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One Small Step

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OPENING CREDITS

INT. NASA RESEARCH LAB

Two scientists are working late. Steve is sat hunched over a microscope whilst Duke is throwing a ball back and forth against a wall showing little interest in his work.

STEVEN HUBBLE

You know some people find that sort of thing distracting.

JAMES DUKE

Thank god none of them people are here.

Steve turns away from his microscope to address Duke.

STEVE

Duke it's late. Why don't you go home and let me finish up here?

DUKE

Don't you find this kind of work a little bit boring?

STEVE

Not really, in fact I find it quite fascinating.

DUKE

All we do is look through a microscope each day.

STEVE

But that's the beauty of it.

DUKE

The beauty?

STEVE

Yeah come on, don't tell me you don't get like this? I mean all these samples are from another planet.

DUKE

They're all the same. I just want a little excitement in this job for once.

STEVE

What could be more exciting than this? In any one of those samples could be something we've never seen before, something that until now, we never even knew existed.

DUKE

Come on you don't believe that? We both know all of them samples are going to be the same. Cheap old mars rock.

STEVE

Maybe. But you never know.

DUKE

Yes I do know. Look I'm not asking for much, I like the work we do but looking through that thing all day and seeing the same thing is, is just dull.

STEVE

That's what you joined NASA to do though.

DUKE

Hey if I knew I would be looking at the same thing day after day I'd have stayed where I was.

STEVE

Look why don't you go home and have an early night? You'll feel much better tomorrow.

DUKE

Yeah I guess you're right.

STEVE

You know I am.

DUKE

Fine I'll leave to it. Maybe something exciting will happen in the morning.

STEVE

I can guarantee it.

Duke walks over to his desk and collects his bag. Now bouncing the ball on the floor he heads for the exit. Meanwhile Steve has turned back to his microscope and is busy working again.

DUKE

See you tomorrow Steve.

STEVE

Uh huh.

Duke exits.

INT. DUKES APPARTMENT

A close up of the front door see's it open to reveal Duke walking into his apartment, it's surprisingly well kept. Grabbing a beer from the fridge Duke sits down in the living room picks up a paper sitting on the coffee table, also turning on the TV. The headline on the paper reads 'Oil Company strikes it rich, securing record profits'. The TV is switched to a show about the moon landings. Duke puts the paper back down and watches.

TV PRESENTER

As yet another anniversary of the moon landings passes us by today we'll be asking why another year has passed since we've been to the moon.

(Later in the show)

TV GUEST

Money money money money. It's as simple as that. The public don't see how much is spent at NASA. There's no financial or viable reason for us to go back to the moon.

(Later in the show)

TV PRESENTER

So you think it'll be at least another ten years before we visit the moon again?

TV GUEST

I'm guessing more like twenty. In fact I think it's highly likely we'll be on mars before we step foot on our moon again.

TV PRESENTER

Mars?

TV GUEST

Why not? We have the technology to go there now; all we need is a reason. I'm telling you the next people on the moon will be people like you and me, tourists.

TV PRESENTER

Moon tourists, who'd have thought it? Well that's about it for this edition, join us next week when...

(TV is turned off)

Duke sits back on the sofa staring blankly into space.

INT. NASA RESEARCH LAB

Steve is sitting at his desk in the NASA lab where Duke left him the previous day. A few take away packets now litter the area. He looks tired and weary, clearly having spent the night here. Duke enters looking more upbeat and happier than yesterday.

DUKE

Steve-o! How are the samples this fine morning?

Steve looks up from his desk towards Duke showing a look of concern.

STEVE

What?

DUKE

What do you mean?

STEVE

In six months of this job, and the seven and a half years prior in which I've know you, I have never, ever, seen you this happy at seven in the morning.

DUKE

Okay you got me.

STEVE

I'm sure I don't want to know.

DUKE

Oh come on, at least humour me will you? I have an idea.

STEVE

Fine, ok, whatever. I'm on the edge of my seat.

DUKE

Last night I'm at home reading the paper and watching some T.V...

STEVE

Multi-tasking.

DUKE

Trying, to think of something we can do to liven up this place a bit. Then this show comes on about the moon landings.

STEVE

You're becoming an astronaut?

DUKE

Don't be ridiculous. But something about what that guy said led me to this.

Duke reaches into his bag and pulls out a sample of something very similar to the mars samples they've been working on.

STEVE

What is that? Is that from mars? Did you take that home?!

DUKE

No my friend, this is what will make us famous and get us out this lab for a while.

Steve looks intently at the sample Duke is holding for a couple of seconds then looks up at Duke.

STEVE

I'm going back to my samples.

Steve swivels round on his chair only for Duke to turn him around again.

DUKE

Come on, let me explain. The area these samples come from on mars is very similar to places here on earth. With seismic readings revealing substantial traps under this area of the mars surface correct?

STEVE

Yeah so what?

DUKE

So all we really need is this.

Duke places a small test tube sample on the table.

STEVE

What the hell is it?

DUKE

Mars rock with a couple of additives, mostly oil.

STEVE

Oil? Why?

DUKE

Because this is the reason the government would need in order for one day to go to mars.

STEVE

I see now. How exactly?

DUKE

Do I have to spell it out for you?

STEVE

Apparently.

DUKE

Ok firstly we have to make about five hundred of these. Then we swap them over with five hundred of the actual samples taken from mars.

STEVE

The real samples?

DUKE

Exactly!

STEVE

You can't contaminate samples. And this is a state of the art facility, with many professionals, some of them geniuses, no one would believe us.

DUKE

That's exactly why they would believe us. Who's going to dispute NASA scientists? And if we fix the results correctly then there would be no way to dispute us or prove otherwise. I mean it's not like they can just go and get more samples is it? That's why they got so many in the first place.

STEVE

Okay say we really do this; I still don't see how this gets them to mars? Or us out this lab for that?

DUKE

It's like the man on T.V. said. At the moment the world is run by financing. Unless there's a financial incentive to go there then the simple answer is that we won't. This, my friend, is the reason. And with us two discovering it we get out of the lab for a while.

STEVE

It'll never work. And we could lose our jobs.

DUKE

It will work, and would that be such a bad thing?

STEVE

Maybe not to you. But I happen to like this job.
This could even constitute as fraud.

DUKE

Okay I know it's not without risk. Tell you what;
I'll give you my space helmet signed by Buzz and
Neil to smooth it over?

STEVE

I don't know Duke.

DUKE

Ok how about I get you another date with my sister?

Steve almost falls off his chair at this comment.

STEVE

Really? You're not joking?

DUKE

Don't freak her out like last time though. Try
speaking this time.

STEVE

I can do that.

DUKE

Good. Then we have a deal?

(Beat)

STEVE

Okay but let's make sure we do this properly.

Steve turns back to his samples and clears the take away boxes
to the floor and Duke brings his bag over to the newly emptied
space.

INT. NASA RESEARCH LAB

The room is now filled up with scientist, most of them wearing
white coats but a few are dressed more casually. One scientist
is hunched over a microscope with more scientists grouped
around him. Duke and Steve stand further back. A few seconds
later the scientist raises his head to speak.

SCIENTIST 1

This makes nine out of fifteen.

SCIENTIST 2

Another positive.

SCIENTIST 1

Without a doubt.

HEAD RESEARCHER

Well then I think we can safely conclude there for the time being. Duke, Steve, it would appear that you've found oil on mars.

Cheers and applauses go up around them with people hugging and shaking hands. The head researcher goes over to Duke for a closer talk.

HEAD RESEARCHER

This is truly an amazing find. My assistant will make the necessary arrangements with the media and senior officials. No doubt there will be people who want to know more about this find. I simply can't wait to inform them.

DUKE

You mean me and Steve?

HEAD RESEARCHER

No no. Don't get me wrong. It's your find and you two will get the appropriate accolades but as head researcher on the mars project it will be my job to speak to these high level officials and the media.

DUKE

That's bullshit.

HEAD RESEARCHER

What did you expect? Everyone here knows it works like that Duke.

DUKE

So we make the find and you get the credit?

HEAD RESEARCHER

If it means that much to you then you can come along but don't expect special treatment. When your head researcher you can take credit. But you should know I also take the fall when things go wrong. So come along, look pretty if you want, but don't expect anything else. Now I have other things I need to be doing, excuse me.

The head researcher moves away without waiting for Dukes reply or caring for it either. Watching him leave Duke is approached by an attractive female scientist from the side.

FELICITY (FLICK)

I got to say Duke I would have never expected this from you. (Beat) Duke?

DUKE

Huh? Oh hey. Can you believe him?

FLICK

Who?

DUKE

He's going to be doing all the press conferences, speaking to important officials and generally just taking the credit.

FLICK

Ah David. Well what did you expect? He is head researcher. You must know by now they take all the credit. If you're lucky you'll get your name in a book somewhere.

DUKE

How's that going to help me?

FLICK

Help you what?

DUKE

Umm... say sis I need a favour?

FLICK

Duke what's going on?

DUKE

I need you to go on a date with Steve. Again.

FLICK

Duke what's going on? (Beat) Wait, you mean the same Steve that never said a word the entire evening the last time we went out?

DUKE

That's right. He's shy but he really likes you.

FLICK

He's creepy.

DUKE

Come on just one date, I owe him a favour.

FLICK

No. Why do you owe him a favour? Has it got something to do with all this?

Duke stares blankly at her for a few seconds trying to think of an answer.

FLICK

Duke?

DUKE

I'll even pay for dinner? At the fancy new restaurant down the road and I promise he'll talk this time?

FLICK

Fine, but now you owe me.

DUKE

Thanks sis.

FLICK

I'll let you know when I'm free. I better be getting back.

DUKE

Ok. Thanks again.

FLICK

You're welcome.

Duke blows a sigh of relief looking around the room before being approached by more scientists who shake his hand and offer congratulations.

EXT. COURTHOUSE-DAY

The Head Researcher is on top of the steps leading to the courthouse talking to the press gathered around at the bottom. He is standing at a plinth answering questions with Duke and Steve standing just behind him.

REPORTER 1

How significant is this find? Does this mean there is life on mars?

HEAD RESEARCHER

It's significant because just its very presence would suggest that there has at some point been life on mars. The obvious benefit of finding an abundance of oil like this is also unquestionable.

REPORTER 2

Does this mean we'll be going to mars for the oil then?

HEAD RESEARCHER

I wouldn't say anytime soon. But in a purely geographical sense we'd estimate the find at somewhere in the region of Alaska and the Middle East combine, so there's a real possibility of visiting there in the future.

REPORTER 2

How long until we'll be able to make use of it?

HEAD RESEARCHER

At an educated guess I would estimate at least ten years. But as with all operations of this size you can never be too sure.

REPORTER 3

And who are the scientists responsible for this find?

HEAD RESEARCHER

As with all studies at NASA any discovery is a joint find by the entire team involved. However the two scientists who made the find are James Duke and Steven Hubble. They are behind me right now and I'm sure they would be happy to answer any questions you have for them at a later date.

The two scientists seem taken aback to suddenly be thrust into the spotlight. Lots of photography flashes go off with every reporter seeming to be asking them both a question at once.

INT. OVAL OFFICE

All three scientists are in the Oval Office meeting the President. Also situated in the room are several of his chiefs of staff and the Vice President. The Head Researcher approaches the President's desk.

HEAD RESEARCHER

Mr President, it's an honour.

PRESIDENT

Please, sit down. I'd like to introduce Harry Charman the Vice President.

The team says a few hellos' then take their seats.

PRESIDENT

I have to admit me and the Chiefs were somewhat amazed by your find. Oil on mars, this is big news. Just a shame you've already done a press conference.

HEAD RESEARCHER

I don't understand Sir?

VICE PRESIDENT

What the President means is that because this is now public knowledge, we're now on a tight schedule in which to utilize the find.

PRESIDENT

He's right. I mean what good is a bucket load of oil all the way out there if where it's really needed is right here, in the U.S.A.

VICE PRESIDENT

We figure the same principles here apply on mars. Whoever drills it first gets the rights to it.

PRESIDENT

And if you hadn't done that damn press conference, no-one else would know. We would have had sufficient time to exploit this, which we no longer have. So as you guys are scientists, how can we get this oil?

HEAD RESEARCHER

Sir whilst it's a fascinating find, there's no feasible way to utilize it yet. Not soon anyway.

DUKE

Actually Sir that's not entirely true.

HEAD RESEARCHER

What?!

PRESIDENT

(To head researcher)

Quiet.

(To Duke)

You got something to say son?

DUKE

I'm not saying it won't take time or money, but the basis is there for it. All we'd need is a way of getting a few men plus some drilling equipment there and back. Given our current level of technology I believe this to be very possible.

PRESIDENT

How long would that take?

DUKE

Getting to mars would take at least three months there and another three back providing were in close orbits. Then we would have to build a completely new ship that's capable for that length of journey, as well as taking drilling equipment and equipment for a ground base. Somewhere people could live for a few months at a time. I would guess about four years for the initial set up but afterwards all you would need are transport ships for the oil.

VICE PRESIDENT

Like building an oil rig, only this one would be on mars.

DUKE

Essentially, yes.

PRESIDENT

Four years huh? And how much would all this cost?

DUKE

Easily fifteen, twenty billion. Maybe thirty or forty. You'd have to get someone else to look at the figures I'm afraid sir.

PRESIDENT

Can I ask you three to wait outside? Just for a second.

The three scientists make their way outside the Oval Office to a waiting area.

INT. OVAL OFFICE WAITING AREA

A small hallway is lined with a few benches and a water cooler at on end.

HEAD RESEARCHER

Just what the HELL do you think you're doing Duke?

DUKE

Just offered my opinion.

HEAD RESEARCHER

No! You were under minding me in front of the President!

DUKE

I just said what I thought.

HEAD RESEARCHER

Bullshit! You said what he wanted to hear. You're not a rocket scientist nor an oil expert, how can you know how long that kind of operation will take? You know what, don't even answer that. Wait until we get back to NASA.

The head researcher wanders off to another corner where he takes a drink from a water cooler.

STEVE

He's got a point you know.

DUKE

Come on, you as well?

STEVE

How can you know all these facts without doing at least a little research?

DUKE

Let's just see what he say's first.

STEVE

You knew didn't you? You knew he would ask about how to get the oil didn't you?

DUKE

Of course, no-one strikes oil to leave it for someone else to claim.

STEVE

You wanted it to go like this didn't you? You knew as soon as we switched the samples.

DUKE

I didn't know it would go exactly like this.

STEVE

This is getting way out of hand Duke. Should I remind you that there is no oil on mars? What are you going to do if they actually send people up there?

DUKE

Let's just let this play out a little longer. If you want to stop it now then by all means go in there and tell the president what we did. If not just let

it play. And if it starts getting out of hand we can come up with a way to save our skins and call it all off without anyone ever knowing.

STEVE

Starts getting out of hand, it's already out of hand!

DUKE

Come on do this for me?

STEVE

Fine, fine I'll play it out a little longer. Just make sure you can stop it before it goes too far.

DUKE

I will, I promise.

The Vice President steps out and calls for Duke to come back into the Oval Office.

PRESIDENT

Duke the Chiefs and I have done some talking and we see this find as a priority for the U.S. Therefore we want to see a fully operational drilling platform on mars in just two years.

DUKE

Two years?

PRESIDENT

And to help you achieve this we'll commission a budget of thirty five billion.

DUKE

Help me?

PRESIDENT

That's right son. You've shown us a can-do attitude that we like, and you have the brains to go with it. It'll be your operation to run, reporting directly to Harry. Don't worry too much, all the major personnel will be assigned to you accordingly, but you'll be in-control of this project. Assuming that you want the job?

DUKE

Absolutely Mr President.

PRESIDENT

Good. Then you'll meet with Harry tomorrow. By then he'll have a list of people to work on the project, scientists, oil expert's even astronauts. From that you'll pick the team, and you'll make it work. Securing the future of the United States.

DUKE

Yes sir Mr President.

The President shakes his hand as Duke stands up. The other staff line up to shake his hand. Duke suddenly has the expression of a man that realises he's just got in too deep.

INT. RUSSIAN PRESIDENT'S OFFICE

The Russian President is in a meeting with two senior officials. One is from a large oil company in Russia; the other is the head of their Aerospace department.

RUSSIAN OIL OFFICIAL

Premier think of the opportunities this find could deliver for mother Russia.

RUSSIAN PRESIDENT BENIN

I know comrade. But how are we supposed to utilize a find like this when it's so many miles away from us? Not to mention the cost, I remind you we are not American. We simply don't have billions lying around for these types of endeavours.

RUSSIAN OIL OFFICIAL

Premier if we can utilize this find, then we will be able to generate billions to spend. You will also have the backing of our oil company covering fifty percent of the costs, for exclusive rights.

RUSSIAN PRESIDENT BENIN

Exclusive rights?

RUSSIAN OIL OFFICIAL

Comrade Premier, Russia would still be able to generate billions but without the extensive costs to the country.

RUSSIAN PRESIDENT BENIN

Indeed to your company billions maybe small change. But you do not have a hundred million people watching how you spend every penny. Not to mention that this could all be for nothing. Are you not forgetting that we will essentially be racing against the Americans?

RUSSIAN AEROSPACE SCIENTIST

Premier we are confident of winning this race. Our operations with the European Space Agency have had us analysing and studying for years on the prospect of a manned mars mission.

RUSSIAN PRESIDENT BENIN

Indeed, but how do we know they are not in a similar or better position?

RUSSIAN AEROSPACE SCIENTIST

There is room for confidence here. The American Space Programme has been suffering cutbacks from each administration for many years now. They have seen no need to look too much further into space since they landed on the moon.

RUSSIAN PRESIDENT BENIN

But they are the ones who found these samples, are they not?

RUSSIAN AEROSPACE SCIENTIST

This is true, but the cost of sending a robot to mars is small in comparison to other things. Estimates of their abilities would see them on mars in four years. We can naturally assume they will speed this up with their significant funding, so perhaps a better estimate would be two years at best. If we start our project straight away premier, we can be on mars by this time next year.

RUSSIAN PRESIDENT BENIN

Of this you are confident?

RUSSIAN AEROSPACE SCIENTIST

Yes Premier.

RUSSIAN PRESIDENT BENIN

And your company will pay for halve the costs?

RUSSIAN OIL OFFICIAL

Yes Premier. We should be looking at a starting figure of 10 billion U.S. dollars from both the company and the state.

RUSSIAN PRESIDENT BENIN

There will be no rational way to hide this from our nation. Cuts will have to come in other areas to fund this. I must inform the people of our intentions before the press and our American friends

find out. This way they can better understand why we are sacrificing so much of their money on this.

RUSSIAN OIL OFFICIAL

I'm sure my company won't mind. The revelations will do wonders for the stock price after all.

RUSSIAN PRESIDENT BENIN

Then it is settled. Can I appreciate you two know how to get the piece's of this moving.

RUSSIAN OIL OFFICIAL

Yes Premier.

RUSSIAN AEROSPACE SCIENTIST

Yes Premier.

RUSSIAN PRESIDENT BENIN

Then tomorrow we shall announce our intentions to the world. Then the race shall well and truly begin.

INT. VICE PRESIDENTS OFFICE

Duke and the Vice President are sitting in his office with the TV on. It is showing an announcement by the Russian President of his countries intentions to go to mars as well.

VICE PRESIDENT

Well ain't that something? There was me thinking the Russians were broke.

DUKE

What does this mean for us?

VICE PRESIDENT

Straight to the point hey? All this really means is that this is now a race.

DUKE

I can't go any faster sir. You've already cut the time I estimated for completion in half before we even began.

VICE PRESIDENT

Relax would you Duke. Now some of the teams waiting outside. We can discuss this with them.

Harry pushes the intercom button and speaks to his secretary.

VICE PRESIDENT
(Over intercom)

Helen could you let our guests in now. Thank you

The door opens seconds later with a two men and woman shown into the room.

VICE PRESIDENT

Tom, Andrew, Sasha. This is Duke, he's scientist behind this discovery and the man the President wants calling the shots. Duke this is Tom, Andrew and Sasha.

Duke exchanges quick hellos and handshakes with the other parties in the room before they take a seat.

VICE PRESIDENT

I take it everyone has seen the news this morning about the Russians? So all I'll ask is how long until we are ready?

TOM LINFORD

The main problem both countries face is the length of the journey needed. Somewhere near the three month mark to get there. On top of that you'll need a few months setting up a living base and drilling rig on the planet, and of course another three months getting back again.

ANDREW CROSS

A drilling rig can be completed in three to four months so our best hope would be a nine month round trip.

VICE PRESIDENT

More importantly how long until we actually strike the oil?

TOM

About six months from when we lift off sir.

SASHA HAMILTON

My concern is that all these predictions are based on estimates for a lightweight trip. We're talking about dragging heavy machinery up with us. As an astronaut I'm also worried about the effects such a long trip will have on the crew, especially those not trained efficiently enough like any drilling experts that may have to come.

VICE PRESIDENT

These are good constructive points, but for now we need to focus on getting started and quickly. You each have your positions to concentrate upon, ship construction to drilling and personnel. Make sure you start getting your teams together and coordinate any problems to Duke. He's the one in-charge of this project. Do you need to add anything Duke?

DUKE

No, not that I can think of.

VICE PRESIDENT

Good. Then what are you waiting around here for, you have work to do.

Everyone starts making their way to the door; Duke is the last to leave.

VICE PRESIDENT

Hold on Duke just a word of advice. The people you'll be working with are at the top of their game. They'll try and dictate their opinions and thoughts on to you. Just remember your in-control and they have to listen to you. It's not the other way around.

DUKE

Yes sir.

VICE PRESIDENT

Good. Remember we're going to be seeing a lot of each other after all.

INT. DUKE'S OFFICE

Duke is sitting behind a desk in his new office going over paperwork; meanwhile Steve approaches the open door.

STEVE

Knock knock.

DUKE

Hey Steve, come in have a seat. What's up?

STEVE

I'm concerned Duke. Last week I was sitting behind my desk doing my job. Now in the back of my mind I can't help thinking about my involvement in quite possibly the biggest fraud case in history.

DUKE

Hey at least they'll write books about us.

STEVE

Duke!

DUKE

What do you want me to say Steve? I did something that I thought would spice up things a bit. I had no idea it would go this far.

STEVE

No idea?

DUKE

That's right. Do you honestly think I could have imagined that in one week I would have been sitting here planning a mission to mars?

STEVE

I don't care what you imagined; it has to stop, sooner rather than later.

DUKE

I don't think it can. It's snowballing and we're not in a position to stop it, at least not yet.

STEVE

Then when? When there are people on mars?

DUKE

When an opportunity arises I promise I'll take it.

STEVE

And if nothing does?

DUKE

Then I'll take full responsibility.

STEVE

Just be careful. Try not to get carried away in all this and miss the bigger picture.

DUKE

I won't, trust me. (Beat) Aren't you going out with Flick tonight?

STEVE

I'm trying not to think about it.

DUKE

You nervous?

STEVE

Petrified.

DUKE

You'll be fine. Just you know, say something this time.

STEVE

Funny, real funny.

INT. CHINESE POLITBURO

A Chinese interim cabinet is assembled discussing the recent oil revelations on mars and their position on whether to join in the race or not.

CHINESE CHAIRMAN CONG

Can we do this without the Americans and Russian knowing about it?

SCIENCE ADVISOR FENG

For a certain period of time yes. But a project of this size can only stay hidden for so long, after all.

CHINESE CHAIRMAN CONG

We are aware of this, thank you Feng. Are there any objections to the progression of the project at this moment in time?

All members sit quietly as if a decision to move forward was reached long before the question was asked.

CHINESE CHAIRMAN CONG

Very well Feng, you will be in command of the project. It would be wise to be in favourable position in terms of progression when this becomes public. The last the Peoples Republic wants is to arrive second.

SCIENCE ADVISOR FENG

Yes premier, may I take this moment to thank the cabinet for this opportunity.

INT. STEVE'S LIVING ROOM

Steve is picking at the suit he's wearing. Duke is watching T.V. but is distracted by his nervousness.

DUKE

Relax would you.

STEVE

That's easy for you to say. I never imagined I'd get this chance. (Beat) Again anyway.

DUKE

You'll be fine as long as you open this (gestures towards his mouth). You've both got a common interest in science so start with that if you're worried. Besides she's pretty easy going.

STEVE

And your sure it's not strange her picking me up?

DUKE

She insisted this time. I think it's in case you're too afraid to knock on her door or something.

STEVE

Hey I managed that last time.

DUKE

Sure that made up for not speaking over the next two hours.

STEVE

I was nervous!

Through the window a car's lights can be seen. A few seconds later a horn sounds.

DUKE

Looks like she's here.

STEVE

How do I look?

DUKE

Better not keep her waiting.

STEVE

Thanks. (Heads for the front door)

DUKE

Don't forget the flowers.

STEVE

You sure she likes these?

DUKE

Positive. Now go.

Steve exits the house and gets into Felicity's waiting car.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Upon entering the car Steve takes a quick glance at Felicity before becoming embarrassed and looking away.

FLICK

Hi Steve.

STEVE

(Not looking)

Hi.

FLICK

Wow! You managed to speak this time. Are you going to be able to look at me?

STEVE

I'm afraid to.

FLICK

Why?

STEVE

I'm afraid that if I look at you I'll freeze because of your beauty.

After a slight pause Flick bursts out laughing causing Steve to turn around and look at her.

STEVE

It's not funny.

FLICK

Yeah it is. And you're looking at me now.

STEVE

I guess you're right.

FLICK

You'll find I'm right a lot.

STEVE

I almost forgot, here these are for you.

Steve hands over the flowers and Felicity just smiles at them.

FLICK

Did Duke tell you to get them?

STEVE

Yeah why? Are they the wrong colour? Are you allergic?

FLICK

Let's just say he didn't do you any favours.
(Giggles)

STEVE

Dammit.

FLICK

Do you like steak?

STEVE

Sure.

FLICK

Good I know a great little place just off the highway. I've got a feeling this night is going to be a lot better than I thought.

Steve and Flick look at each other and smile before driving off. As car pulls away Steve drops the flowers out his window into the street.

INT. RUSSIAN PREMIERS OFFICE

The Russian Oil Official is talking to an American woman. She is head of the Russian mission to mars. A Russian minister is representing the President.

EMILY EPSTEIN

It's not as simple as a quick fix. Recycling is going to be a necessity on a trip this far. And forgive me for saying but Russia isn't exactly known for its recycling facilities.

RUSSIAN OIL OFFICIAL

So we take more supplies no?

EMILY

That's not a practical option. It means more size and weight to a ship already over-limit. Not to mention the extra costs.

RUSSIAN PREMIER KELTZ

Emily how do we fix the problem?

EMILY

We need to develop a whole new system.

RUSSIAN OIL OFFICIAL

So why are you talking to us, do it.

EMILY

If it were as simple as that then I would have begun already. If we develop a new system it will add another six months to a year onto the schedule.

RUSSIAN PREMIER KELTZ

The President will find that unacceptable.

EMILY

Then may I suggest a trade with the Americans.

RUSSIAN PREMIER KELTZ

What do we have that they could possibly want?

EMILY

Our solar panels are the best out there; I can guarantee they will trade for them.

RUSSIAN OIL OFFICIAL

And we lose our edge when we're in space?

EMILY

The process in building a single panel alone takes a sufficiently long time. And they would need at least eight per engine like us.

RUSSIAN PREMIER KELTZ

I cannot authorise this. The military developed the technology and would not allow it. For now start the new recycling build. But try to find alternatives or a way to speed up the process as well.

EMILY

As you ask minister, but I warn you I cannot pull miracles out of my ass.

RUSSIAN PREMIER KELTZ

It is noted.

EMILY

Then I shall get back to my team.

RUSSIAN PREMIER KELTZ

Hold on, how are you finding the job Emily?

EMILY

You mean are your Russian employees disgusted by the fact that an American, let alone an American Woman is in-charge of them?

RUSSIAN PREMIER KELTZ

Something like that.

EMILY

I knew when I took the job minister that with the bigger pay checks come the bigger challenges. And I like to be paid well minister.

RUSSIAN PREMIER KELTZ

Indeed. Let me keep you no longer. I trust you will be able to find a way around the problem in the near future.

Emily walks out of the Premiers office whilst he looks onward.

INT. CHINESE POLITBURO

The Chinese are discussing the financial aspects of the mission with oil representatives present.

CHINESE CHAIRMAN CONG

Is the company not owned by the government anyway?

CHINESE FINANCE MINISTER FU

Yes but it's more complicated than that. The firm is separated in a way that if it should struggle the government cannot be held liable to bail it out. This protects the country but means technically it's an independent company.

CHINESE CHAIRMAN CONG

A confusing matter indeed. So the company invests like the Russians have had done?

FINANCE MINISTER FU

Precisely Chairman. But the benefits are more with us because the People's Republic will have a government company involved.

FORIGEN ADVISOR CHANG

This is indeed very confusing.

FINANCE MINISTER FU

Think of it as a way of majorly funding the project in a way that won't cost the Republic directly.

CHINESE CHAIRMAN CONG

I believe we are as far into understanding this as possible, so the question I ask is are there any objections to outside investment from our oil company?

All members' hands stay put and there are no objections.

CHINESE CHAIRMAN CONG

Then it would seem Minister Fu you have won your argument. Inform those who need be and do what you have to.

CHINESE FINANCE MINISTER FU

Thank you chairman.

INT. AMERICAN ENGINEERING LAB

An engineer is speaking to Duke.

DUKE

So what's the problem?

ENGINEER

Weight, there's too much. It's going to add drag and that will add time to the journey.

DUKE

How much time?

ENGINEER

Everyday will add between three to five hours on. Over that duration it means it'll take another two weeks to a month.

DUKE

A month?

ENGINEER

About that.

DUKE

Is there any way around it?

ENGINEER

At the moment no. The trouble is we're not getting enough power from the solar panels we have.

DUKE

What about more engines?

ENGINEER

You're a NASA Scientist?

DUKE

What's that suppose to mean?

ENGINEER

Say the top speed of an engine is say two hundred. But the power output only allows it to perform at one eighty, you follow me?

DUKE

There's no need to be a wiseass.

ENGINEER

Okay, if you put another one eighty engine on; it's not going to get you going at two hundred. The only way this is possible is by increasing the power. If we can get the power up then the engines can handle it.

DUKE

And these panels can't do it?

ENGINEER

No.

DUKE

Okay, I've got to speak to the vice president about this.

ENGINEER

Good luck. And if you need a dumb downed version for him I'd be more than happy to provide it.

DUKE

How do you still have a job?

ENGINEER

My stunning good looks of course.

A FEW MONTHS LATER

INT. VICE PRESIDENTS OFFICE

Duke is sitting with the Vice President both are watching a TV. The news report is from China where an official has finally revealed that they too are involved in the prospect of reaching mars for oil.

TV REPORTER
(On Television)

So there you have it. The two horse race is now a three horse race. And the quest for who will reach the dusty red planet first in order to secure the black gold is well and truly on.

The Vice President turns off the TV and looks over at Duke.

VICE PRESIDENT
How does this affect us?

DUKE
Actually sir, it doesn't.

VICE PRESIDENT
How so?

DUKE
Well since the start we've been in a race with the Russians. So we've been going as quickly as we can for as long as we can. The rest of the world could join in right now and we still wouldn't be able to go any faster than we are at the moment.

VICE PRESIDENT
That's what I like to hear. Are we on schedule?

DUKE
With regards to most things yes, we're even ahead in some areas. But power is still proving a problem.

HARRY
I'll trust you'll have it sorted as quickly as possible. We need to win this Duke, not for moral, but the ramifications if one of the other two countries secure a substantial resource like this, just doesn't bare thinking about.

DUKE
I know.

INT. DUKES OFFICE
Duke is going over paperwork starting to look stressed by the events around him. Steve comes by to visit him.

DUKE
Steve! What can I do for you?

Steve throws a paper down in front of Duke with China and their mars ambitions on the front.

STEVE

China. Now China's in the race!

DUKE

Calm down ok.

STEVE

How can I possibly calm down?

Steve closes the office door and sits down.

STEVE

I can't believe were in this situation. We've got to come clean, right now.

DUKE

I've told you before that's not an option. The amount of money already spent enters into the billions.

STEVE

Jesus Christ Duke! How has it ended up like this? You're in-charge how come you've spent that much?

DUKE

A project this size needs that kind of funding, it'll attract more attention if I didn't spend that much.

STEVE

You'd only spend that much if you actually intended to go to mars.

DUKE

Seems a good an option as any. You and I both know that at this moment there's no feasible way to make things right.

STEVE

That doesn't mean we have to make it worse.

DUKE

Exactly. This is why we have to carry on.

STEVE

That's making it worse!

DUKE

Don't you see? If we stop now there's only going to be questions. If we ride it out then something's bound to turn up later.

STEVE

That's what you said before, but nothing has yet.
What if nothing does?

DUKE

Then we'll send a few people on a pointless trip.

STEVE

I don't believe you.

DUKE

Look if the shit hit's the fan I've said I'll take
full responsibility and make sure you're not in the
firing line.

STEVE

Thanks I appreciate the offer but that's not exactly
the point is it?

DUKE

Are you done?

STEVE

For now, but this situation won't just disappear.
(Beat) Say I'm suppose to meet your sister in a
while, why don't you come with us?

DUKE

I might do. How's it going with you guys?

STEVE

Yeah its going well I think, guess time will tell.

DUKE

At least you've managed to speak to her.

STEVE

Shut up.

INT. RUSSIAN SPACE FACILITY

Emily and a Russian scientist are discussing the mounting
problems facing their Russian bid.

RUSSIAN SCIENTIST

The engines are the only good thing about this
project.

EMILY

That's hardly surprising, it's the only bit of
technology this countries spent money on in the past
ten years.

RUSSIAN SCIENTIST

It is unfortunate that funding is a major problem for us. Now we have some money progress can move forward but as always at the start things go slower than we would like. To be perfectly honest we still need more funding.

EMILY

I know, how about our recycling troubles? Are we any closer to finding a solution?

RUSSIAN SCIENTIST

Neit. We have spoken to several outsider companies with no real solutions as yet. This is worrying for us no?

EMILY

It's wasting time and money that we can't afford to.

The Russian minister enters the room.

RUSSIAN MINISTER KELTZ

Emily, how are you?

EMILY

Minster Keltz. Please excuse us Tomsk.

RUSSIAN SCIENTIST

Certainly.

The Russian scientist leaves the room.

EMILY

How may I help you minister?

RUSSIAN MINISTER KELTZ

Ah, I am only here as a means to get out of the office and see how far along we've come.

EMILY

Well we are still suffering from the recycling situation, I believe it will eventually require more funding in order to make sure we can still compete in this race.

RUSSIAN MINISTER KELTZ

The government is aware of your limitations in finances.

EMILY

So they will grant us more?

RUSSIAN MINISTER KELTZ

Not at present.

EMILY

Minister may I be blunt and point out that if we don't receive the funding quickly there is every possibility that we won't be the first team on mars.

RUSSIAN MINISTER KELTZ

Da, again the government is also aware of this.

EMILY

And yet they do nothing?

RUSSIAN MINISTER KELTZ

For now you must do the best you can with what you have.

EMILY

Minister, I can do a lot better if I have all the information available to me. Is there something you're not telling me?

RUSSIAN MINISTER KELTZ

Emily when you need to know you will. Until then just do the job we pay you to do.

The Russian minister exits leaving Emily fuming.

INT. VICE PRESIDENTS OFFICE

The vice president has called Duke into his office. He is joined by an oil executive.

VICE PRESIDENT

Duke have a seat. I'd like you to meet Kent Hampshire. The reason I called you here is because our situation has changed a little, but with a project like this you have expect that.

DUKE

Okay.

VICE PRESIDENT

Kent is from the Exxon mobile group. They've negotiated a deal for rights to the oil on mars. With the costs being so high it looks good in the eyes of the people if we can be seen to be saving them money. And that's what this deal does.

DUKE

What does this mean for me?

KENT HAMPSHIRE

We've heard a lot about your progress and I'm pleased to say that we're not looking to change that.

VICE PRESIDENT

This administrations got a lot of faith in you as well Duke.

DUKE

Thanks.

VICE PRESIDENT

Don't worry you'll still be in control of this. Exxon want more input in the oil departments and I'm sure you'll have no objections to that. But in terms of the space race, they haven't really got much in that area.

KENT

Yeah that's true.

DUKE

So that's all this meeting was?

VICE PRESIDENT

You're a senior manager Duke and we need to make sure you're aware of all changes that affect you. I know being new to a senior position you may not be used to that.

DUKE

No, I know. Some things still catch you of guard every now and then.

VICE PRESIDENT

I know what you mean. But you're a good guy Duke, you'll go far.

INT. DUKES OFFICE

Duke is sat in his office looking at the ceiling for help. Clutching his face and rubbing his eyes he shows the pressure of his secret and the strains of the job. Felicity walks in to the open office.

FLICK

Duke? (Beat) Are you okay?

DUKE

What? Yeah, yeah I'm fine.

FLICK

You sure? You don't look great.

DUKE

Yeah, no don't worry. What did you want?

FLICK

Me and Steve are going for lunch if you want to join us? We haven't seen much of you for a while.

DUKE

I'm not sure I've got time, there's so much paper work to do.

FLICK

I'm not going to take no for an answer.

DUKE

Alright fine, I'll be right behind you.

FLICK

Good. Come on.

Duke throws his pen down on his desk, grabs his coat and follows his sister out the door.

EXT. RUSSIAN PARLIAMENT BUILDING

The Russian minister is delivering a statement to the media on the steps of an old worn building.

RUSSIAN MINISTER KELTZ

Due to circumstances beyond our control, the Russian Government no longer feels that a mission to mars is a viable option. Therefore we would like to take this opportunity to announce our withdrawal. I would like to personally thank all those people involved in the project up until this point. All their hard work means they have made advancements in areas that go beyond this project alone and these can and will improve Russia in other ways. To the Russian people I would like to thank you for all your support in this matter.

The media circus is desperate in asking question however Minister Keltz ignores their requests turning around and walking into the state building behind.

INT. RUSSIAN PARLIAMENT HALLWAY

Shortly after entering the building the minister is confronted by an angry looking Emily.

EMILY

You son of a, this is how you decide to tell me that my project is cancelled?

RUSSIAN MINISTER KELTZ

Calm down Emily. This isn't a decision we've come to lightly.

EMILY

It's a decision you've come to without informing me! How long have you known about this?

RUSSIAN MINISTER KELTZ

I'll not lie. It's been discussed for some time now, though the actual decision was only reach yesterday.

EMILY

And what's the reasoning behind this?

RUSSIAN MINISTER KELTZ

Our country is in a state of change. It has been for some time I'm sure you're aware. This said it would be seen as damaging should we as a country fail to win this race.

EMILY

You're saying you didn't have faith in me to complete my objective?

RUSSIAN MINISTER KELTZ

No. I'm saying we don't have confidence in our finances and to some extent our abilities to compete with the other two nations.

EMILY

So you don't have faith in me?

RUSSIAN MINISTER KELTZ

Emily answer me this; could you win this race with a budget half that or even a third that size of your competitors?

EMILY

Providing we had the correct equipment.

RUSSIAN MINISTER KELTZ

And you and I both know we don't. So let's not argue. There is simply no feasible way to have won this race with what we've given you.

EMILY

So what now?

RUSSIAN MINISTER KELTZ

We will be in contact with you before the end of the week with another project.

EMILY

Assuming the pay is correct.

RUSSIAN MINISTER KELTZ

Da, of course.

EMILY

I don't like leaving things unfinished.

RUSSIAN MINISTER KELTZ

Neither do I. Now let us have a drink to forget this unfortunate situation.

The Russian minister leads Emily down the corridor.

INT. OVAL OFFICE

The President, Vice President, a Chinese minister, an American and Chinese oil executive and Duke are in a meeting.

PRESIDENT

How's the project going?

DUKE

Nothing's changed since my last meeting Harry. Which makes me wonder why I was called here in the first place?

PRESIDENT

That's where you're wrong Duke. A situation like this is always changing. Have you heard about the Russians?

DUKE

Yes sir. I think it was harder to miss.

PRESIDENT

After that announcement the chiefs and I had a meeting to assess our position. It was at that point we decided to contact the Chinese.

DUKE

Okay. (Confused)

PRESIDENT

We came to an agreement to make this a joint venture between our two nations.

DUKE

Excuse me?

VICE PRESIDENT

Duke in this type of financial climate a race just wasn't a desirable option. If we combined our efforts then we can save time and money, as well as both benefitting from the rewards.

DUKE

With all respect sir, it's only desirable for them because they were bound to lose the race.

(To Chinese Official)

No offence.

MR YANGZHEE

None taken.

PRESIDENT

That may have been the case, but it's something that you cannot guarantee one hundred percent. And since the decision has been made you'll have to get used to it.

DUKE

So who's in-charge of the project now? Us or the Chinese?

VICE PRESIDENT

Both. You'll be in control of our side of the operations and Mr Yangzhee will be in control of the Chinese side. You'll be required to do a lot more liaising than before, especially with Mr Yangzhee. Don't worry his English is perfect.

MR YANGZHEE

Indeed it's something I look forward to.

DUKE

What about our oil investors? Or the Chinese's?

KENT HAMPSHIRE

It's something both our companies are in agreement with. Halving the costs on a project with so much risk is something both sides welcome. Besides billion dollar profit margins are still just that

and now there's no risk one side will be left empty handed.

DUKE

Okay then.

VICE PRESIDENT

Your fine with this Duke? Because now's the time to bring up any reservations you have?

DUKE

Actually I'm surprised something like this didn't happen sooner.

PRESIDENT

Ha, that's why we like you Duke. Carry with what you're doing. Any problems let Harry know. I think that's about it for now.

INT. ENGINE DEVELOPEMENT ROOM

Duke is talking with Tom Linford.

DUKE

How can it possibly be worse?

TOM

Since we've been looking for new ways to develop the solar power our experiments have thrown up the concept of distance.

DUKE

How did you manage to miss that?

TOM

Even guys like us can overlook things sometimes.

DUKE

So what does this do to the equation?

TOM

The solar panels are built and tested on earth. But with the distance mars is away from the sun means that the light intensity there will be similar to wearing sunglasses here on earth.

DUKE

Will the panels still work?

TOM

Yes, but there'll be a drop in power by ten to twenty percent by the time we reach mars.

DUKE

You can't get them past eighty percent now.

TOM

I know. It's what we're still working on. But Duke the extra lose in power will add another six months to the journey.

DUKE

Six months? That's unacceptable.

TOM

Believe me I've spent the last month working on this. But at the moment we've got to consider the possibility this journey could be fifteen months. I'm not sure we're cut out for that length of expedition.

DUKE

Dammit! You're sure there's no way around this?

TOM

I'm not saying we won't find a solution, but it may take longer than you expect.

DUKE

What about the Chinese? Have you spoken to their engineers?

TOM

Are you kidding? There in worse shape than us, I can't believe we made this a joint operation in the first place. There's no way we would have lost to them, even with our engines in the shape they are.

DUKE

Guess I'll have to tell the big men there's a serious problem.

TOM

Rather you than me.

DUKE

Don't I know it. Look keep working on this and tell me the second you have anything positive. Though I'm not holding my breath.

INT. HOTEL ROOM

Emily is packing a suitcase preparing to move when her phone rings.

EMILY

Emily Epstien. (Beat) You're sure of this? (Beat) Cancel? (Beat) Would they consider working with the Russians? (Beat) Of course the Chinese would be the harder sell, I'm sure America would welcome it. (Beat) I'm meeting him in twenty minutes I'll call you after.

Emily hangs up the phone then dials another number.

EMILY

Hi can you tell me when the next flight to Washington from Moscow is please? Yes I'll hold.

INT. OVAL OFFICE WAITING AREA

Duke is preparing to speak to the President. Steve has accompanied him for support.

DUKE

I appreciate you coming all the way to Washington Steve.

STEVE

You looked like you needed the support.

DUKE

Are you kidding? I've got to tell the president we've spent thirty billion on a ship that can't go where it's supposed to.

STEVE

I think this is a blessing.

DUKE

I don't think he's going to like the news.

STEVE

Not that. This is the opportunity we've been waiting for Duke. We'll finally be able to pull out of this thing without being found out.

DUKE

I never even thought about that.

STEVE

I've been telling you you've got too wrapped up in this. Now's your chance to get out in one piece while you still can.

DUKE

You know you're right.

STEVE

You know I am. If we're lucky we may still get to avoid jail.

The Oval Office door opens and Harry leans out.

HARRY

Duke get in here.

Harry goes back into the Oval Office.

DUKE

Wish me luck.

Duke follows Harry into the Oval Office and the door is shut behind him with a secret service agent guarding it.

INT. OVAL OFFICE

PRESIDENT

Duke.

DUKE

Mr President. Firstly I'd like to start by saying...

PRESIDENT

Hold that thought Duke. I want you to meet Emily Epstein.

EMILY

James Duke right?

DUKE

Yeah.

Duke and Emily shake hands.

PRESIDENT

You're probably unaware who Emily is.

VICE PRESIDENT

She was the Russians senior personnel on their mars project.

PRESIDENT

Don't be fooled by her accent Duke. She's American, but her services are for hire to those with the right cash.

EMILY

And the right attitude sir.

PRESIDENT

It means she's a real bitch. But one that will see her job through until the end. This is why she's here.

TOM

It would seem she has a solution to our problem.

DUKE

What problem would that be?

EMILY

Your engines or more specifically the solar panels.

DUKE

And how would you know about that?

VICE PRESIDENT

That's a question we all would like to know the answer to, but I don't think we're going to get it.

DUKE

Mr President I assume Tom has told you of our predicament then?

PRESIDENT

It wasn't Tom's fault. I had a phone call from Emily and wanted to know firsthand if this was the case. So I called Tom directly, then organised this meeting.

DUKE

You didn't come to me?

PRESIDENT

I wanted to know the engine situation so I called the engineer. If I need to know the project as a whole I would have called you. You've got too much going on to worry about this, especially if it turned out to be a rouse.

VICE PRESIDENT

That being said Duke; you should really hear what the girl has to say.

EMILY

I am not a girl, I'm a woman, try to remember that.

VICE PRESIDENT

I apologise.

EMILY

For some time now the Russians have put a substantial amount of time and money into developing their solar power, particularly for space flight. As a result the Russians have fully operational engines for a mars mission, which will allow you travel time of three months or less. Each way of course.

DUKE

I'm confused as to why you stopped you're attempt?

EMILY

In short this was about the only area the Russians were ahead in.

DUKE

So what do you want in exchange for them?

EMILY

Obviously for technology like this we'll ask for an equal share of the oil.

DUKE

Equal?

PRESIDENT

As equal as can be, they want thirty four percent.

EMILY

With joint input and control in line with that of what you and the Chinese have.

PRESIDENT

Naturally. (Beat) Duke with situations like this I like to listen to those with the knowledge. So I'm going to ask you two questions. Firstly; can we complete the mission without these engines?

DUKE

Honestly, no sir. That's what I thought this meeting was originally about.

PRESIDENT

Okay. Secondly; can we complete the mission with the engines?

DUKE

Assuming they're as good as she say's...

EMILY

She has a name, and they're as good.

DUKE

If they're as good as Emily say's then it's the only component left that's stopping us. So yes we can complete the mission.

PRESIDENT

Then providing your engines can pass the tests Tom has, it would be an honour to have the Russian working with us. Providing you can convince the Chinese.

EMILY

I have ways of making people come around to my kind of thinking.

VICE PRESIDENT

I'm sure you do.

DUKE

Just one question sir, who on the Russian side will I be working with?

PRESIDENT

Emily of course.

DUKE

Right, of course.

INT. OVAL OFFICE WAITING AREA

Duke exits the Oval Office and is greeted by a relieved looking Steve.

STEVE

That must have been rough? How'd it go?

DUKE

Could have gone better.

STEVE

Hey at least we're in the clear now right?

DUKE

Not exactly.

STEVE

What do you mean? I thought there was no way round this problem?

DUKE

Turns out the President had a solution.

STEVE

You saying their still going to mars?

DUKE

Looks that way.

Emily enters from the Oval Office.

EMILY

Duke. It looks like we're going to be working together in the near future. (Emily steps in towards Duke and grabs his shirt and tie, he offers no resistance) But I warn you, if you try and cross me or the Russian interests I represent then you'll regret it.

DUKE

I hear you.

EMILY

Good (Releases her grip and steps back). Now where shall we go for lunch? It's been a while since I've been in Washington.

DUKE

Lunch?

EMILY

(Walking away) Come on, it may have been a while but I'm sure I can find a good place still.

STEVE

Is she the reason?

DUKE

Don't.

STEVE

She's seems feisty.

EMILY O.S

DUKE!

DUKE

She is.

Duke runs off to catch up with Emily.

INT. AMERICAN DEVELOPMENT ROOM

Emily, Duke and a selection of engineers are testing the Russian engines.

AMERICAN ENGINEER

Yar it's an amazing piece of equipment. The amount of power this thing puts out is incredible. Its design is like nothing else out there yar. Who came up with this?

RUSSIAN ENGINEER

It's of Russian design. Something we've been working on for a while now. No one man's design, a team effort. Maybe one day it will replace the need for oil no?

AMERICAN ENGINEER

Yar I'll say. If you can build enough panels.

RUSSIAN ENGINEER

And therein lays the problem. Each solar panel alone costs ten million dollars.

DUKE

Ten million dollars?

RUSSIAN ENGINEER

For one panel yes, and there are eight per engine. It's the diamonds involved in the construction.

DUKE

Are you telling me each engine costs eighty million dollars?

EMILY

Actually it's closer to a hundred. What with all the components involved in the actual engine. Remember that it's only the panels that cost ten million each.

DUKE

I can see why we couldn't develop ours.

AMERICAN ENGINEER

Yar I suppose she's holding back on the fact we need four of these?

DUKE

Four?

EMILY

Its okay we've brought an extra along with us.

DUKE

Five hundred million, just on engines?

EMILY

No one said going to mars would be cheap.

DUKE

How long until we can adapt these to suit us?

AMERICAN ENGINEER

Each engine is already assembled which helps yar. Assuming the integration is swift, with this level of technology it should be, about two weeks.

DUKE

For each engine?

AMERICAN ENGINEER

Oh no, all four.

EMILY

Nikolayev will help you with the installation.

DUKE

What you don't trust us?

EMILY

No. And with Russian technology the benefits of a Russian technician are foretold. But Duke I've never trusted anyone with five hundred million dollars worth of equipment before, so don't feel singled out.

Another engineer enters the room.

AMERICAN ENGINEER 2 (O.S.)

Duke phone call, it's the Vice President.

DUKE

I better take this.

EMILY

Take your time.

INT. DUKES OFFICE

Duke returns to his office to see the Vice president sitting there.

VICE PRESIDENT

Duke! Makes a change for me to swing by your office hey? Come in sit down, sit down.

DUKE

You said it was important on the phone.

VICE PRESIDENT

It is I'm in a hurry.

DUKE

Oh.

VICE PRESIDENT

Don't worry; I'm sure you'll like the news. In fact I'm certain.

DUKE

Ok.

VICE PRESIDENT

How are the engines coming along?

DUKE

Well the engineer reckons it'll be about two weeks before their adapted to our systems and installed.

VICE PRESIDENT

Good, it's good to see things finally moving along. How long until you'll be ready for flight?

DUKE

Another two months. Is that it sir?

VICE PRESIDENT

No, no. What I'm really here for is, well the crew.

DUKE

The crew?

VICE PRESIDENT

Yes. Look to start with the idea was for a ten man team. But with three countries involved now we've decided to reduce it to nine people, three from each country.

DUKE

Seems fair.

VICE PRESIDENT

Don't get me started on that. Anyway, the deal is to send one astronaut, oil professional with drilling expertise and a scientist all with some space training completed.

DUKE

Okay.

VICE PRESIDENT

The President and I want you to go as our science advisor.

DUKE

What!?

VICE PRESIDENT

We want you to go to mars Duke.

DUKE

Me?

VICE PRESIDENT

Yes provisionally. You would have to pass some psych tests and do zero gravity training of course. This is assuming you want to be considered for it?

DUKE

It's a bit of a shock.

VICE PRESIDENT

You'd become one of the first people ever on mars. It's an incredible opportunity and you're lucky to have it.

DUKE

Well yes. Yes Mr Vice President, I'd be honoured.

VICE PRESIDENT

Great, The President will be thrilled. It was his idea after all. As long as you pass the psych test and zero gravity you should be going. I've got to shot off to L.A. now. All the details will be sent to your desk by the end of the day. First thing tomorrow you'll start training.

DUKE

Tomorrow?

VICE PRESIDENT

People spend year's training before they get to fly into space you've only got two months. You'll need all the training you can get. Time is a wasting Duke. Good luck and I'll speak to you soon.

DUKE

Okay see you Harry, and thanks.

The Vice President exits.

DUKE

Wow.

INT. INTERVIEW ROOM

Duke is sitting at a desk with a psychologist. He's asking random questions and showing Duke Ink blots to describe.

PSYCHOLOGIST

Tell me James, if you found a wallet in the street filled with a hundred dollars, what would you do?

DUKE

You want an honest answer?

PSYCHOLOGIST

That is the idea of this exam.

DUKE

Then I'd hand it over to the police, minus a hundred dollars.

PSYCHOLOGIST

Uh huh. (Notes down the answer) Now say upon opening the wallet you were drawn first not to the money but the senior citizens card.

DUKE

Ah. Then I would hand it all over.

PSYCHOLOGIST

Uh huh. (Notes down the answer) Can you explain your reasoning as to why this is?

DUKE

Well, subconsciously I guess I would see the a younger person being able to take that kind of loss, after all they would have more time left to make it up again.

PSYCHOLOGIST

Uh huh (notes down the answer).

A senior astronaut opens the exam room to interrupt.

SENIOR ASTRONAUT

You done here doc? The rest of the crew is waiting at the pool if he can join them?

PSYCHOLOGIST

Well ideally I would like a few months to work with James to make sure there are no underlying hidden

problems to deal with. But since the President wants this done fast, then in my opinion there is no preliminary disorder that would inhibit James for this type of travel.

DUKE

Thanks Doc.

PSYCHOLOGIST

Not that there is a base marker for this length of trip. It'll be written in my report that I strongly advise taking someone with more training and experience instead.

SENIOR ASTRONAUT

Duly noted. Apart from that he's good to go?

PSYCHOLOGIST

Apart from that yes.

SENIOR ASTRONAUT

Come on then Duke, it's time for the fun part.

INT. ZERO GRAVITY TRAINING

A crowd of people are gathered by a large swimming pool. Some are Chinese some Russian. Eight of them are in spacesuits, with four others in jumpsuits. Duke approaches the group quickly acknowledging he's late with a raised hand, also dressed in a spacesuit and moving awkwardly.

DUKE

Sorry I'm late.

LEADING INSTRUCTOR

You passed psych then. Eagles is going to be pissed, he was looking forward to taking your spot.

DUKE

I'm good to go.

LEADING INSTRUCTOR

The three people in orange jumpsuits like mine are your instructors. There's Greg, Marlon and Mia. You'll listen to anything they have to say. From this moment on we have the power to stop any of you going on this trip if we don't think you're suited to it. That includes Russian and Chinese members also present. For some of you there will be only two months to get adapted to your environment. Now I need you to gather in two groups. People

representing scientists for each county on one side everyone else on the other.

The crowd disperse into a group of three and six, with Duke in the three where he sees Emily is also present.

LEADING INSTRUCTOR

(Addressing the six others)

I hope I'm right in saying that all six of you have completed at least basic training and experienced a parabolic flight?

All members nod their heads giving a general's census of yes.

LEADING INSTRUCTOR

Good then you're main efforts in the next two months will be how to establish a base on Mars and setting up drilling apparatus. You'll be working with Marlon and Greg. You three will learn the basics with me and Mia.

DUKE

(To Emily)

What are you doing here?

EMILY

(To Duke)

I'm the Russian science advisor. More to the point what are you doing here?

DUKE

(To Emily)

I'm the American science advisor.

EMILY

(To Duke)

Pah, since when have you had astronaut training?

DUKE

(To Emily)

And you have?

EMILY

(To Duke)

Two years cosmonaut training in Russia.

DUKE

(To Emily)

Oh.

LEADING INSTRUCTOR

You two finished?

DUKE

Sorry.

LEADING INSTRUCTOR

Duke, you're the only member without any space training. To be honest I'm very surprised your even here so listen. The suits your in are what you'll be required to wear on the surface or anywhere with no oxygen. At thirty eight percent gravity on the surface you should notice some substantial differences.

MIA

You'll also experience zero gravity whilst in space flight. Lucky for you these now suits are equipped with magnets in the feet and rear so you'll be able to sit and walk similar to that on earth.

LEADING INSTRUCTOR

Okay first things first, would you all put your helmets on.

Each member puts his up, Duke after a little struggle.

MIA

It's important to know your helmet is secured properly, so each time you do this have another member check that it is sealed correctly. Do that now.

All three members check each other's helmets.

MIA

Good now enable your oxygen.

Each turns theirs on.

LEADING INSTRUCTOR

Now step onto the cage over the pool. Then Mia will lower you into the water.

All three step on a steel grate platform suspended over the water. When onboard Mia closes a small gate and the leading Instructor starts lowering the cage.

MIA

The water will go some way to showing you the effects of zero gravity.

DUKE

Holy crap.

MIA

The natural instinct is to take a deep breath. There is no need just breath normally.

DUKE

This is unreal.

MIA

Once you're fully under you training will really begin.

TWO MONTHS LATER

INT. CLASSROOM

The nine crew members are sitting behind desks. The vice president is addressing them.

VICE PRESIDENT

Tomorrows the big day people. Who'd have thought just sixteen months ago that we would make the biggest find in human history? And that would inspire the greatest project ever envisaged by man. This will be unlike the moon landings forty odd years ago. When people look back on the mars mission they will see three countries working together. Working for the future of their nations and the future of man. Tonight will be the last night for you on earth for close to a year. I advise you to spend it well, rejoice, enjoy but most importantly, makes sure your here at eight a.m. sharp, I'm sure no of you will want to miss this. Dismissed people.

EMILY

(To Duke)

Inspiring speech.

DUKE

(To Emily)

Maybe we could use it when we land.

Sasha Hamilton approaches them.

SASHA

Have you two got any plans for tonight?

DUKE

I've got dinner with my sister and a friend.

EMILY

A long hot bath in my hotel room. You?

SASHA

A quiet evening with the husband. I'll, see you two tomorrow. Hope you're looking forward to me driving.

Sasha Exits.

DUKE

You really just having a bath tonight?

EMILY

We'll yeah. It's that a problem?

DUKE

No. I just thought last night here for a while; you'd spend it with someone?

EMILY

Duke I've spent the last five years in Moscow. I've never really gotten to know many people where I go and in the past three months there hasn't been much opportunity to either.

DUKE

Then come to dinner with me.

EMILY

I don't think so.

DUKE

My sister and her boyfriend would be there to.

EMILY

Oh I see a double date then?

DUKE

If you don't like it there will always be time for a bath afterwards.

EMILY

Okay why not. But you can pay.

DUKE

Great, I'll pick you from your hotel at eight?

EMILY

Sure.

DUKE

I'll see you then.

INT. RESTUARANT NIGHT

Duke, Emily, Felicity and Steve are sat at a table enjoying their evening. Their telling stories and there is a general happiness in the air.

FLICK

Come on, tell us more.

EMILY

There's not much more to tell. After that I ended up in Russia, and apart from quick stop off's it's only really in the past three months I've been back.

STEVE

It's cold in Russia right?

EMILY

There were times when I wished for a nice hot sunny beach. But the companies I worked for always made sure I was in a top hotel with lots of heating. I feel for the poorer people in that country.

DUKE

Texas can get cold as well you know.

FLICK

Hardly. I've not seen snowfall since we've been working there.

DUKE

Yeah but a couple of times I've had to wear a jumper.

Everyone shares a small laugh.

FLICK

Would you excuse me, I need to go to the bathroom.

EMILY

I'll join you.

Emily and Felicity exit.

DUKE

Why do women do that?

STEVE

Duke?

DUKE

Don't do it. Not tonight.

STEVE

What?

DUKE

I know what you're going to say, you've got that tone in your voice.

STEVE

Are you really going to go through with this?

DUKE

There's not much else I can do is there?

STEVE

You're flying to mars in the morning!

DUKE

I tried to take the only chance we had to stop this, but when the president wants to do something, there's not much stopping him.

STEVE

People are getting suspicious at NASA. Most of them have been working with you since this started, but a lot of them are returning to what they were doing before. It won't be long until they start asking questions?

DUKE

Then let them ask, they won't be able to prove anything will they? And by this time tomorrow I'll be far enough away they won't be able to do anything if they could.

STEVE

I'll still be here though. And you'll have to come back at some point.

DUKE

You're always being negative. Something could still happen that can change all of this. Maybe there will actually be oil on mars.

STEVE

I'm being negative because I can't spend the rest of my life in jail!

Flick and Emily return to the table.

FLICK

What are you two arguing about?

DUKE

Nothing! Look our food's here now.

A waiter brings over food to the table.

FLICK

Ok, touchy subject.

DUKE

Let's just enjoy the rest of the night.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Duke is dropping of Emily.

DUKE

I'm sorry for getting upset earlier. It had nothing to do with you.

EMILY

I'm sure you had your reasons.

DUKE

Are you nervous about tomorrow?

EMILY

Ask me again in twelve hours.

DUKE

Right. I guess I'll see you in the morning then?

EMILY

Duke.

DUKE

What?

EMILY

There'll be plenty of time to get to know each other soon. There's no need to rush anything.

DUKE

I'm not sure I know what you're talking about.

Emily leans in and gives Duke a quick thank you kiss the steps out of the car.

EMILY

I'll see you in the morning.

Emily closes the car door and walks off.

EXT. SPACECRAFT LAUNCH PAD

A large space craft sits on a take-off pad. The sky is clear and a large crowd is formed in the distance.

INT. SPACECRAFT COCKPIT

The nine crew members are all strapped in to their seats with a few engineers are clearing up tools and exiting the spacecraft. Sasha Hamilton is talking to Houston command.

SASHA

Area one checked operational.

INT. HOUSTON COMMAND

A large room is lined with computer desks all facing towards a large screen situated at the front. The screen is currently showing a picture of the spacecraft on its launch pad. People are gathered around individual computers some are moving quickly around handing over information. The camera tracks to an office overlooking the main area.

INT. HOUSTON COMMAND CONTROL

The president of the U.S., Russian President Benin and Chinese Chairman Cong are sitting in the room watching screens of the space launch. Also present are the Vice president and two senior members from Houston Command in charge of the space mission. Oslow is wearing a headset to communicate to the outside.

CHIEF OSLOW FENCHURN

(Over comm.)

Roger area four secure and operational.

SUB-CHIEF MARTIN EPPS

(To leaders)

Not long now, another five minutes then they should be in space.

RUSSIAN PRESIDENT BENIN

In all my time I have yet to see even a single ship take off for space.

CHINESE CHAIRMAN CONG

Indeed, I too share this.

PRESIDENT

Then you're in for a treat. This one should blow away anything I've ever seen before.

MARTIN EPPS

This should be like nothing any of us has seen before.

INT. SPACECRAFT COCKPIT

Back inside the cockpit the crew members look nervous waiting for the take off.

SASHA

Roger warming up engines. Engine one online, engine two online.

INT. HOUSTON COMMAND CONTROL

Oslow is listening to the crew through his headset.

OSLOW FENCHURN

(Over comm.)

Roger.

(Over speaker to Houston Command Floor)

Sixty Seconds people, repeat sixty seconds.

INT. SPACECRAFT COCKPIT

Sasha is going over the last few of her checks.

RUSSIAN DRILL COMMANDER VSEVOLOD

Take great comfort friends in knowing that if this thing explodes your families will be saved the expense of cremation.

This generates a few laughs but nervousness remains.

EMILY

Shut up Vsevolod.

INT. HOUSTON COMMAND CONTROL

Oslow continues to speak on his headset. All other people in this room are now transfixed on the T.V. screens.

OSLOW FENCHURN

It's all on us now Sasha relax.

Suddenly a loud speaker in the command area burst to life.

SPEAKER

Ten, nine, eight, seven...

INT. SPACECRAFT COCKPIT

The speaker can just about be heard counting down from outside.

SASHA

This is it people brace yourselves and remember your training.

SPEAKER

Three, two, one...

EXT. SPACECRAFT LAUNCH PAD

The ship shows the first signs of a take-off. Fumes blow out two enormous exhausts. Fire and clouds of smoke can be seen in masses and the ship slowly starts to move upwards.

INT. HOUSTON COMMAND CONTROL

Everyone involved is now glued to their screens.

PRESIDENT

Would you look at that.

RUSSIAN PRESIDENT BENIN

Phenomenal is how you say?

PRESIDENT

That's one way of putting it.

INT. SPACECRAFT COCKPIT

Turbulence is causing everything inside to shake, with all members feeling the effects of the G forces.

DUKE

I feel so heavy.

SASHA

It's the G forces.

VSEVOLOD

It's cool.

INT. HOUSTON COMMAND CONTROL

Breaking his attention away from the screen, Oslow looks to another screen showing data of the launch.

OSLOW FENCHURN

Santa Maria, we are engaging second thrust now, repeat engaging second trust now.

VICE PRESIDENT

Second thrust?

MARTIN EPPS

Due to the immense size of the ship a second thrust is necessary to extend it beyond our atmosphere.

VICE PRESIDENT

Oh.

INT. SPACECRAFT COCKPIT

The crew receives the message over their comm.

SASHA

Alright people brace again

EXT. SPACECRAFT LAUNCH MID FLIGHT

The space craft is shown about forty thousand feet above the earth. The fire coming out the exhausts is now followed by a long white cloud trailing back to earth. Suddenly the orange flames turn to a hot white colour and the ship is shown gaining more speed rapidly.

INT. SPACECRAFT COCKPIT

VSEVOLOD

This does not feel good.

CHINESE ASTRONAUT JI

Very bad, my head is going to burst.

INT. HOUSTON COMMAND CONTROL

OSLOW FENCHURN

(Over comm.)

Clear in three, two, and one. Santa Maria you are now free from our gravitational pull. Continue on launch engines until empty then disengage and prepare for stage two.

PRESIDENT

Is that it?

OSLOW FENCHURN

For now. Their burn what little fuel they have left from these engines then float really while they do assessments and changes for the second stage.

CHINESE CHAIRMAN CONG

Assessments?

OSLOW FENCHURN

Yes sir. To certain if they received any damage during take-off and to put in place the four solar panels required to take them the rest of the way.

EXT. SPACECRAFT SPACE

The last of the engines burning comes to an end. Small clips and compressed air blow as the take-off engines are disconnected from the main spacecraft.

INT. SPACECRAFT COCKPIT

As the nine members unseat themselves they start to float around the ship. When their feet hit the floor they are held in place by the magnets. A growing sense of relief flows over the crew before they commit to their required jobs.

SASHA

(Over comm.)

Houston command stage one is complete. Preparation for stage two is now in progress over.

DUKE

That was incredible.

SASHA

That second thrust really took it out of me. That's was unlike any takeoffs I've experienced before.

VSEVOLOD

Da it is no good for the nausea. Me and Matvei will look over compartment one.

SASHA

Okay, Duke and Emily take compartment two; Ji and Huan-Yue take compartment three. That leaves Sheng Li and Anthony to do compartment four; I'll continue the status check.

All members wander off content with what they have to do.

SASHA

(Over comm.)

Santa Maria Leader one to Houston, status check is commencing over?

INT. HOUSTON COMMAND CONTROL

In command control only Oslow and Mike are still present.

OSLOW FENCHURN

(Over comm.)

Roger Santa Maria I will remain in contact for updates, over.

MIKE EPPS

First part went to plan then?

OSLOW FENCHURN

There's still a long way to go. I won't be satisfied until all nine are back on solid ground. And that's not for another nine months.

EXT. SPACECRAFT SPACE

Four people in space suits are outside checking the exterior of the ship.

CHINESE OIL EXPERT SHENG LI

Everything appears fine. No extreme stresses or damage to report.

INT. SPACECRAFT AIRLOCK

Anthony is standing at a screen monitoring Sheng Li.

AMERICAN OIL EXPERT ANTHONY

Okay Sheng Li, That's the last section. Come back to the air lock and I'll get you in.

SHENG LI (Over Monitor)

Okay on my way.

INT. SPACECRAFT COCKPIT

Sasha is going over the last of her instrument checks when the crew starts to return. Vsevolod and Matvei come back first.

SASHA

Anything to report?

RUSSIAN COSMONAUT MATVEI

Everything checked out. Section one is clear and the solar panels are fine.

Ji and Huan-Yue enter.

CHINESE SCIENTIST HUAN-YUE

Section three outer is fine.

JI

However the solar panels came off their runners and received damage.

SASHA

Are they useable?

HUAN-YUE

No. They need to be replaced.

SASHA

That's why we brought a spare.

VSEVOLOD

Yes but we only have the one.

Anthony and Sheng Li enter to a nervous looking crew.

ANTHONY

Section four is fine no damaged to the outside or panels.

SASHA

One to go then.

ANTHONY

What's going on?

SASHA

We've got a broken solar panel in section three. If there's any more we're going nowhere but home.

Duke and Emily enter.

SASHA

Tell us its good news?

DUKE

Everything's fine...

Matvei steps in and hugs Duke.

MATVEI

Thank you, you beautiful man.

DUKE

(Pushing Matvei away)

What's going on?

SASHA

The panel in compartment three is damaged. Thankfully it's the only so one we can replace it with the spare and finally get on moving with this journey.

VSEVOLOD

Red beast that haunts my dreams, soon we shall be together.

All members look at Vsevolod with slightly amused concern.

INT. NASA RESEARCH LAB

Two scientists are going over mars samples.

SCIENTIST 3

Well that's the last of these samples.

SCIENTIST 4

And?

SCIENTIST 3

It's the same as the others. There's no oil present in these.

SCIENTIST 4

Okay let's have a break. I need to call David and report this anyway.

SCIENTIST 3

You don't have to tell me twice.

Scientist 3 exits and Scientist 4 goes over to a phone.

SCIENTIST 4

(Over telephone)

Hi David its Paul, I've just finished going over the Delta Four samples we got from mars. (Beat) That's right these are the ones taken in the same area in which the oil was found. The thing is these are all negative there's no oil in them. (Beat) Sure I'll have a report done by the end of the day; I'll speak to you soon.

INT. SPACECRAFT COCKPIT

All nine members are once again in their seats waiting for the next stage.

SASHA

(Over comm.)

Houston Command, all four solar panels are on their runners and ready for deployment over.

HUAN-YUE

This is remarkable.

ANTHONY

Yeah, let's just hope our Russian engines can do what their designed for.

EMILY

They will.

VSEVOLOD

Russian engineering is still up there with the best my American friend.

SASHA

Well we're about to find out, engaging stage two.

EXT. SPACECRAFT SPACE

Out of either side of the ship come four blue mirrors, two on either side. Starting off small they expand becoming incredibly large.

INT. SPACECRAFT COCKPIT

The crew are examining monitors of the event.

VSEVOLOD

Where exactly are the engines?

DUKE

They're already in place.

EMILY

The panels relay the power to them. It's impractical to have them alongside the panels.

SASHA

Power increasing, were at eighty eight percent, ninety five, hundred and two.

EMILY

Can we begin?

SASHA

(Over comm.)

Houston Command this is Santa Maria. Power is above maximum, holding steady at one, one three. Requesting permission to enter stage two over.

INT. HOUSTON COMMAND

Oslow is standing in the main room looking at the large screen dominating the room; it is now filled with data. People are standing and sitting behind desks continuing to work.

OSLOW FENCHURN

(Over comm.)

Roger Santa Maria this is Houston Command. Everything looks good from our end, permission to enter stage two granted. Good luck Santa Maria and God speed.

INT. SPACECRAFT

The message is received by the crew.

SASHA

(Over comm.)

Roger Houston Command, see you in nine short months
Santa Maria out.

DUKE

So this is it?

SASHA

Buckle up people we're going to pull a few g's in
this acceleration too.

Everyone tries to get as comfortable as possible in their
seats.

SASHA (cont.)

Here we go.

Sasha pulls a few switches and the engines engage.

EXT. SPACECRAFT SPACE

The spacecraft has a glowing white ambience near the rear. It
slowly start's to move forward before picking up speed
quickly.

INT. RESTARAUNT - NIGHT

Steve and Flick are out having a meal and are dressed very
formally. Steve is acting very nervously.

FLICK

What's the matter Steve, you've been twitching all
night?

STEVE

I'm a little nervous.

FLICK

Why?

STEVE

Okay here goes. (Takes a deep breath)

Steve pushes his chair back and walks around to Felicity.
Getting down on one knee he pulls out an engagement ring.

FLICK

What are you doing?

STEVE

Felicity, will you marry me?

FLICK

Wow Steve. (Beat) I never even imagined you'd, umm I mean yes. Yes I'd be delighted to.

STEVE

Oh Thank God.

Steve puts the ring onto Felicity's finger before they engage in a kiss and Steve retakes his seat.

FLICK

It's beautiful.

STEVE

You've no idea how many places I went before I managed to find that.

FLICK

It's amazing really. (Beat) Is this what you and Duke were fighting about before he left?

STEVE

No that was about the samples we switched. I still can't believe he's gone.

FLICK

Wait, what samples did you switch?

STEVE

The one's from mars. (Beat) Oh shit.

FLICK

Steve?

STEVE

You cannot tell anyone about this.

FLICK

What did you do?

STEVE

(Quietly)

There is no oil on mars. We changed some of the samples over to show that there was.

FLICK

WHAT?! Why would you do that?!

STEVE

Calm down. It wasn't my idea.

FLICK

What does it matter who's idea it was?

STEVE

The plan was to get us out of the lab for a couple of days, we didn't know it would go this far. You know what it's like analysing samples all day.

FLICK

It's boring I know. You two could end up in jail for this. Why would you even considered it?

STEVE

Because, (beat) he said he would get me another date with you.

(Long beat)

FLICK

I don't know whether that's the most romantic or stupid thing anyone has ever done. (Beat) We'll he's out the lab no that's for sure. What are you going to do about this?

STEVE

There's nothing we can do. I wanted to come clean before it got this far but Duke's very persistent. I think he sees this as his one chance to finally do something big.

FLICK

Does anyone else know?

STEVE

No.

FLICK

I guess we have to keep it that way.

INT. NASA RESEARCH LAB

The head researcher is talking with the two scientists who have been going over the samples.

HEAD RESEARCHER

You're sure this is correct?

SCIENTIST 4

Positive.

HEAD RESEARCHER

How can this be?

SCIENTIST 4

Simple answer is that it can't. So either their results became contaminated somehow, or they fixed them.

HEAD RESEARCHER

That isn't possible.

SCIENTIST 4

I'm sorry David but it is. Only the samples that Duke and Steve had been working on have come back positive for oil. We've been through every other sample taken from the planet, that's over twenty thousand and their all negative.

HEAD RESEARCHER

Why has it taken this long to find out?

SCIENTIST 4

Since we announced this anyone and everyone has been working on the mission to send a ship to mars. It's only in the past few months that myself and others have started to come back and continue what they were doing before.

HEAD RESEARCHER

Can we prove there isn't oil on mars?

SCIENTIST 4

If we gather the original contaminated samples together then we can test the oil. There's no guarantee but we may be able to match some of its compounds to similar ones out there. That would go a long way.

HEAD RESEARCHER

Do it. I'll start making a report for senior officials. I've got a feeling some people Washington aren't going to be happy about this.

TWO MONTHS LATER

INT. SPACECRAFT DINING AREA

A large steel table with five seats each side is situated in the middle of this room. A large screen adorns one wall. Duke and Anthony are sitting at the table eating.

DUKE

I have to admit I'm surprised a little.

ANTHONY

About what?

DUKE

Well on all these films you always see something going wrong with the spaceship.

ANTHONY

You better not have just jinxed us.

DUKE

I'm just saying. Apart from the solar panels, everything's been rather quiet the past two months.

ANTHONY

Are you saying you want something to happen?

DUKE

No, maybe a light bit of action, nothing serious.

Emily enters the room.

ANTHONY

(To Duke)

I'm going to leave you alone.

(To Emily)

I'm pretty sure he's bad luck.

Anthony exits.

EMILY

What was that about?

DUKE

I was just messing with him. How've you been?

EMILY

Who put Sasha in-charge?

DUKE

Three country officials.

EMILY

Does she have to be so by the book all the way out here?

DUKE

That's why they put her in-charge and not you or me.

EMILY

She's a pain in the ass.

DUKE

What's she done?

EMILY

I don't want to talk about it.

DUKE

You want to come by my quarters later?

EMILY

You'd like that wouldn't you?

DUKE

No, I'd like not to sneak around anymore.

Duke and Emily embrace in a kiss. It resembles something they have done before and enjoy doing. Ji enters getting some food; Duke and Emily break it off quickly hoping not to get caught.

Ji

You don't have to stop on my account.

EMILY

Stop what?

Ji

Nothing.

EMILY

Seriously what?

Ji

I should remind you we've spent the last two months on a ship with nine people in something that is not much bigger than closet space.

EMILY

I have no idea what you're talking about.

Ji

Fine. I've got to head back anyway. You two can go back to whatever you were doing.

Ji exits.

DUKE

He's right you know. I bet everyone on board knows.

EMILY

Knows what? There's nothing to know.

Emily exits quickly.

DUKE
(Calling after her)
Emily? Wait, come on!

INT. OVAL OFFICE

The president is sitting behind his desk looking through a document. The head researcher is standing in front of him. The vice president and a few chiefs of staff are standing scattered about the room. An uneasy silence fills the room.

PRESIDENT
How sure are you of this?

HEAD RESEARCHER
Ninety Nine percent sirs.

PRESIDENT
And who knows about this?

HEAD RESEARCHER
Some scientists at NASA, me plus anyone Duke told. We can't be sure if Steve helped or if he even knows.

PRESIDENT
Why has it taken almost two years since we published those results for this information to come about?!

HEAD RESEARCHER
With all due respect sir, I believe the government is partly responsible, pushing for the mission at such pace. If we had taken a little more time then we would have discovered these results before any important decisions were made.

PRESIDENT
TWO YEARS! (Beat) Not to mention the billions of dollars spent. And you're in here telling me it'll all be for nothing?

HEAD RESEARCHER
It looks that way sir.

PRESIDENT
What does he think he's going to do?! Go to mars and all this will be forgotten? (Beat) Harry get Air Force One ready. We're going over to Houston Command right now. I'm going to have a little chat with our budding spaceman. While you're at it you better get me the Russian Minister and Chinese Chairman as

well. Heads are going to roll, and I'll be damned if it's going to be mine!

INT. SPACECRAFT MEDICAL BAY

Anthony is injured with blood and cuts strewn across his face and right side. Sheng Li is treating his wounds. Duke enters.

DUKE

What happened?

ANTHONY

(Painfully)

You jinxed me.

SHENG LI

Hold still. It needs stitches.

VSEVOLOD

We were practicing the drilling procedures for when we reach the surface. One of the supporting branches for the steel holding snapped. It could have been a lot worse.

DUKE

Looks nasty enough.

SHENG LI

You kidding? If this had happened on earth there's a good chance he would be dead.

ANTHONY

The jinx. That's what I'm going to call you.

Sasha enters.

SASHA

Is he okay?

SHENG LI

He should be fine, it looks a lot worse than it is.

ANTHONY

(To Sheng Li)

How would you know?

SASHA

Okay. There's an incoming call from earth, it's got a mission directive as well so we all need to be there.

(To Anthony)

Can you manage?

SHENG LI

Another couple of minutes and we'll be there.

SASHA

Right, just hurry up.

ANTHONY

We'll be there.

INT. SPACECRAFT DINING AREA

Seven members of the crew are assembled. The large T.V. screen in the dining area is showing Oslow Fenchurn from Houston Command.

Anthony and Sheng Li enter.

OSLOW FENCHURN (via T.V.)

Good, with you all finally assembled, may I introduce the president of the United States.

On the television Oslow steps aside and is replaced by the President. The crew onboard atones a more attentive posture.

PRESIDENT (via T.V.)

I hear there's a twelve second delay in transmission, but I'm glad I can see you're all there. I would like to congratulate you on the fine job you're doing with this mission. However some new evidence has come to light which has cast this in to doubt. And after speaking with the leaders of the represented countries we've decided to end the mission at its present stage. You are hereby ordered to turn around and return to earth as soon as possible.

The crew is stunned into silent disbelief.

EMILY

With all due respect Mr President, why?

PRESIDENT (via T.V.)

The mission is no longer applicable because the reason for it no longer exists. The simple fact is there is no oil on mars. (Beat) Is there Duke?

The crew continue to look shocked now turning to Duke who is showing different shocked emotions at being found out.

EMILY

(To Duke)

What does he mean?

PRESIDENT (via T.V.)

The samples showing oil present were planted. Fraudulent. Put in place by James Duke for a reason that is beyond my reckoning. We've spent billions and two years on a project that has no purpose. Your mission is to be classed as a failure. You are to come back to earth as soon as possible, where James Duke will be placed in custody.

SHENG LI

Duke is this true.

SASHA

Duke?!

DUKE

Guess you wouldn't believe me if I said I never intended it to go this far.

VSEVOLOD

This is, the words are beyond me.

PRESIDENT (via T.V.)

You'll be fully debriefed on your arrival back to earth until then you have your orders.

The television goes blank and the crew turn back again to Duke.

DUKE

I don't know what to say. I've done something that in I should never have done. But you've got to believe me that I could never have imagined it would get out of hand like this.

ANTHONY

But it did and whether you imagined it or not we're here. And for what? A four month round trip in a tin can? (Beat) I have to get back to the infirmary.

SHENG LI

I'll join you.

Anthony and Sheng Li exit.

MATVEI

I shall return to my room. Something's are best left unsaid.

Matvei exits and is followed by Vsevolod, Ji and Huan-Yue all leave without saying a word. Only Duke, Sasha and Emily remain.

SASHA

A lot of people spent a good part of their lives on this. You gave them hope they would be part of something amazing. A better man would have owned up to this long before.

DUKE

I'm sorry, I really am.

SASHA

I have to plan a return journey to earth, excuse me.

Sasha exits. Emily is facing away from Duke now.

DUKE

Emily?

EMILY

Duke don't.

DUKE

Emily, I (beat) I never...

EMILY

(Turns to face Duke)

You've already said it Duke. How could you lie to all these people? To your friends? To me?

DUKE

I wanted to tell you but things just kept getting more and more out of control.

EMILY

I have to go.

DUKE

Where?

EMILY

Just away. From you. (Beat) I need time to think like everyone else.

DUKE

I never meant to hurt anyone.

EMILY

It's too late for that now.

Emily exits, leaving Duke alone in the room. He hangs his head and leans on the table before gently weeping to himself.

INT. SPACECRAFT DUKES QUARTERS

Duke is lying in a sleeping bag, staring blankly into space. Vsevolod enters the room.

VSEVOLOD

We require that you join us in the dining area.

DUKE

Sure. When?

VSEVOLOD

Now. I'll meet you there.

INT. SPACECRAFT DINING AREA

The eight members of the crew excluding Duke are sitting around the table. Duke enters the room and they all look up at him.

SASHA

Duke. We've been talking.

DUKE

I'm sorry.

VSEVOLOD

Shut up, we are done with apologies. What's done is done.

JI

Water under the bridge.

SASHA

We've got to face what's in front of us now. For the past two months we've been eating, sleeping and training together. And now we're told to go home so we would have wasted four months of lives.

ANTHONY

Become labelled as the furthest human beings ever from earth that went nowhere.

SASHA

It's not a tag I want, and I'm sure it's not one anyone else wants either.

EMILY

So we've had a vote.

MATVEI

To which we've all agreed.

DUKE

A vote on what?

SASHA

We want to carry on.

EMILY

Go to mars.

VSEVOLOD

Be the first people to step foot on its surface.

EMILY

To make history.

DUKE

What about the president? Your leaders? They want us back right now.

SHENG LI

Are they going to come and stop us if we say no?

DUKE

What about the consequences? So far you've done nothing wrong, you'll all be reprimanded and you'll never be able to go into space again. Not to mention that you could lose your jobs, or even join me in prison.

SASHA

It's better than the alternative.

ANTHONY

Become the forgotten chapter in history.

DUKE

You're all set on this aren't you?

EMILY

You've got us this far Duke. It's time for us to take you the rest of the way.

DUKE

Can I talk you out of it?

EMILY

Would you want to?

Duke pauses then smiles to himself.

VSEVOLOD

Good, then it is settled.

SASHA

We'll continue to mars.

HUAN-YEU

And be damned with the consequences.

INT. HOUSTON COMMAND

A few people are in the command area, it's less crowded than at take-off. Again some are sitting some standing. One man is staring at a computer screen intently whilst cross checking data with paperwork on his desk. After a few more checks he gets up and walks into the command control area.

INT. HOUSTON COMMAND CONTROL

Behind his desk is Oslow Fenchurn doing paperwork. The man draws Oslow's attention as he knocks on the open door.

OSLOW FENCHURN

What is it Richard?

RICHARD HUNTER

I've been going over figures and data for the Santa Maria.

OSLOW FENCHURN

Go on.

RICHARD HUNTER

Well since they were given the order by the president yesterday they haven't started a turn procedure yet.

OSLOW FENCHURN

They're not on their way back yet?

RICHARD HUNTER

On the contrary, it looks like they're still moving away.

OSLOW FENCHURN

Okay set up another link meeting, they might have a problem were unaware off that they haven't called in.

RICHARD HUNTER

Sure thing.

INT. SPACECRAFT DINING AREA

All nine members are present as Oslow's face lights up the T.V. screen in the area.

OSLOW FENCHURN (via T.V.)

Santa Maria, Houston Command has been monitoring your path readings and have become aware that you have yet to start your turn back to earth. Is there a problem Houston is unaware of?

SASHA

No sir.

OSLOW FENCHURN (via T.V.)

Then Can I ask why you haven't started the turn yet?

SASHA

Yes sir. It's because we don't intend to turn around yet.

OSLOW FENCHURN (via T.V.)

Santa Maria do I have to remind you that you have been given a direct order from the President of the United States, Chairman Mao and Russian Minister Benin. You are hereby under orders to start your turn for earth immediately or face disciplinary action upon your return.

SASHA

We are aware of that sir. From this moment forward the crew has decided to continue with our mission to mars. Only after touchdown shall we then begin our journey home. Santa Maria requests Houston Commands continued support, but we fully understand if you are unable to continue to provide this. Santa Maria Out.

Matvei turns the power off to the T.V. before Oslow Fenchurn can issue a response. All members turn their attention from the silent T.V. to Sasha.

SASHA

There's no turning back now.

INT. HOUSTON COMMAND

Oslow Fenchurn is staring at the blank screen dominating the room. He turns to Richard Hunter next to him.

OSLOW FENCHURN

Get me in touch with the president. He's going to want to know about this.

INT. SPACECRAFT COCKPIT

Matvei is sitting in the pilots chair, Vsevolod is dozing in another chair. Sasha enters the room and takes a seat.

MATVEI

I've been thinking Sasha.

SASHA

About what?

MATVEI

When we land on mars, who should be the first person out.

SASHA

You had any ideas?

MATVEI

Myself naturally. But after a bias choice, I think it should be Duke. What about you?

SASHA

I've been thinking the same.

VSEVOLOD

(Not looking up)

I have to agree.

Sasha and Matvei both react in small shock as Vsevolod sits up right.

VSEVOLOD

He is the reason we are in touching distance in the first place. If it wasn't for him none of us would have had an opportunity like this in our lifetime. Despite his deceit, I feel we owe him with this honour.

MATVEI

I have spoken to others over the two months and believe most would conform to this census.

SASHA

I'll ask the others to make sure. But Duke maybe the one to make history.

INT. HOUSTON COMMAND CONTROL

The president is in Oslow office standing at a T.V. waiting to speak with the Santa Maria. The Vice president and Oslow are also present.

PRESIDENT

If they think they can disregard a direct order from the president, let's see them say it to my face. Turn this thing on.

Oslow presses a few keys on his computer and the T.V. screen in front of the president displays the Santa Maria dining area with the crew assembled. The president speaks into a camera on the computer.

PRESIDENT

(Into camera)

Just what the hell do you think you're doing? This is a direct order from your president. Turn that heap of junk you call a ship around right now, or by help me god I swear you'll pay for this upon your return.

INT. SPACESHIP DINING AREA

The crew are gathered around the T.V. which shows the president.

SASHA

With respect sir we are carrying onto mars. I'm afraid there is nothing you can say or do. We've made our decision and are committed to it regardless of any subsequence consequences that arise later.

INT. HOUSTON COMMAND CONTROL

PRESIDENT

(Into camera)

DAMNIT YOU TURN THAT SHIP AROUND RIGHT NOW. RIGHT NOW GOD DAMNIT!

INT. SPACECRAFT DINING AREA

SASHA

Sorry Sir we just won't do that. I would also like to take this opportunity to inform you that James Duke has been designated by us to become the first person to step foot on mars.

DUKE

What?

INT. HOUSTON COMMAND CONTROL

PRESIDENT

Mark my words Santa Maria; you'd be better off staying out there than ever returning to this planet. I just hope it was worth it.

(To Oslow)

Turn this thing off.

INT. SPACECRAFT DINING AREA

The television goes from showing an angry president to a blank screen.

DUKE

I can't believe you want me to be the first one out. After all I've done.

VSEVOLOD

If it wasn't for you we wouldn't be here in the first place.

JI

It is a big honour.

ANTHONY

If I were you I'd get a speech ready. You don't want to say anything stupid.

SASHA

And don't worry. We'll all be one step behind you.

INT. SPACECRAFT DUKES QUARTERS

Duke is sat at a computer trying to write what he's going to say. Emily comes to his quarters.

EMILY

Having trouble?

DUKE

You could say that.

EMILY

Maybe I can help?

DUKE

Sure, I'd appreciate that.

Emily goes over to his computer to read what he has so far.

EMILY

That's pretty bad.

Emily starts to edit the speech on the computer.

DUKE

I never meant to hurt you, you know?

EMILY

I know.

DUKE

I still can't explain how it got out of hand like this.

EMILY

You don't have to apologise anymore. You could never have known what was going to happen. Everyone was caught up in the shock of it. Nobody on board has any I'll feelings after all we picked you to go first didn't we?

Emily carries on reading and typing bits on the computer where appropriate.

DUKE

If I could go back and change it, I don't think I would. (Beat) And it's not because of mars or this trip. (Beat) It's because I got to meet you.

Emily stops what she is doing and turns to face Duke.

DUKE

I think maybe I love you Emily.

EMILY

Maybe?

DUKE

I love you.

EMILY

You're the only person to ever say that to me. You have to come fifty million miles to say it and the scariest thing is... (beat) I think maybe I love you too.

DUKE

Maybe?

EMILY

Shut up.

Emily steps towards Duke and they share a long emotional kiss.