

“Blast Off”

By: Eshal P.

It was the beginning of the end after what seemed like an eternity to me. I couldn't wait anymore.

Looking at the camera feed from the International Space Station, I saw a sleek black ship flying towards the satellite. I heard screaming and the beeping of alarms, and the camera went dark. We officially had no connection to the battle going on in space.

I slammed the computer shut and walked down the hallway at a rapid pace, trying to ignore the static from the radios and the emergency lines ringing constantly. My assistant, Adrianna Fisher, ran up to me, glasses askew and sweat dripping.

“Ms. Shore, we must send reinforcements. We can't let the ISS go,” she said, taking deep breaths.

I didn't respond, only because I knew we could do nothing to save the souls aboard the Space Station. Shoving past managers and terrified police, I scanned my key card into a pad by a locked door. The doors opened soundlessly, hissing with the compression of metal gears. Inside was the most beautiful thing that we had ever made. At 170 meters tall, the HMS Athena was by far the biggest manned rocket ever.

My assistant looked at me. “You can't be serious. Marilyn. We haven't tested the rocket out for flight yet. We have no idea if it will even work”

I looked her in the eyes. “There was one time that we did. In secret.”

She looked back at me. “And did it work?”

My thoughts whirred. I decided to tell the truth. “No.”

“Then how do you expect it to work? We can’t let people's lives depend on a faulty rocket.”

“We’ve fixed it,” I said, turning to look back at the rocket, "but we don’t know if it works. It has a fifty percent chance of getting people off Earth. But I’m not sure if we can fit everyone.”

A shadow fell over the doorway. Nicholas Miller, one of our most valued men on the base, stared back at me.

“You do know what's going on right? The ISS, all the technology we’ve lost, and now you want to put a bunch of scared people on a rocket. What is this, the apocalypse?”

I took a deep breath. “I guess it is.”

* * *

Now I was in the announcement room, the PA system turned on for the entire base. Nicholas stood beside me, whispering prayers under his breath. I could smell the gasoline being loaded into the engine of the HMS Athena.

Nicholas stepped forward. “Who are we putting on the ship? How do we pick who we are going to take?”

I ignored all of his questions and instead pressed the button that turned on the speakers. “Attention all workers on base. We are undergoing a Category 5 invasion. The said invasion seems to be armed and... extraterrestrial. Please have armed soldiers and keep all equipment safe. For those who do not have to be here, get yourselves out, or hide.”

Nicholas touches my arm. “Rocket fueled.”

“You are going to go on that rocket,” I say, voicing the decision I’ve made up in my mind in that very second.

Instead of reacting as I thought he would, he nods. “Yes, maam.”

I take a deep breath. “Prepare for liftoff.”

* * *

“Ms. Shore! Ms. Shore!” A manager runs over to me. He has a phone with a picture displayed on it. He shows me the picture depicting the same sleek, black ship. But this time, the ship has a ramp running down the edge. Zooming in, I could see a humanoid figure walking down the ramp.

The manager looked at me. “This is five minutes from base.”

For the first time in my career, I’m caught off guard. Five minutes! We needed at least thirty more to launch.

My mind was racing as I ran to the military issued Jeeps.

No one knew I was here.

I was alone.

* * *

Nearing the location of the aliens, I stepped off the Jeep and decided to walk over to the base, hoping to make some sort of agreement with the aliens. Or at least buy some time to get some people off the Earth.

Crouching between two bushes, I had a clear view of the base. Mentally, I prepared myself for whatever might happen next. I made a bold move.

I stepped out of the bushes.

The alien looked at me. Straight into my eyes. And when I looked at it, my brain felt like it was being sucked out of my head. I wanted to tear my eyes away, but I felt compelled to look at it.

To see it.

And it saw me.

The pain just stopped. Like there was a switch and it was just gone. The alien was about six feet tall with a regular human body; however, where the face was supposed to be... nothing. Like a black hole in a person's face.

And it spoke.

“We have studied your ways for a while now. We know about you, Dr. Shore.”

No sound comes out of my mouth.

“We have concluded that your population is slowly killing the beautiful planet called Earth. Our creation.” it says, moving closer.

“You humans are weak. You care too much, or care too little. We will eliminate your race...”

“And a new one will be born from the ashes of the old. I’m sorry to have to tell you this but... you cannot win.”

I look down, ashamed. Because I know that it is right.

The alien moves closer and closer, ever so silently. All I'm doing is buying time. For
Nicholas. NASA. Humanity.

I see the space launch beginning, and as I realize what's going to happen to me, I think
about the people who are getting to safety, a new home.

Without me.

But it's a fresh start. For more than just who we think.

For family.

For life.

For love.

And because of that, I feel at peace.

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Blast off.