

Solo

By

Lee O'Connor

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Email: lee.a.oconnor@gmail.com

FADE IN:

SPACE

A boundless mass of glittering stars.

Coasting through the emptiness, reflecting light from the nearest sun eight million miles away, a small, compact SPACECRAFT.

INT. SPACECRAFT - CONTROL ROOM

Spotless, white with a clinical feel. A small control panel is fixed on the wall. To the side, a built-in monitor with a chair adjacent.

Astronaut, HENDRIK HENSON, 35, clean shaven, healthy, in a plain white T-shirt, trousers and white pumps, stands alone in silence, facing the control panel. He flicks a switch, then writes data onto a clipboard.

Hendrik checks his digital watch, hangs the clipboard on the wall, walks past the monitor and enters -

INT. LIVING QUARTERS

A modular design, open plan living area. A bed lies in the center, white gloss worktops and cabinets stretch along the wall opposite, an EXERCISE BIKE stands beside the bed, a hyper-sleep pod rests behind the bike.

Hendrik heads over to the bike, another clipboard hangs nearby, he takes it down, looks at his watch again, writes the time and date -

15:30pm 02/04/2023

Hangs up the clipboard, stretches his arms and legs then sits on the bike.

MOMENTS LATER:

Hendrik peddles fast enough just to get his heart rate going, he sits back riding with no hands and winds down the pace, eventually coming to a stop. He gets off the bike, takes a white towel from out of the white bedside table and wipes his brow.

He walks over to the worktops, opens a cabinet - it's a mini fridge filled with bottled water, grabs a bottle and takes a sip. Looks at the framed family PHOTOGRAPH sitting on the side -

HENDRIK WITH HIS ARMS AROUND HIS WIFE, SASKIA, 35, AND DAUGHTER, EDEN, 10. HAPPY TIMES.

Picks up the picture, a small smile appears, what he would do to be with them right now.

He places the photo down, opens another cabinet door, taking out a plastic bowl with a sponge and specially formulated shower gel inside. Puts the bowl on the worktop, removes the sponge and gel, pours in a small amount of water, lifts off his shirt and preps for a sponge bath.

INT. CONTROL ROOM (LATER)

Hendrik sits in front of the monitor, turns on the screen and presses a button - A VIDEO MESSAGE appears, it's Saskia.

SASKIA

Hey sweetie. Sorry Eden isn't here to say hello, it's midnight and I just felt like talking to you alone.

Saskia wells up.

SASKIA (CONT'D)

I miss you so much, Hendrik. I wish you were here.

Regains her composure. Wipes away her tears.

SASKIA (CONT'D)

Sorry. I know I promised I wouldn't cry.

He sheds a tear.

SASKIA (CONT'D)

Eden wanted me to tell you she has her first boyfriend. His names Jason. They're so cute together. He comes over and walks her to school everyday, it's so sweet. She misses you Hendrik. She brags about you all day to her friends.

He sniggers.

SASKIA (CONT'D)

Our little girl is growing up so fast and it hurts me knowing you are going to miss that. It's been three years already but seems like a life time back here.

Hendrik cups his mouth, upset.

SASKIA (CONT'D)

I only hope the next ten years get easier.

Saskia smiles, hopeful.

SASKIA (CONT'D)

We live for your messages, they keep us going. I love you so much baby. I'll speak to you tomorrow. Goodnight.

The screen cuts out, turns to static.

Hendrik swallows his tears, takes a deep breath, then pushes a button, recording a message.

HENDRIK

Hey honey, hope everything's OK back home? You looked so good on your last message. What I would give to hold you both in my arms.

He turns away, fighting back tears, looks back, clears his throat.

HENDRIK (CONT'D)

Wow. Eden has a boyfriend. She *is* growing up fast. Eden if you're watching, make him jealous just like your Mother did with me, trust me it will make him want you more.

He smiles broadly, then saddens at the thought of what he's about to tell them.

HENDRIK (CONT'D)

Saskia, I have some bad news. I'm approaching the half way point to my journey where I have to go into hyper-sleep. This means I will be under for two years. I'm afraid tomorrow will be the last chance for us to be able to communicate.

Hendrik shows a look of guilt.

HENDRIK (CONT'D)

I'm so sorry Saskia. I shouldn't be putting you and Eden through this. It was selfish of me to leave you two behind. I dream of you every night and wish I could be by your side. I love you both with all my heart.

Hendrik kisses his hand and touches the screen.

HENDRIK (CONT'D)

Sleep tight, sweetheart.

He turns off the screen and leaves. Disheartened.

INT. NASA - OFFICE - DAY

FLASHBACK:

Hendrik sits in ordinary clothes opposite project manager, MIKE EDGINGTON, 45.

MIKE

As you are well aware from the Intel from Cassini, large deposits of hydrocarbon have been discovered on Titan. This is the first stable bodied surface liquid found outside of Earth. Hendrik, we are preparing a mission to launch to this moon. After a meeting with my superiors, we believe you are the right man for the job.

Hendrik smiles.

HENDRIK

When is mission launch?

MIKE

Six months from now.

Hendrik sits back. In thought.

HENDRIK

If I say yes, who will be assisting me?

MIKE

That's the difficult part. It's a one man mission. A single craft. A thirteen year round trip in complete isolation.

Hendrik exhales heavily.

HENDRIK

Thirteen years without being with my family.

MIKE

It's a lot to sacrifice, I know. Dwell on it, speak with your family. If you accept, we will give you the full briefing.

INT. HENSON RESIDENTS - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Hendrik sits with Saskia and his daughter, Eden. They're in the middle of dinner.

HENDRIK

It's a huge opportunity. I will be the first person to have traveled that far through space.

SASKIA

How long will you be gone?

HENDRIK

It's too long. Thirteen years give or take.

Saskia sits back, lost for words.

SASKIA

Um...What did you tell them?

HENDRIK

I said I would talk to you.

Hendrik takes Sakia's hand.

HENDRIK (CONT'D)

Listen, I could not image being away from you two for that long. Leaving you for all those years will be too much to ask. The only positive that will come from this

(More)

HENDRIK (CONT'D) (Cont'd)
is that we will be set for life.
The only reason I would consider
going on this mission is because of
you guys.

Saskia gives him a warm smile.

END OF FLASHBACK.

INT. LIVING QUARTERS

LIGHTS flicker on.

Hendrik's eyes shoot open, wakes up in a cold sweat. He breaths heavy, it was just a dream.

He rubs his eyes, sits on the edge of the bed for a moment before rising, trudges over to the cabinets taking out a foil packet of food, puts it on the worktop, stretches his neck and pads along to the control room - SWITCHES FLICKED - elegant classical MUSIC sounds throughout the craft.

Hendrik returns, makes his bed.

MONTAGE

- Hendrik sits on the edge of his bed, eats from the foil packet.

- Hendrik cycles on the exercise bike.

- Hendrik in the middle of a sponge bath.

END OF MONTAGE.

INT. CONTROL ROOM

Hendrik sits in front of the monitor, he is at the end of his briefing with NASA communications.

HENDRIK
This is Henson signing out,
preparing for hyper-sleep. I'll see
you when I wake up. Henson out.

He switches off the screen, takes a minute to compose himself. Starts a recording, puts on a brave face.

HENDRIK

Well this is it sweetheart, the long haul until I will be able to speak to you again. I wish I had more time to say goodbye. I love you both so much. Eden look after your Mother and do well in school. Saskia, I will be dreaming about you, I love you forever baby. I'll send you a transmission as soon as I can.

Hendrik kisses his hand, then touches the screen, just like he did before. He turns off the monitor

INT. LIVING QUARTERS

Hendrik jumps into the hyper-sleep pod, gets comfy and closes the lid.

FADE OUT:

BLACK SCREEN:

RUMBLING.

LIGHT FLICKERS ON AND OFF.

AN ALARM SOUNDS.

SUDDEN SILENCE AND CALM.

LIGHTS FLICKER OFF - DARKNESS.

MOMENTS LATER.

LIGHTS FLICKER ON.

Hyper-sleep pod opens, hands grab the side, Hendrik pulls himself up, stretches his arms and neck, jumps out of the box.

Hendrik walks over to the mini fridge, grabs a bottle of water, takes a big gulp, studies the craft - everything is normal. He opens a draw, pulls out a small portable mirror and razor, looks at his reflection, he needs a shave.

MOMENTS LATER

He puts away the bowl, glances at his watch - it's not working. TAPS it - nothing happens. He frowns. Moves to the control room.

INT. CONTROL ROOM (LATER)

Hendrik passes the monitor, heading to the flight deck not noticing a small RED LIGHT FLASHING by the screen - He has a message.

INT. FLIGHT DECK

A compact area. A single pilots chair, a number of control panels to the side and overhead. Three windscreens look out of the craft - Hendrik leans over the chair, peers outside -

TRANQUILITY, STARS AGAINST THE BLACK VOID.

BACK TO SCENE.

Hendrik surveys the outside, no sign of any moons or planets.

He steps away, puzzled. Remains calm, heads to the control room.

INT. CONTROL ROOM

Hendrik notices the flashing red flight, quickly turns on the screen, it's Saskia and Eden.

A sigh of relief, he sits and watches the message.

SASKIA

(on screen)

Hey Sweetie, I know your asleep and you won't get this till you wake up, but I just wanted you to know that we are thinking of you and pray for the day that you come home.

EDEN

(on screen)

We love you daddy!

Hendrik sheds a tear, touches the screen, caresses Eden's face with his finger tips.

SASKIA

(on screen)

I love you Hendrik. Sweet dreams.

EDEN
Sleep tight Daddy!

The screen goes to static - numbers "1/411" in the corner.

Hendrik frowns, clicks NEXT on the panel - it's Saskia and Eden again.

EDEN
(on screen)
Hi Daddy! It's my eleventh birthday.

Saskia eats cake.

SASKIA
(mouthful)
Your missing out on some delicious birthday cake.

He chuckles.

EDEN
Look what Mommy got me.

Eden picks up a new chocolate Labrador puppy.

SASKIA
Sorry sweetie, I know how much you hate dogs, but look how cute he is.

Hendrik snickers.

SASKIA (CONT'D)
Anyway honey, I better get back to the cooking, I can't wait for the day you wake up. I love you.

EDEN
I love you Daddy!

The screen turns to static, flicks to the next message - it's Mike Edgington from NASA communications.

MIKE
(on screen)
Henson. You won't see this transmission until you're conscious, but you are one month into your hyper-sleep and we have encountered some difficulties in regards to your current position. As soon as you receive this you
(More)

MIKE (Cont'd)
must reset your GPS device so we
can establish your location. I look
forward to speaking with you
Henson. Edgington out.

The screen cuts out.

He moves back to the flight deck.

INT. FLIGHT DECK

Hendrik punches in buttons on the control panel, the GPS is
unable to get a location. The DIGITS frantically flash
random numbers on the panel.

A sudden thought - he rushes back to the control room.

INT. CONTROL ROOM

Flicks to another message on the monitor - it's Saskia
again.

SAKIA
(on screen)
Hey Hendrik...

Hendrik frowns, something's wrong. Looks at the numbers in
the corner "4/411" - He fast forwards to message "287/411"

An older lady appears on the screen, it's Saskia, 87.

SASKIA
(on screen)
I still haven't given up hope. I
know that you are still out there
somewhere. It's been fifty two
years today since you set off on
your mission.

Hendrik covers his mouth, shocked, tears stream down his
face.

SASKIA (CONT'D)
(on screen)
I've been waiting all this time,
hoping, wishing you will come home
or send a message...

Hendrik flicks to another message - number "365/411"

It's Eden, 62, and her daughter, MIA, 30, sits by her side.

EDEN

Hi Dad, It's my sixty second birthday.

MIA

Hey Granddad.

Mia waves.

Hendrik cries.

EDEN

It's been just over a year since Mom passed. I hope she has found peace and is by your side...

Hendrik struggles not to lose it. He clicks to the last message "411/411"

It's Mia, 45, teary eyed.

MIA

(on screen)

Hey Grandpa, It's Mia. Mom passed away. She died peacefully in her sleep a few days ago.

Hendrik cries harder.

MIA (CONT'D)

(on screen)

She lived a full life and spoke about you all the time. And if you are still out there, I'm sure that they are with you now. They had more strength than I do, I have come to terms with the fact that you are never coming back. I'm sorry, this is the last message to you Grandpa, I love you. Goodbye.

The screen turns static.

Hendrik loses it, weeps uncontrollably.

INT. CONTROL ROOM

SUPER: TWO DAYS LATER

Foil food packets and empty water bottles lie by his side. Hendrik, unshaven, bags under his eyes, hasn't moved for days, speaks into a communications mic by the monitor.

HENDRIK

Communications this is Henson, I have veered off course and have no idea where I am. The year is unknown and my GPS tracking system is down. Can you advise? Henson out.

Hendrik switches off the screen.

LAUGHTER.

Hendrik turns around. Nothing.

LAUGHTER.

He jumps out of his seat, rushes to the flight deck.

INT. FLIGHT DECK

Hendrik searches the deck - nothing again.

Takes a deep breath, closes his eyes.

HENDRIK

I must be losing my mind.

Walks back to the living quarters.

INT. LIVING QUARTERS

Hendrik grabs a bottle of water from the mini fridge, takes a sip.

SASKIA (V.O)

Stay calm, Hendrik.

Hendrik turns, the voice came from behind - no one there.

HENDRIK

Saskia?

He wells up.

HENDRIK (CONT'D)

Where are you?

Looks in every direction.

SILENCE.

Hendrik closes his eyes again, shakes his head, slaps himself in the face. Then moves to the control room.

INT. CONTROL ROOM

He sits at the monitor, no message from NASA communication. Sends another message.

HENDRIK

Communications this is Henson, did you receive my last transmission? Please send transmission for assistance. Henson out.

He switches off the screen. Moves to the flight deck.

INT. FLIGHT DECK

Hendrik sits, attempts to pin point his location on the GPS. SLAMS his fist with frustration, exhales. It's not working.

The ship RUMBLES.

Looks out the window, nothing has changed - the ship still floating in space.

He heads to the control panel, opens the door.

INT. CONTROL ROOM

Hendrik stands in the door, dumbfounded - it's control room after control room - a never ending cycle.

He closes the flight deck door, moves towards the first door on his right that leads to the living quarters.

Before opening the door -

SASKIA (V.O)
Stay calm, Hendrik.

Hendrik looks behind - still no one there.

HENDRIK
Saskia, where are you?

SILENCE.

His head flips in every direction. Desperate to find her.

HENDRIK (CONT'D)
Saskia!?

Hendrik pushes through the door, stands in the doorway - it's Mike Edgington's NASA office. Hendrik sits opposite Mike, talking.

NASA OFFICE

MIKE
So did you speak to your family.

HENDRIK
I did sir. It was a long talk, and
I decided to accept your offer.

They shake hands.

Hendrik closes the door.

CONTROL ROOM

Rushes to the next door on his right, opens it - it's himself in the spacecraft living quarters, working out on the bike. He slams the door.

Runs past a few more doors, opens another - It's himself again, he sits at the monitor, food packets and empty water bottles by his side, desperate to make contact with NASA communications.

Hendrik covers his mouth, shocked.

HENDRIK
No, No, No!

He shuts the door.

SASKIA (V.O)
Keep calm, Hendrik.

HENDRIK
Saskia, where are you?

Hendrik ripping his hair out with frustration. Turns the way he came - it's now another endless cycle of control rooms.

He runs back to where he thinks he started, opens the door on his left - it's the NASA OFFICE again. He sits opposite Mike.

NASA OFFICE

MIKE
So did you speak to your family?

HENDRIK
I did sir, and over a long discussion, I decided against your offer. I'm sorry sir.

MIKE
I understand Henson. It's a lot to ask and a big sacrifice.

They shake hands.

MIKE (CONT'D)
I would like to offer you an alternate position, supervising the training for the astronaut chosen for the mission.

HENDRIK
Of course sir.

CONTROL ROOM

Hendrik hurries to the next door, opens it - It's Eden's eleventh birthday party.

DINING ROOM

Hendrik, Saskia and Eden stand around a cake and blow out the candles.

CONTROL ROOM

He shuts the door. Takes a deep breath.

HENDRIK
What is happening to me?

SASKIA (V.O)
Stay calm Sweetie. Nothing is
happening to you.

HENDRIK
I must be going crazy?

SASKIA (V.O)
Your not Honey. Please try and stay
focused, remember what you once
told me.

HENDRIK
What I once told you? What do you
mean?

Hendrik looks up and down the endless control room.

SASKIA (V.O)
That our bodies are a vessel...

HENDRIK
And after we pass, we go to another
dimension.

His eyes shoot wide open.

HENDRIK
Another dimension.

He rushes to the next door and opens it - it's himself, 60
and Sakia, 60. Retired. They sit on the sofa together
enjoying a glass of wine.

He turns, opens the door opposite, stands in the doorway,
gazes at himself inside the living quarters, his wrinkled
skin and Grey hair suggests he is much older, close to
death. He's in hyper-sleep. Hendrik steps back, in thought,
mutters to himself.

HENDRIK
The fifth dimension. The doors are
giving me my life in different
scenarios.

Hendrik crouches, back to the wall, leaning. Puts his head
in his hands.

HENDRIK (CONT'D)
This can't be happening.

He SLAPS his face, rises.

HENDRIK (CONT'D)
Get it together.

Runs down the never ending control room - frantically opens every door he passes, desperately trying to find the door to the present time, he eventually stops, pants for breath. Composes himself, closes his eyes and takes a deep breath, then opens his eyes to -

INT. RESTROOM - NASA COMMUNICATIONS

His reflection in a mirror - his normal self, but full of dread and uncertainty. Water drips down his face, his white collar shirt soaking wet from a combination of sweat and water that he splashed over himself. He turns off the tap, leans on the sink, exhales with relief. A HAND pats him on the back - it's Mike.

MIKE
Everything OK Henson? You've been
in here for half an hour?

Hendrik looks at himself in the mirror again, unsure on what to say.

MIKE (CONT'D)
Have you decided on your answer?

Hendrik faces Mike. Lost.

Mike puts an arm around him, ushers him outside.

MIKE (CONT'D)
Come on, let's go back to the
conference.

They leave.

THE END

FADE OUT.