarah: Weren't you lonely?

Marc: Not really, I went online a lot so I had friends there. And I got pretty good at blending in. Switch.

They switch to a different exercise.

It almost became a game. I'd try and see how invisible I could make myself in situations. I was great at it, thought maybe I could be a spy.

Sarah: Well don't go invisible on me here!

Marc: You'll see. We'll have to play hide and seek sometime, I'd kick your ass.

Sarah: Not many places to hide on the ship.

Marc: You'd be surprised.

Sarah: Ok, Mr Invisible. Let's keep it up our sleeve for when we're really bored in a few months.

Marc: Deal.

SCENE SEVEN

RADIO 2

Carl: You see this mission isn't just about putting two people on Mars, it's about inspiring the whole world to believe in a better future. For a long time we've been looking back on the big achievements of space travel, but we need to keep looking forward. We're really breaking through some huge barriers here. Going where no man has gone before.

Sally: Or woman.

Carl: Exactly!

Sally: And entertaining a few people along the way.

Carl: Of course! Without the financial support the show brings in the mission simply wouldn't be happening. This is a unique opportunity to share one of the biggest moments in scientific history with the whole world. The triumphs, the failures, there's nothing people love to watch more than a struggle. It becomes everyone's journey.

Sally: So you're also crossing the final frontier of reality TV?

Carl: That's it. You really get it Sally.

She laughs.

Carl: We had two main goals. We wanted to go beyond the boundaries of space exploration, and we wanted to make some cracking good television.

SCENE EIGHT
24 DAYS IN SPACE

Sarah is looking out the window. Marc is inputting data into a computer.

Sarah: Hey Marc?

Marc: Yeah?

Sarah: Come here.

Marc: What?

Silence.

Marc: What is it?

Sarah: Just come and look!

He comes over.

Marc: You know that I've seen Earth before right?

Sarah: Yeah I know, but look... *(She moves her thumb in front of Earth and closes one eye.)* It's smaller than my thumb.

Marc: *(He does it too.)* Oh yeah...

Sarah: That's everyone. All of human kind, they're all there... behind my thumb.

Long pause as they let it sink in.

Marc: Bye Sarah's mum and dad! Bye Sarah's sister! Bye Sarah's ex-boyfriends!

Sarah: Bye everyone.

Marc: Look at her now. You wish you'd never let that go, she's the most beautiful woman in the universe now... Because we're in the universe get it?

Sarah: Yeah dingus, I got it. They're in the universe too you know. Everything is.

Marc: Yeah true... (*He looks out the window at Earth.*) It's so weird to think that they're watching us while we're watching them. Except that they can see us all the time...

Sarah: It still feels really strange...

Marc: So I was brushing my teeth right? Someone could be sitting there, in their lounge room, watching me brush my teeth. How boring must that person's life be? Getting their rocks off to my dental hygiene.

Sarah: Don't flatter yourself.

Marc: Hey, it's none of my business what people do.

Sarah: I think it's kind of comforting. They'll always be there; even when we can't see them they can always see us. So we're not completely alone out here.

Marc: Yeah...

SCENE NINE

RADIO 3

Sally: So tell me about the other teams you've been training... why the decision to go with only the two of them for the first mission?

Carl: Great question Sally. We always had the option of sending over bigger groups, we're training several teams of four right now. Each person has their own specialisation, and the social dynamics can be fairly balanced.

Sally: Don't you think there might be some tension with only two people? I know my partner can drive me crazy if we're just on a long car trip! Sounds like the perfect situation for some exciting viewing!

Carl: These two were chosen by a public vote, the people want to see them succeed so why set them up to fail? Our elite team of psychologists agreed they were a great match and I agree. We really wanted the first mission to be special so we decided to take a risk and send just the two of them. We've come up with a sort of 'Adam and Eve' metaphor, a mother and father for the new world. Pretty good, right?

Sally: Love it.

SCENE TEN
45 DAYS IN SPACE

Sarah and Marc are exercising. Sarah is in a fit of laughter.

Sarah: (*Laughing.*) Oh noooo, that really is terrible!

Marc: Ok, ok, another one. Why didn't anyone want to eat at the restaurant on the Moon?

Sarah: I don't know, why?

Marc: Because there wasn't any atmosphere.

Sarah: Ohhh god... that one was worse.

They laugh.

Marc: Hey I know... how about when the next round of people arrives we play a trick on them?

Sarah: No way! After two years of this I'm going to be desperate to see some other human life, with any luck they'll bring some better jokes with them...

Marc: But it's such a great opportunity to mess with them, and we'll have to do something to let them know we're in charge you know... assert our dominance.

Sarah: What do you have in mind?

Marc: I don't know... we could invent a new language and pretend like we've evolved beyond their way of thinking.

Sarah: Pretend we have telepathy.

Marc: Yes!

Sarah: We could dress up really crazy, in insulation foam or something, act like it's the high fashion of the New World. We're this elite super class of humans. The Overlords of Mars!

Marc: *(Laughs)* Exactly, now you're thinking...

Sarah: Oh those poor people. Imagine going on the exact same journey as us, stuck in a ship for 10 months then arriving and the first colonists have gone completely mad!

Marc: They'll be mad because they'll be behind the times. They won't know what's hip. We're the future now!

Sarah: *(She laughs)* Hip?

Marc: Hey why don't we make up a welcoming song for them?

(Sings.) Welcome to your new home,
No more TV, no more phones
We're gonna have so much fun
I hope we don't die from radiation... poisoning.

Sarah: They'd go right back if they could.

Marc: What if there was a dance to go with it?

He stops his exercises and starts interpretive dancing while singing the terrible song.

Marc: 'Welcome to your new home, finally we're not alone!'

Sarah: Stop! Oh my god you're such a...

Marc: Such a what?

*She smiles at him knowingly.
She walks over to the control panel and pretends to radio someone.*

Sarah: Yes hello this is Sarah. Yeah sorry, there's been a mistake you've set me up with a complete lunatic you're going to have to turn us around... Yes I know it's all very expensive but I'm afraid you're going to have to abort the mission-

He runs up to her and picks her up playfully. She laughs.

Marc: *(Jokingly authoritative.)* Miss Jacobs you have not completed your exercises how very irresponsible of you!

Sarah: Stop let me go!

*They fall slightly and end up tangled in each other.
Their laughter gives way to a gleaming moment of joy and they look
at each other.*

Sarah: I'm going to kiss you now.

Marc: *(Laughs, taken aback)* Uh. Ok.

*She kisses him, nervous and tender.
He softens and they are alone for a moment.
She pulls back and they look at each and smile, a door finally open
between them.
A brief pause. Electricity shoots between them before they throw
themselves at each other hungrily.
This gives way to an awkward frenzy of making their way to the
beds and taking off clothes.
Marc attempts to put up a sheet to provide a small modicum of
privacy while **Sarah** laughs.
They hide under a blanket together.*

END OF EXCERPT