

The Loneliest Man in the Universe

Written By: Mohammad Al Onaizi

INT. CLASSROOM - AFTERNOON

TITLE: FLORIDA, 2016

A 7 year old boy is standing at his desk, holding a piece of paper. The other students sitting at their desks, listening.

BOY

What do you want to be when you grow up? When I grow up I want to be the best quarterback in the world, I will win the Super Bowl and I will go to the White House, have lots of money and the best cars!

The female TEACHER, in her late 20's, applauds for the boy.

TEACHER

Oh we have a future quarterback in our class, impressive.

The boy sits down with a smug look, proud of himself.

TEACHER (CONT'D)

Ok, who's next?

Another boy, CORY, stands up, looking nervous, less confident than the previous student.

CORY

What do you want to be when you grow up? When I grow up I want to be an astronaut.

The other kids laugh.

TEACHER

Shh! That's good, go on.

CORY

I will be an astronaut and I will go to outer space.

BOY

Go to space and don't come back!

The previous kid shouts out as the kids laugh again.

TEACHER

Stop that! Let him finish! Keep
going Mr. Fox... Mr. Fox... Mr.
Fox...

END FLASHBACK:

INT. CLASSROOM - AFTERNOON (FLORIDA, 2045)

JEFF

Mr. Fox... Mr. Fox, I'm done.

JEFF (15), a confused looking, slightly chubby STUDENT tries to get the attention of his daydreaming teacher MR. CORY FOX (35), young-looking, handsome, wearing a worn out NASA shirt with his name on it.

CORY

Thank you Jeff. You can go back to
your seat.

Jeff goes back to his seat next to his friend MASON (15), a sharply-dressed, somewhat shy lad.

MASON

Your presentation was so boring you
actually put Mr. Fox to sleep!

JEFF

Shut up!

The bell rings, the students begin to pack their things, but Cory raises his arms for them to stop.

CORY

Ok boys and girls, pop quiz time!

All the students groan in unison.

CORY (CONT'D)

Hey, you guys know the drill; I
pick on someone, they answer the
question correctly and you all
leave. So, Jeff... How many moons
does Jupiter have?

JEFF

What? Why me? I just gave a
presentation... I need to rest my
brain!

Jeff lays his head on the table as the other kids laugh.
BRANDI (15) the top student in the class, with a ponytail and a big glowing smile stands up.

BRANDI

I object!

CORY

And what is it that you are objecting to exactly?

BRANDI

That is a trick question with no suitable answer. The count for Jupiter's moons stands at 79 with 23 moons still unnamed. That count could change, and if you wanna believe any article on the internet, that tally could go up to a whopping 600! So how is he supposed to answer how many moons Jupiter has?

The other students clap for Brandi. Cory takes a sip from his coffee mug, and thinks.

CORY

Ok point taken!

BRANDI

I have a counter question and offer for you. I ask you a question, and because you cheated, if you can't answer correctly, then tomorrow we all leave 10 minutes early!

Cory motions with his hand for her to ask her question.

BRANDI (CONT'D)

Since you mentioned Jupiter, at what peak speed does the red spot travel round the gas giant?

CORY

Oh c'mon!

BRANDI

And you have to get it exactly, no rounding up.

The other students are getting fevered, as Cory looks to be stumped by that question.

CORY

I know it's 250 something... 253
miles per hour.

BRANDI

268!

The students get up and cheer.

CORY

Fine, fine, you guys win! 10
minutes early tomorrow! But hey,
don't forget, your projects are
also due tomorrow.

JEFF

What projects?

Jeff discreetly whispers to Mason.

MASON

Ways to improve space travel. Don't
tell me, you didn't do it? He told
us about it like a month ago!

JEFF

Damn! I forgot about it!

MASON

Well, you have to do it in one
night, else, you better hope Mr.
Fox doesn't show up tomorrow.

Cory sees Jeff whispering to his friend.

CORY

Jeff! Can I see you for a second?

MASON

You're screwed!

All the students leave and Jeff slowly makes his way to the
head of the class, where Cory is wiping the board.

CORY

So, what's the title of your
project?

JEFF

It's... umm... space... traveling
in space.

Jeff's face begins to turn red, flustered, as he struggles to come up with a fake name.

CORY

You didn't do it, did you?

JEFF

I'm sorry Mr. Fox, I completely forgot, honestly! I still have one night, I will stay up late and work on it.

CORY

Jeff, you love space, I thought you would be excited to work on this project?

JEFF

I was! But I keep messing things up. I'm sorry.

CORY

Be more confident in yourself Jeff! No one in my class loves space more than you. Let's say I'm the NASA Director, standing right in front of you, are you going to talk to me with your head down like that?

Jeff remains quiet, disappointed in himself.

CORY (CONT'D)

Your problem is up here...

(points to his temple)

You can easily be the best student in my class, you just need to focus. Tell you what, I will give you three extra days if you promise to focus this time and give me the best project that you can!

Jeff's eyes light up.

JEFF

YES! I will! Thank you, Mr. Fox, I won't let you down.

CORY

Good, now go to your next class, you don't wanna be late.

INT. TEACHER'S LOUNGE - AFTERNOON

Cory sets out his magazine and coffee robotically on the table as he has done a thousand times before. MRS. WELLS (50), a sweet old lady, one of the elder teachers at school, who looks much older than she actually is, comes over and sits next to him.

MRS. WELLS

Have you heard? Lianne is getting divorced, what do you think?

CORY

I didn't hear about that. What do you mean, what do I think?

MRS. WELLS

You know, of you two getting together.

CORY

She isn't divorced yet and you're trying to set me up with her? Come on Wendy.

MRS. WELLS

You keep shooting down every other girl I mention! You're young, good looking, successful. Why don't you want to get involved with someone?

CORY

I failed at NASA and now I'm an astronomy teacher, how is that successful?! Besides, relationships are not for me, I'm happy on my own.

MRS. WELLS

Cory my dear, she was a treasure, I can't imagine what it must've been like to lose her, but it's been five years now, you have to move on, I want to see you happy, we all do.

Cory spaces out, staring at the table.

MRS. WELLS (CONT'D)

Hello!

Mrs. Wells waves her hand in front of his face, and she gets his attention again.

MRS. WELLS (CONT'D)

Are you alright? Your eyes look a bit yellow.

CORY

I'm fine, it's just been a long week. Can't wait for the weekend.

Cory grabs his coffee mug, gets up and walks towards the exit but feels strange and light-headed, as if the room is spinning. His vision starts to get blurry and he stops to put his hand on his head.

TEACHER #1

Hey Fox, you alright?

A TEACHER sitting nearby sees that Cory is not looking okay. Suddenly, Cory collapses on the floor as the nearby teachers rush to check on him.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

Cory wakes, alone, laying in bed in a hospital room, when a DOCTOR (60), with the traditional doctor's white coat on, and a folder in his hands, walks into the room.

DOCTOR

Hello, Mr. Fox.

The doctor then takes out scans from the folder and places them on the board to view them.

CORY

What the hell happened to me? How did I end up in hospital? I can't remember.

DOCTOR

You've been passed out for almost two hours! But I need you to focus with me now, cause this is very important; you see that part there in your scans? I'm afraid that's a tumor.

Cory stares at the scans, then at the floor, not blinking, or saying anything.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

I'm sorry Mr. Fox.

Cory shakes his head and sighs.

CORY

How bad is it?

DOCTOR

It's not that bad, for now, but we need you to get started on chemo right away.

CORY

Can I still go to work?

DOCTOR

Mr. Fox, this will not take a day, or a week, you will have to take a pretty long break. I'm sorry, but you'll be unable to work.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - MORNING

Cory returns to his high school to see a banner on the entrance that reads "Get well Mr. Fox". He goes inside.

EXT. CLASSROOM - MORNING

Cory peeps into the class through the Plexiglass on the door to see the SUBSTITUTE TEACHER teaching his students. Cory knocks on the door and enters.

INT. CLASSROOM - MORNING

The substitute teacher stops talking and the students turn to see Cory. They all smile, happy to see him.

CORY

Am I interrupting?

SUBSTITUTE TEACHER

It's your class, Mr. Fox.

Cory then goes to the head of the class, leans against the wall to address his students.

CORY

I'm sure you guys heard what happened. I just felt that you needed to hear it from me. I have cancer, and I'm gonna have to step away from teaching for a while, so I'm no longer going to be your astronomy teacher...

A couple of students begin to cry, and Cory makes sure not to look at them, fearing that he will cry as well.

CORY (CONT'D)

I don't know how things will turn out, so I just want to take the chance now to say... to thank you for being great students, all of you, including you Jeff!

His joke lifts the gloom a little as the students laugh.

CORY (CONT'D)

I wish you all the best in life, I hope that you all graduate, and go to college. I hope you go on to have successful careers and big happy families and long lives...

He begins to choke up and he stops talking. Brandi gets up and approaches Cory with a big red folder.

BRANDI

These are our projects, with little special messages to go along.

Cory takes the folder and opens it to see twenty separate projects made by every student in the class.

CORY

I told you... you guys are the best.

Cory is touched by the love. Brandi and all the students come over to hug him.

JEFF

(hugging Cory)

I did the project too!

Cory bids farewell to the students and leaves.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Cory sits on the couch watching TV. Next to him are all his old documents that include his diploma and teaching certificate. He looks at each one, reliving his life.

He finds his termination letter from NASA, and as he is holding it, his eyes glance over at the folder that his students gave him with all their projects, and he squints his eyes at the realization of something. His train of thought is broken as he hears his apartment doorbell.

He gets up to open it to see his father, IAN FOX (70), balding with a combover, and using a cane, standing outside his apartment.

CORY

Dad!

Ian walks in and hugs Cory.

IAN

How are you holding up?

CORY

I will begin chemo next week, so we'll see.

Cory notices two suitcases next to his father.

CORY (CONT'D)

What's with the bags?

IAN

A nice man downstairs helped me with those, it's my stuff, I'm gonna stay with you for a while.

CORY

You don't need to do that.

IAN

I'm a retired old fart with nothing to do! Help me out with these will you?

INT. CORY FOX APARTMENT - MIDNIGHT

Cory gave his dad his bedroom, and he is sleeping on the couch in the living room. He wakes up and goes to get some water. As he sits on the couch again, he notices a photo album his dad brought, laying on the coffee table.

CORY

I can't believe he still has that thing.

Cory browses through the pictures and sees a photo of him and his dad at the Kennedy Space Center, when he first got his job at NASA. He stares at it, lost in a thought. He gets up and opens a drawer and picks up a folder labeled "My Baby", with the NASA emblem on the papers, and his notes with red pen on it, he smiles and shakes his head looking at the papers.

CORY (CONT'D)
Problem solved!

EXT. CORY FOX APARTMENT - EARLY MORNING

Cory goes out without waking his dad and hails a cab.

INT. KENNEDY SPACE CENTER - MORNING

Cory arrives at the Kennedy Space Center and walks into the lobby, filled with scientists going about their daily work, and tourists coming to learn more about space. He goes to the RECEPTIONIST (25), a young attractive man, perfectly combed hair, and who's desk is in the middle of the lobby.

RECEPTIONIST
Can I help you sir?

CORY
Yeah, I used to work here about five years ago.

RECEPTIONIST
Oh, welcome back I guess, is there anything I can help you with?

Cory doesn't answer, just looks around with a confused stare.

RECEPTIONIST (CONT'D)
Did you forget something here?

Cory still does not answer, daydreaming about the time when he worked here.

CORY
Mr. Collins!

Cory sees COLLINS (55), a chief engineer at NASA and his former teacher, with three younger ENGINEERS following him holding papers and folders. Hair all grey; reflecting the years of stress. Cory runs towards him.

COLLINS
Mr. Fox! What brings you here?

A brief hug between teacher and former student.

CORY
I was... I just...

Collins stares at him waiting to hear his reason for visiting, but Cory is struggling to say why.

COLLINS

Look I'm kind of in the middle of something here, why don't you come back tomorrow, I can be free to chat with you.

Collins pats Cory on the shoulder, turns his back to him and starts walking away.

CORY

I figured it out! The Jupiter mission!

Collins stops, turns around and moves away from the younger engineers.

COLLINS

You figured it out? Figured out what exactly?

CORY

There was nothing wrong with the mission itself. Everything would have worked out. The problem was it was not a manned mission, because it was not guaranteed that the astronaut would make it back. Well, he doesn't have to come back.

COLLINS

That's your solution?! Not bringing them back?! Who would be crazy enough to go on a one-way mission into space?

CORY

Me!

COLLINS

You? Cory, sorry to bring this up but you failed as an astronaut, and subsequently failed as a scientist here. What makes you suitable for this mission?

CORY

What makes me suitable? Who is my competition to be chosen as the astronaut for this mission? I am your best option, because I am your only option!

(MORE)

CORY (CONT'D)

I worked on this project before you let me go, unless you made changes after I left, I know that mission inside out! What more do you want?

Collins turns around to see his students waiting for him. He goes over to them.

COLLINS

I... I have to go. We will pick things up another time.

Collins dismisses his students, and heads with Cory to his office.

INT. COLLINS OFFICE - MORNING

They enter the office, with pictures of Collins with former presidents and world renowned scientists all around the office. Collins sits at his desk, littered with papers, and awards hanging on the wall behind him, with Cory taking a seat in front of him.

COLLINS

So you became an Astronomy teacher after we released you? How is that?

CORY

Compared with working for NASA? Come on!

COLLINS

What made you come up with this idea?

CORY

I... I quit my job as a teacher when I got cancer about a month ago, and I just don't see a point in fighting this... I... I might as well use what's left of my life to help science.

COLLINS

I'm sorry, I didn't know about your diagnosis. But if that's the case, then you are basically looking at this as a suicide mission? You just want us to send you out there to die?

CORY

I have my reasons okay. Is it really important why I want to do this? Isn't it more important that I can? Now I came to you with this offer, so what's your counter-offer?

COLLINS

You know, we've had tons of guys offering to work on this mission, to revive it, to make it happen. But we never had anyone offer to embark on this mission until you walked into the center. But you must have a pretty good memory if you recall details of the mission.

CORY

Actually... I made copies of some of the mission details... I have them in a folder in my apartment.

COLLINS

You have details of a top-secret NASA mission in your apartment... and you are no longer a NASA employee?!

CORY

You guys fired me, but I never quit working on that mission... it was the most rewarding thing I've ever done... I... we were so close to getting there Mr. Collins, you and I were close to something big... Europa was almost a reality!

COLLINS

Scrapping that mission, you losing your job, they were never my calls. I never had a failure stick with me more than Europa... it was the perfect mission that never was... the greatest human achievement of all time... we found a place that could be habitable for humankind... but we will never know.

CORY

We still can! The only thing stopping us back then was an astronaut... well?

Cory points at himself.

CORY (CONT'D)
What's stopping you now?

Collins takes out a folder that was in one of his drawers, and puts it in front of Cory.

COLLINS
Did you ever hear about this?

Cory opens the folder to see details of an asteroid. He shakes his head no.

COLLINS (CONT'D)
Meet Icarus 99945, an asteroid 1.5 Kilometers in diameter... and it's heading our way!

CORY
It's gonna hit us?

COLLINS
Thankfully no! It's gonna pass, but it got me thinking about how lucky Earth has been with all these near misses. Icarus is gonna be the closest near miss of an asteroid ever recorded... the near misses are getting closer and closer every single time, and it's inevitable that one day, Earth's luck will run out, there will be a direct hit, and it won't be good.

CORY
What are you trying to say?

COLLINS
Going to Europa, finding another suitable Earth might be more than just an achievement... in 20-30 years... nobody knows when, but one day it will be a necessity.

Silence as both men contemplate how important this mission has become.

COLLINS (CONT'D)
Oh I'm gonna lose my job over this!
Welcome back Mr. Fox!

Collins symbolically says, signaling the return of Cory and the mission.

EXT. NASA DIRECTOR'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Collins and one of his lead scientists SINGH (44), Collins' right hand man, thin eyeglasses, and unkempt bushy Einstein like black hair, are about to head into the NASA Director's office when they are stopped by his secretary.

SECRETARY #1

I'm sorry you can't go in now, he's doing his interview with Fox.

COLLINS

That's today?

She nods yes.

SINGH

We will be quiet.

Singh slowly turns the door knob and they go in.

SECRETARY #1

No wait!

She gets up to try and stop them.

INT. NASA DIRECTOR'S OFFICE

The NASA Director, PATRICK (61), with a fancy suit, and jacket draped on his chair, and a stern face that most resembles an army general rather than a NASA Director. His frowned face doesn't change when the two walk in, he gestures with his hand for them to stop, and Collins and Singh, along with the secretary stand at the open door as he goes on with his interview.

PATRICK

(on the phone)

Look the economy is not helping, our budget was slashed, we haven't done anything major for a while because of the conditions that not just the agency, but the whole country is facing.

On the TV screen hanging on the wall of his office, the TV host STEVE BARNES (43) is listening intently before responding.

BARNES

Its the easy option to blame the economy, isn't it?

(MORE)

BARNES (CONT'D)

I have always followed the projects of NASA over the years, the Europa Clipper, the Artemis missions, the Mars expeditions, why has it gone so quiet at NASA? You have been Director for 3 years now, and you have yet to announce any project under your leadership. I wish I could say that the United States is lagging behind in this new space race, but to be frank, we are not even in it, it's just China and India!

PATRICK

Look, the reason I haven't' announced any new projects is credit to my predecessors, because they had great projects already going during their time, so we are working on those. We are talking about space exploration here Steve, its a million, and even billion dollar field. Any project has to go under strict studies over and over again, I cant just go out and say "hey we are going to the Sun"! Things have to be done in a precise manner.

BARNES

What about Roscosmos?

PATRICK

What about them?

BARNES

Well, from my sources, I heard that they are working on a project that will embarrass NASA! Have you heard about that?

PATRICK

No, I can't say that I have.

BARNES

It brings me to another point; the teamwork lets say, between NASA and Roscosmos has always been exemplary.

(MORE)

BARNES (CONT'D)

No matter how bad things are politically between the 2 countries, and lets face it, they have seen awful times over the past few years, but it never effected you. Going to the ISS together, going to the Moon. What happened to that teamwork? Has anyone from NASA contacted them to learn about this project that they are working on?

Patrick reaches for the cigarettes pack on the table and he lights a cigarette, and places the pack back on the table near an overflowing ashtray. The secretary leans over to whisper to Collins and Singh.

SECRETARY

He's been under a lot of stress lately. The White House called the other day... the President wants to speak to him... in person.

COLLINS

It's that bad, huh?

The Secretary nods and they continue to listen in on the call.

PATRICK

I agree, there is no politics when it comes to our respective space agencies, however, when the right project comes along, which requires our teamwork, we will work together. And who told you they have a new project?

BARNES

Well, he never gave me the exact details of the project. But maybe your Russian counterpart can enlighten us. I'm glad to welcome on the show, directly from Moscow, the head of Roscosmos, Cosmonaut Kir Morozov. Thank you for joining us.

The head of Roscosmos COSMONAUT KIR MOROZOV (62), with a thick Russian accent, and broken English, joins the show by phone.

COSMONAUT MOROZOV

Hello Mr. Patrick.

PATRICK

Are you kidding me?

BARNES

Well Patrick, you asked about my source, here he is. Hello? Patrick? Did you just end the call? Wow what a brave move Patrick, well done.

Steve Barnes claps sarcastically, as Patrick's line dies after he slams the speaker and hangs up the phone, to the shock of Collins and Singh. Patrick turns off the TV.

PATRICK

I'm not going to be on the same show as that asshole! What do you guys want?

The secretary puts her head down and exits the office, closing the door behind her. Collins and Singh still haven't spoken, too afraid to speak after seeing Patrick get angry. They go over and sit on the two chairs in front of Patrick's desk.

COLLINS

Do you remember the Jupiter mission? We may have figured out a solution to the problem that we faced.

PATRICK

Yeah I remember that. What's your solution?

SINGH

We change it back to what we originally wanted, back to a manned mission, and we don't have to worry about the logistics of bringing that man back... because he will not come back... he will stay there... in space.

PATRICK

You're joking, right? What is this? Is today "lets prank Patrick day?" First the interview and now this!

COLLINS

We're not trying to prank you! This guy was a scientist here working on the Jupiter mission. He was let go when we hit a dead end, along with five others.

PATRICK

A scientist?! He's not even an astronaut?

SINGH

Patrick, please just look at the potential here; This could be the project that will shut Steve Barnes and your critics up! We could finally get to Europa... The new space race with Russia, China, India and whoever else wants to join... this mission will end it!

Patrick silently contemplates, when his phone rings.

PATRICK

I have to take this. Privately!

Collins and Singh leave without getting an answer.

INT. MALL - AFTERNOON

Cory is walking around inside the mall when he runs into Jeff and his dad, DR. BRODY (44).

JEFF

Mr. Fox!

Jeff smiles as he sees him, and runs over to say hi to his favorite teacher.

CORY

Good to see you, Dr. Brody.

DR. BRODY

Jeff, you mind giving us a minute?

Jeff moves away to let the two men have a private conversation.

DR. BRODY (CONT'D)

I'm glad we ran into you, Jeff told me what happened. I'm really sorry.

CORY

Thanks.

DR. BRODY

How's the chemo going? Did you start already?

CORY

I did, but I stopped.

DR. BRODY

Why?

CORY

I just... I don't wanna do it anymore. Going to find something else to do until my time comes.

DR. BRODY

Mr. Fox, why are you giving up? There is always hope that you will get over this and go back to living a normal life.

CORY

You see, that's my problem; I never had anything that resembled a normal life to begin with.

Dr. Brody sees Cory's sadness. He takes out his wallet and from the many business cards he hands one to Cory.

DR. BRODY

This is a friend of mine, give her a call.

Cory looks at the card.

CORY

A shrink?

DR. BRODY

Just give her a call, please.

Cory nods his head and leaves.

INT. NASA DIRECTOR'S OFFICE - MORNING

Collins opens the door to see Patrick waiting for him. He motions for him to take a seat.

PATRICK

If you're here to talk about the Jupiter mission then you're wasting your time.

COLLINS

I still didn't get to show you this.

PATRICK

What can you show me that will convince me to throw millions of dollars on a maybe mission?!

Collins takes the iPad that is on his lap and places it on Patrick's desk so that he can see.

COLLINS

I was checking the feasibility of the launch, and I was surprised at what I saw, like this mission was destined to happen at this very moment. Look at the perfect alignment of Earth, the Moon, Jupiter and Europa! If we launch within the next 2 months, the shuttle will have a perfect path to our goal. Escape velocity will not be an issue, no need for hyperbolic orbit, the boosters will be enough for a straight shot to Jupiter! We have 2 months! Two months is our launch window, so please decide now to go ahead.

PATRICK

Hank, what are the chances that this mission will go exactly as you are seeing in your head?

COLLINS

Cory came to us at this perfect moment, what are the odds of that? It's like this is meant to be, we have to go ahead with this mission now, because we don't know when we will see this alignment again.

PATRICK

You're a scientist and you're talking to me about fate? Icarus gave us a scare and our survival could be at stake but we need something plausible, something guaranteed. You know how messed up it will be if we go ahead with this mission, advertise it as "the mission that will save the human race!" And then it fails... badly! And we go out and face the world and say "sorry, that was the only plan that we had, you're on your own!"

Collins remains quiet.

PATRICK (CONT'D)

Look, I admire your passion for this project of yours, I know it hurt you the most when it was shelved, but focus on something else, something that can work.

COLLINS

What if I don't?

PATRICK

What if you don't what?

COLLINS

What if I don't focus on any other project? What if I relieve my duties on all the projects I'm working on and just focus on this.

(gets up)

What if I put my whole career, my work, my life... over 20 years of my life working for NASA on the line to get this mission done! How's that for probability?

Patrick doesn't answer, and he just stares at Collins.

INT. CORY FOX APARTMENT - AFTERNOON

Cory enters his small and not too furnished apartment, and throws himself on the couch and turns on the TV. His cell phone vibrates, he looks to see a message from Collins.

CORY

(reading message)

Cory, it's Collins. I want to talk to you. Could you come to the center this afternoon?

Cory stares in disbelief and quickly gets off the couch.

INT. MEETING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Cory goes to the Kennedy Space Center and is led to a meeting room where he finds Collins and Singh sitting at the round table, with a few papers and folders on it.

COLLINS

Cory, thanks for coming. This is Umran Singh, one of our top scientists here.

Cory shakes Singh's hand and sits at the table. He looks at one of the folders which reads "Jupiter Mission".

CORY

Is this a good sign or a bad sign?!

COLLINS

The mission is a go! We are finally going to Jupiter! You said you still recall the mission from the stolen information you have, but we need to go over it again... if you still want to go through with this?

CORY

Borrowed! I prefer borrowed, not stolen!

COLLINS

You know we're gonna have to get those "borrowed" papers back, whether you like it or not.

Singh switches on the projector and the first slide of the solar system comes up.

SINGH

This is us, of course, and this is where we want to go.

Singh points to Earth and then Jupiter.

SINGH (CONT'D)

Now, it's Jupiter's moon Europa, that we want to explore. That's why we want to send our shuttle to this circle here that we have called the "gold mine". This gold mine is away from Jupiter's radiation belt, meaning both you and the shuttle will be safe.

He points at an area near Jupiter.

CORY

Gold mine? Why is it called the gold mine?

SINGH

The gold mines of old had their dangers, but people still risked their life for it because the reward when you strike gold is priceless. It's the same issue here; if we can get a shuttle to that point, then it will remain there safely orbiting Jupiter, and you can release our orbiter, and we will be able to discover Europa like we have never done before... but there are risks.

Singh changes to the next slide showing Jupiter's moon Io and a graph.

SINGH (CONT'D)

Europa is not the only moon orbiting Jupiter. Io is gonna mess one big thing for us.

CORY

What?

SINGH

Look at the graph. That's the amount of radio emission by Jupiter. Io has its own radio bursts, and at the point that it's gonna be at when you reach Jupiter, there's gonna be around 5 million amps of electric current flowing between Jupiter's Ionosphere and Io, which will produce radio bursts that are so massive... that it will bury your radio signal... which means...

CORY

Which means I'm gonna lose contact with you.

SINGH

And you're going to be on your own to complete the mission.

Singh changes to the next slide to show the shuttle that they built for this mission. Collins explains.

COLLINS

It will be up to you to not only get the shuttle to the "gold mine", which will take seven months, but you also have the task of manually starting the process of releasing the orbiter to explore Europa. What's left of the shuttle will serve as the unmanned satellite and the astronaut, you, will be left in the escape pod, which we would have no control over. So, you will be left to float in space, with no way to bring you back... isn't that what you want?

Cory puts his elbows on the table and lays his head on his hands. He begins to tap his foot, thinking about this mission.

CORY

Yeah... I don't wanna come back.

COLLINS

We have to perform our own medical on you to make sure that you can survive the length of this mission. Another thing; how much do you recall from the astronaut training that you went through before?

CORY

All of it!

COLLINS

Good, cause we're gonna compact the astronaut training for this particular mission to just 3 days to save time. So lets hope your memory is as good as you suggest.

SINGH

Cory, are you with us?

Singh notices that Cory has a far-away look on his face.

COLLINS

Cory, I know you came to us believing this will be some sort of leisure trip, but now you know that it's much more than that. Are you having second thoughts?

CORY

No, I'm just thinking... how soon
can we get started?

Collins then places a contract in front of Cory.

COLLINS

If you're ready to go then this is
it. You sign this and we will
immediately begin this mission
because time is not on either of
our sides. Planets perfectly
aligned, and you might not survive
for so long, so Cory, this is your
only chance to decide. You sign
this, and you are accepting that
you are making this decision on
your own. Think carefully; you are
going to space and not coming back.
You are going on your own, nobody
to talk to, no face to look at. You
will have audio contact with us in
the beginning, but for the final
days of your life, you will
literally be... the loneliest man
in the universe.

Cory takes a deep breath, moves the contract closer to him
and picks up the pen.

CORY

Let's do this then!

He signs the contract.

COLLINS

Good. Go back home tonight, pack
some clothes and come back here
tomorrow morning. You will be given
a room to stay in.

INT. CORY FOX APARTMENT - EVENING

Cory enters to find his father slowly pacing around the
living room.

CORY

Dad, what's wrong?

IAN

What's wrong? Where have you been
all day?

(MORE)

IAN (CONT'D)

I was waiting for you at the hospital, you were supposed to have your treatment today.

CORY

I told you already, I stopped my treatment, I have something else planned.

IAN

Something else planned? Like what?

CORY

I am back at NASA. They are sending me to space.

IAN

What are you talking about?

CORY

I just came back from the center, they explained the mission. I have to be there tomorrow morning, they are gonna give me a room to stay in as I prepare for it.

IAN

Son, please explain what the hell you're doing!

CORY

Remember the project that I was working on when I was at NASA?

IAN

The Jupiter thing?

CORY

I volunteered to be the astronaut... But the mission is one-way, they are not bringing me back.

IAN

No, what are you doing? Are you serious? Why are you doing this?

CORY

Because there is nothing for me here! I don't wanna be here anymore OK?! I have another shitty situation to deal with! I find the love of my life and I lose her. I land my dream job at NASA and I get cut.

(MORE)

CORY (CONT'D)

I finally start to love my job as a teacher and I get cancer! I can't take this anymore... maybe I am just not meant to be happy, maybe I am meant to be alone... maybe... I'm meant for this. Dad, I'm doing this.

Ian grabs Cory by his shoulders.

IAN

I already lost your mom, don't make me lose you too!

Cory moves away from his father, puts his hand on his head and puffs his cheek; torn, trying to think of a way of doing this without hurting his dad.

CORY

Dad, I'm already gone! You are gonna lose me either way, if I stay on Earth, or go on this mission. Are you really going to stand in the way of your only child, finally realizing his dream of going to space?

Ian has his head down in disappointment.

CORY (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. Tomorrow morning I'm heading to the center, my apartment is yours if you wanna stay here.

INT. KENNEDY SPACE CENTER - MORNING

Cory arrives to see a geeky, awkward, young man, with big glasses, ERIK VAN DE CLOET (23), waiting for him.

ERIK

Hi... umm I am Erik Van De Cloet; I am kind of gonna be your personal escort here at the Center.

CORY

Erik, can I just call you Erik? Because I didn't hear what you said after that.

ERIK

Yeah... sure. Are you ready for your first official day as an astronaut?

CORY

Beam me up, Erik Van Dingle!

ERIK

It's Van De Cloet.

CORY

That's what I said!

ERIK

Before we get started, the NASA
Director wants to see you.

Cory looks down at his attire - he's wearing shorts and a t-shirt.

CORY

Can I go to my room first and
change?

ERIK

No, it's fine, just keep your bag
here I will take it up later.

Erik takes out his phone and moves closer to Cory. He raises his phone and takes a selfie with him.

CORY

What? What's happening?

ERIK

Sorry, I just wanted a picture with
the one-way astronaut. I hope you
don't mind.

CORY

It's okay I guess. Hey, if you
print it out I could sign it for
you.

ERIK

No, that won't be necessary, let's
get going.

The two men walk through the corridors of the Center and reach the entrance hall where Patrick is waiting, dressed in his usual fancy suit.

INT. ENTRANCE HALL - MORNING

CORY

Mr. Director, it is good to see you
again sir!

Cory immediately goes to shake his hand.

PATRICK

Collins' star student returns! I guess you couldn't live with the fact that you could never be as good as your teacher, is that why you decided to come back?

The Director does not extend his hand to shake Cory's.

CORY

To be fair sir, not many people can match Mr. Collins. But I just came to him with an idea, and he helped hire me back after you let me go.

PATRICK

Aha I see, so you are doing this to prove a point?

CORY

Just to myself. But thank you for trusting me to be the astronaut for this mission.

PATRICK

I don't trust you! Hank Collins is one of the best guys we've ever had, I trust his judgment. Secondly, don't go round calling yourself an astronaut! I never had to re-hire someone I fired and I don't plan on starting now. As far as this mission is concerned, you're not doing this as a NASA employee, you're just a volunteer.

Patrick leaves. Erik escorts Cory to the medical.

INT. MEETING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Cory enters, sees Collins and Singh holding his medical report.

CORY

So, what does it say? Do I have cancer?

That joke barely gets a smile from them.

CORY (CONT'D)

I realized after my diagnosis that the best way to keep my spirits up is to have a sense of humor, so just play along.

SINGH

Oh, ha-ha (fake laughs).

COLLINS

Your prognosis is not as bad as we thought. You will definitely survive the length of the mission, maybe longer, so that is a plus.

CORY

Or a minus considering I'm going to be spending my last days alone. So what is the preparation going to be like?

SINGH

Preparing you for the mission is going to take ten days, hopefully, and we will need about a couple of weeks to prepare everything else.

COLLINS

We're going to barely make that 2-month launch window. If it was up to me, I would launch right now! But... we have to be realistic, we need as much time to prepare... we never know when we will have another shot like this again.

INT. SPACE SHUTTLE - AFTERNOON

Cory is taken inside the shuttle for a tour with a SHUTTLE CREW.

SHUTTLE CREW

Let's start at the cockpit. Remember, this shuttle was never intended to be for just one man, so the two seats at the cockpit have their own functions. Controlling and flying the shuttle, you sit on the right. The on-board computer, releasing the orbiter, is done on the left side.

CORY

How 'bout you come with me and we
can make use of both these seats?

The SHUTTLE CREW just stares at him.

CORY (CONT'D)

So... what else do I need to know
about the shuttle?

The two move behind the cockpit where there is a circular
seating with 5 seats.

SHUTTLE CREW

Again, this was supposed to be for
the rest of the crew, but you can
ignore this. Let's head down to the
pods.

CORY

It's like the Enterprise!

The two use the ladder to descend down the chute and they
arrive to where the orbiter and pod are held.

SHUTTLE CREW

This is the belly of the shuttle,
and the most complex part of it.
And seeing what happened the last
time we tried to go to Jupiter, it
had to be, we don't want another
Europa Clipper on our hands.

CORY

I wasn't here when the Clipper
launched, and there was nothing
about it in the news. Didn't it go
to Jupiter?

SHUTTLE CREW

Oh it went to Jupiter... it went
right through Jupiter to be exact!

CORY

It crashed?

SHUTTLE CREW

A single miscalculation and the
Clipper never reached its orbit.
And we are making it harder for
ourselves this time because there's
the orbiter and your pod, so
there's a chance of those two
crashing into each other too.

CORY

And how is that problem countered?

SHUTTLE CREW

The pod and orbiter are set to a single release mechanism that will release them at the same time, and away from each other, but even this brings its own problem because they will be inter-connected, so if there is an error with the pod for example, and it doesn't release, then neither will the orbiter, and vice versa.

Cory looks around the small cylindrical room, at the complexity of the computer setup of the pod and orbiter.

CORY

Then whose job is it to make sure that everything is set perfectly before the launch? Cause I don't wanna go all the way to Jupiter and be stuck there without releasing the orbiter.

SHUTTLE CREW

Collins himself is gonna do it! So you're in good hands, don't worry about it. Why don't you take a look inside your pod.

He glances around at the small size of the circular pod and lack of amenities onboard.

CORY

Not exactly five star!

SHUTTLE CREW

We had to sacrifice a lot of things in the pod in order to accommodate the complexity of the shuttle that it would be in. It still has the same basic features that a regular pod would have, but just smaller. So, it just has enough space for you and any other things you need for the last part of the journey like food, reading material, stuff like that.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Cory lies in bed with a pen and paper, writing his learning about the mission today, and making a list of things he wants to take with him in the small pod.

CORY

Number 1... Doritos. Number 2...
reading material... what should I
bring as reading material?

As he is thinking he dozes off.

INT. TRAINING FACILITY - MORNING

Cory arrives to see the CREW setting up equipment in the large pool.

TRAINER

Get in your suit volunteer, today
you will learn how to space walk!

CORY

Space walk?! Man, this was the
worst part of astronaut training,
it completely drained me! I thought
all my tasks for this mission are
done inside the shuttle. I have to
space walk?

TRAINER

You don't HAVE to, but you still
need to learn how, or in your case
re-learn how. If the shuttle gets
damaged for instance, you will have
to go out and fix the issue.

Cory is helped into his suit and into the pool.

SEQUENCE -- The entire day teaching Cory to space walk.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Cory, exhausted, throws himself on the bed and lets out a big sigh.

CORY

Space walking... I sure hope I
never have to do that...

Cory falls asleep.

INT. MEETING ROOM - AFTERNOON

It's just Collins, Singh and Cory, finalizing the mission details.

SINGH

Well, this is it. This is the mission to Jupiter, can you do it?

Singh throws the final mission folder on the table. Cory, contemplating, nodding his head, remains silent.

SINGH (CONT'D)

Cory?

CORY

Yeah... yeah I can do it.

SINGH

I was expecting a more enthused answer but I guess that will do.

CORY

What's the next step?

COLLINS

We step back, and let the guys prepare the launch.

CORY

So I'm gonna spend a whole week just sitting here waiting?

SINGH

Here's a thought, since you're... you know, never coming back, why don't you make a little bucket list and just enjoy your last week here?

CORY

What can I do?

SINGH

Don't ask me, it's your bucket list.

As Cory sits there, with his hands on his chin, thinking. The door opens and the receptionist peeps his head.

RECEPTIONIST

Sorry to disturb you sir, but Katia Mohren just called, and she confirmed her arrival for tomorrow.

COLLINS

Great, thanks.

Collins replies as the receptionist leaves.

CORY

Mohren? Katia Mohren?

COLLINS

Yeah, why?

CORY FOX

THE Katia Mohren? The hottest actress of all time? That's the one you're talking about?

COLLINS

Yeah she's part of a select group of celebrities that help us out with PR stuff, they're called Solar Systems Ambassadors.

CORY

I think I know what I want on my bucket list!

Collins looks at him quizzically.

COLLINS

What?

CORY

I'll keep it a surprise.

FADE TO:

EXT. KENNEDY SPACE CENTER - LATE AFTERNOON

A black Cadillac pulls up in front of the entrance. The driver opens the door and out comes tall, stunning, Hollywood Icon KATIA MOHREN (33), with flowing long blonde hair. She is escorted into the center with her even taller bodyguard.

INT. KENNEDY SPACE CENTER - LATE AFTERNOON

Miss Mohren enters.

SINGH

(whispers)

How?! I've seen her so many times now but I still get nervous! I'm sweating...

(MORE)

SINGH (CONT'D)
(to self)
Stop sweating!

Collins shushes him.

COLLINS
Miss Mohren, good to have you back again.

KATIA
Always a pleasure to be invited here. So what's this project you're working on?

COLLINS
Singh here is gonna explain this project to you, if you please follow him, just don't hold his hand!

Katia laughs.

KATIA
He still can't even make eye contact with me. Singh, I'm not gonna bite you, why are you always scared of me?

SINGH
I'm not scared! I... shall we get going!

KATIA
After you!

Singh accompanies Katia around the center.

INT. BEDROOM - EVENING

Cory is lying in bed resting, when Erik comes rushing in.

ERIK
Katia Mohren is here!

Cory jumps out of bed.

CORY
Are you serious? Didn't they say it was tomorrow?

ERIK

No it's today! You better get
dressed and come down quickly.
Singh is showing her around.

Cory is nervously scrambling to find the fancy collared shirt
and pants that he brought with him, while reaching for his
cologne, and his deodorant.

ERIK (CONT'D)

Calm down, man! You have plenty of
time to meet her.

CORY

You're right. How's my breath?

Cory lets out a deep breath in Erik's face.

ERIK

OK, maybe that should be the first
thing that you take care of! I'll
be outside, let me know when you're
ready.

INT. ENTRANCE HALL - EVENING

Katia completes her day at the center and is ready to leave.
Cory is standing with Erik behind the crew who are sending
her off.

KATIA MOHREN

Wow humankind is going to Jupiter!
I guess nothing is impossible when
it comes to NASA!

She has one last word for the crew before she begins to walk
towards the exit, and that's when Cory decides to make his
move.

ERIK

Go do your thing, Romeo!

Erik pats him on his shoulder. Cory walks at a fast pace to
catch her, while everyone else is looking at him confused as
to why he is going to her.

CORY

Miss Katia, wait!

He approaches Katia but her bodyguard sticks his arm out and
stands between them, to prevent Cory from getting any closer.
Katia pays him no attention and keeps going towards the exit.

CORY (CONT'D)
I'm the dying astronaut that is
going to Jupiter!

The bodyguard fearfully removes his arm away from Cory. Katia stops, and turns to look at him.

CORY (CONT'D)
Don't worry big fella, it is
nothing contagious!

KATIA
You're dying?

CORY
I have cancer and I stopped my
treatment to focus on doing this
mission.

KATIA
They didn't mention that? They just
said that you were going away and
not coming back.

CORY
Yeah, that's also true.

Katia then crosses her arms waiting to see what Cory came to tell her.

CORY (CONT'D)
Look, I am very sorry for any
inconvenience this is causing you,
and you too...

Cory says, pointing to her bemused bodyguard.

CORY (CONT'D)
But can I just have a minute to
explain why I'm standing in front
of you right now?

KATIA
Go on.

CORY
I'm a huge fan of yours, I love
your movies and you are by far the
most beautiful woman ever.

(MORE)

CORY (CONT'D)

I don't have much time left on Earth, and when I heard you were coming, I thought, it would be nice if maybe I could go out on a date with you, or maybe not even a date, just a cup of coffee. Could you please grant me this wish?

Cory puts his palms together and begs her.

COLLINS

Oh my God, that's what he wanted on his bucket list?

A baffled Collins says to Singh. Katia, put on the spot, doesn't want to be the woman who refuses to grant a dying man's final wish.

KATIA

Fine.

Cory clenches his fists in celebration.

EXT. KENNEDY SPACE CENTER - NIGHT

Katia and Cory sit with their coffees at a table outside with the rocket and shuttle making for a beautiful backdrop. Her bodyguard waits further away.

KATIA

How come you don't want to spend your last days with your family?

CORY

I'm an only child, my mom passed away when I was 3 and my dad... well, we kind of ended things on bad terms, he was against me going through with this.

KATIA

And you were a science teacher?

CORY

Yeah, life has a funny way of twisting you around. I became an Astronomy teacher after I was let go from NASA. And now, after I resigned as a teacher, I am back at NASA as an astr... as a volunteer!

The two finish their coffees.

KATIA
So, how about a tour?

CORY
But you already know the place...?

KATIA
I want a tour from you.

CORY
(surprised)
Sure!

KATIA
(to bodyguard)
Wait in the car.

INT. KENNEDY SPACE CENTER - NIGHT

They walk around the center, it's late and there is no one else around. They reach his room.

KATIA
I'm tired. Can I come in?

Cory opens the door, again surprised.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

They enter his small room, Katia takes off her coat and high heels and gets comfortable on the small couch. Cory has a bewildered look in his eyes - he has no idea what to do.

KATIA
Sit! Let's talk some more.

Katia gestures for Cory to sit next to her on the couch.

KATIA (CONT'D)
You told me about your dad, but you don't have a family of your own? Wife? Kids?

CORY
I have never been married, and no kids.

KATIA
How come? I mean, you're a pretty good looking guy.

CORY

Wait, wait, give me a second to catch my breath. Katia Mohren thinks I am good looking!

Katia laughs again as Cory closes his eyes and tries to control his breathing.

CORY (CONT'D)

OK, I'm back.

KATIA

Are you done, can you answer now?

CORY

It is kind of a sad story, to be honest, I'm not sure you want to hear it.

KATIA

It's OK. You're going into space and never coming back, now is a good time to let go of any sad memories you have.

CORY

My college sweetheart, Laura... she was my first love, and she would have been my wife as well. About five years ago I bought this really expensive engagement ring and didn't tell her that I was going to propose, I just told her to meet me at a restaurant downtown. I was there early, sitting at the table, nervous, and my sweat had overpowered the smell of the cologne that I poured on myself. Minutes passed by, which turned into hours. I kept calling, but her phone was switched off. I thought something was wrong, because she would never stand me up like that. Then one of her friends called me and told me what happened; she was hit by a car on her way to the restaurant...

(beat)

And that was it for me; the only woman I ever wanted to marry, died because of me, she died on her way to meet me...

KATIA

I'm so sorry. But you can't blame yourself for that.

CORY

We used to always go out together, but that one time I told her to meet me instead... because I had to go pick up the damn ring first.

Cory then gets up off the couch and goes to the drawer near his bed. He opens it and takes out a small box which he then shows to Katia.

KATIA

This is the ring?

Cory nods.

CORY

It's one of the things I'm taking with me to space.

FADE TO:

AN HOUR LATER...

Katia is now lying on the bed with her back straight against the head of the bed, while Cory is lying in the opposite direction, with his head on Katia's lap.

CORY (CONT'D)

How come you're not married?

KATIA

If you tried life in the spotlight you would know why! You can't have a normal private life. It's the one thing that we "celebrities" have to give up if we want the fame and money.

CORY

That must suck! Good thing I never went to Hollywood.

KATIA

(sarcastic)

Really? You wanted to be an actor?

CORY

Yeah, why not? I could sing too.
(clears throat)

(MORE)

CORY (CONT'D)
"I'm leaving on a jet plane, and
I'm never coming back again..."

Katia laughs hysterically.

KATIA
That's not how the song goes.

CORY
That's how it goes for me.

They both laugh for a few seconds, then it's quiet again.

CORY (CONT'D)
Can I tell you something?
(looks up at Katia)
Thank you for this. I'm going to
leave Earth in a couple of days a
happy man.

Katia smiles.

CORY (CONT'D)
Hey, how crazy are you?

KATIA
What kind of a question is that?

CORY
Everyone is sleeping now. Come on,
I wanna show you something.

Cory jumps off the bed and pulls Katia by her arms with him.
He grabs his center pass.

KATIA
Wait... my shoes!

Katia didn't get a chance to put on her shoes, but Cory
ignores her and they leave the room, with Katia barefoot.

INT. AUDITROIUM - MIDNIGHT

They enter the empty auditorium, with Cory still holding her
hand.

CORY
Lie down over there, in the middle
of the aisle.

Katia looks at him with a raised eyebrow.

CORY (CONT'D)

I know that sounded weird but just trust me.

Katia goes over and lies in the middle of the auditorium and looks up at the ceiling. Cory goes over to the controls.

CORY (CONT'D)

Okay, how did this go again?

Cory starts up the projector and the solar system fills up the ceiling of the auditorium. Katia's mouth gapes at what she is seeing and Cory grabs the remote and goes to lie next to her.

KATIA

Wow! How come those guys never showed me this before? So what am I looking at exactly? Tell me.

Katia says as she scoots closer to Cory, resting her head on his shoulders.

CORY

You see that group of bright stars in the middle? That's the Gemini Constellation.

Cory uses the remote, and the stars of the Gemini Constellation light up. Katia is still astonished.

KATIA

I see it now! It's like two people holding hands. It's so beautiful.

CORY

It is. But what I want you to see is the bright orange dot that is right outside the constellation, right at the top there.

KATIA

Yeah I see it. What about it?

CORY

Jupiter is in Gemini... that's Jupiter, that's where I'm going!

KATIA

You're gonna see that bright dot up close? That's unbelievable!

CORY

Yeah, but it still won't be the most beautiful thing I have ever seen in my life.

Cory looks at her smiling.

KATIA

Oh shut up!

Katia playfully slaps him. The two then lie again on their backs and continue staring at the stars.

KATIA (CONT'D)

I hope everything goes well with the launch, and you complete this mission of yours. I just want to say that you are really brave for doing this, I don't know anyone that would go on a one-way mission to space...

Katia looks at Cory to see that he has fallen asleep. She quietly gets up and leaves, heading back to take her stuff.

FADE TO:

INT. KENNEDY SPACE CENTER - EARLY MORNING

Katia's promotional stunt for the Jupiter mission got people talking, and they now want to learn more about it. The team gave Cory the green light to do interviews about the mission, and he is seated in front of a camera, ready to be interviewed by a news channel.

INTERCUT:

INT. TV STUDIO - EARLY MORNING

NEWS ANCHOR

"The one-way mission to space!" The top-secret mission that NASA had managed to keep under wraps and are facing huge criticism for. NASA is planning on sending a dying man into space with no intention of bringing him back; why the secrecy behind this mission? And why is he not coming back?

(MORE)

NEWS ANCHOR (CONT'D)

To answer those questions, we have with us live from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida, the volunteer for this mission, Mr. Cory Fox. Mr. Fox, thank you for joining us.

INTERCUT:

CORY

Thank you for having me.

NEWS ANCHOR

Tell us what you can about this mission; Why are you doing this? And don't you feel that you are being used by NASA?

CORY

Well, I'm going alone and I'm heading to Jupiter, or Jupiter's moon Europa to be exact. But before going into more detail, I just want to say that nobody is using me. I agreed to this mission on my own. It was me that contacted NASA and told them about this idea, and I signed the contract myself. If anything, I am the one that is using NASA to fulfill my childhood dream of going to space. So, this perception that the media has created about NASA using a dying man...

NEWS ANCHOR

But why aren't they bringing you back? OK, using a dying man, as horrible as it sounds, can be understood seeing how risky this mission is, but they could at least bring you back to have a proper funeral rather than leave your body floating in space?

CORY

That should concern no one but myself. I don't care if I come back or not. I would actually prefer for my body to float in space for eternity, I think that's better than being buried six feet under.

NEWS ANCHOR

Mr. Fox, since you are not an astronaut, how have you prepared for this?

CORY

My preparations have just been trying to memorize everything that I have been taught in a short amount of time. I was working on the project when it began, and I still remember most of the details. I just took a crash course, no pun intended, on how to be an astronaut. And one last thing - I just want to give a quick shout out to Ever-heart high-schoolers, your science teacher is finally going into space.

NEWS ANCHOR

Well, Mr. Fox, you certainly seem excited about your mission, and I am sure everyone will join me in wishing you the best of luck.

INT. COLLINS RESIDENCE - EVENING

Collins returns home after another stressful day at work, getting the preps ready for the Jupiter mission. It's late, and he goes to the couch in the living room and sits, putting his right foot on the coffee table in front of him. His wife MARY (50) short statured, with short hair to match, comes over and sits next to him.

MARY

Everything ok at work or should I not even ask about that anymore?

COLLINS

Not work exactly, its just this mission is...

MARY

What about the mission? Something wrong?

COLLINS

Nothing wrong with the mission... look, I don't care if this makes me sound like a jerk, but if the astronaut for this mission was any other person...

(MORE)

COLLINS (CONT'D)

I wouldn't give a damn, and you would see me coming back home excited that I'm finally gonna complete my dream project. But it's Cory... I'm still trying to wrap my head around the fact that I'm using my former student, to realize my dream. You know he still calls me Mr. Collins.

MARY

You are not using him, he agreed to do this. And I know, it's Cory, the sweet little kid who wanted to be just like his teacher. I cried when you told me about his diagnosis... I'm just as sad as anyone that we're gonna lose him, but he's not a little boy anymore, he's a grown man and he made this decision on his own.

COLLINS

I know, but I just wish... that I could go with him.

MARY

Hank, don't you dare start that again! You're no astronaut, stick to what you're good at; you will be more helpful to the mission by staying on the ground.

INT. MEETING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Cory enters to see Collins and Singh.

COLLINS

So how are you feeling? You ready to go into space?

CORY

If I say no, will you cancel the mission?

COLLINS

It's good that you're still keeping your sense of humor. We just need to go over a few last-minute details again.

Cory sits down.

COLLINS (CONT'D)

It will take you about 212 days for you to reach the gold mine, and you might lose contact with us at the 190-day mark. So, when you reach the gold mine, you will be on your own to complete this mission. Once you complete the sequence to release the pod and orbiter, you will have 60 seconds to get into your pod before it separates from the shuttle. The pod is closed shut now, and it will remain that way until you complete the release sequence.

SINGH

Everything you said you needed is inside the pod already.

CORY

You managed to get my reading material?

SINGH

It's all in there, don't worry. Just no Doritos! You can only have regular space food!

CORY

Can I just ask one thing; It must have slipped my mind, but what is so special about the pod? I mean, getting into an escape pod is a normal thing to do in any mission, but you keep emphasizing it a lot, why is that?

Collins and Singh look at each other, hesitant to speak.

COLLINS

The mission went through a lot of changes after you left, we plan on going to that shuttle again in a future mission, and we don't want the astronauts to open it and see your rotten corpse there, no offense.

Cory nods his head, gets up and leaves the room. Singh moves some of the papers on the desk to reveal a folder underneath labeled "AUTO POD".

SINGH

I thought you were gonna tell him.

COLLINS

Tell him that we already figured out how to bring our astronaut home and we're just trying it out on him first? I was going to, but... Cory Fox wants to do this mission because he wants to die, and be left alone in space. Telling him that won't happen, might ruin the chances of him wanting to go ahead. It's best he doesn't know that he's coming back.

Collins gets up and leaves the room....

EXT. MEETING ROOM - AFTERNOON

...to find a shocking sight outside the door. Cory is laying motionless, face down on the floor.

COLLINS

Cory!

Collins rushes to Cory. Singh appears and calls the medical team to the scene.

INT. MEDICAL CENTER ROOM - AFTERNOON

Cory wakes up to see Collins and Singh standing beside him.

COLLINS

You're alright Cory, just a slight hiccup, you'll be fine.

CORY

How long was I out?

Before either of them can answer, Patrick enters the room.

PATRICK

I am glad you two are here, saves me the time of having to go around delivering the news.

SINGH

What news?

PATRICK

The mission is off, Cory is in no condition to go to space. We would be wasting our time, and more importantly our money, sending him out there.

Patrick is about to leave when Collins confronts him.

COLLINS

Patrick... Sir, he just got a little lightheaded! He's fine, you're making a mistake if you cancel the mission now. Just delay it at least.

PATRICK

If we delay the mission, will his cancer go away?

Silence.

PATRICK (CONT'D)

(to Cory)

I informed Erik to get all your things ready and provide a car to take you back home. This mission is over.

SINGH

Sir! You're making a mistake!

Singh joins Collins in facing up to Patrick.

PATRICK

We're putting a multi-million dollar mission in the hands of a dying man! Cory, can you guarantee that you will not die before completing your mission? Or what will happen if you pass out again in space? Who's going to pick you up? Cause these guys wont be there for you up there!

Cory doesn't speak, instead he looks at Collins and Singh to answer, but they remain quiet.

PATRICK (CONT'D)

Going ahead with this mission in the first place was the mistake. It was a fantasy... and I admit, I got caught up in it too... you hooked me Collins!

(MORE)

PATRICK (CONT'D)

You actually had me believing that this could work; a dying man is going to space to possibly find a new home for humans and save the world! Sorry it took me so long to realize this but the risks are far too great, I mean, your volunteer is lying in a hospital bed, just 2 days before his launch! The fate of mankind could literally rest on what we do... We have to come up with something better than this!
(points at Cory)

Patrick leaves. The three men look at each other dejected.

EXT. CORY FOX APARTMENT - EVENING

A cab pulls up and Cory gets out carrying his bag, with a solemn look on his face.

INT. CORY FOX APARTMENT - EVENING

Cory enters to find his place in the same condition he left it, and his father is gone. He drops his bag on the floor, and lies down on the couch. He turns on the TV...

NEWS ANCHOR #2

Some breaking news to share with you tonight; IT'S OFF! No sooner than we heard about it, the controversial one-way mission to Jupiter has been scrapped. Why? Because the astronaut is not fit enough! What did NASA expect? He is dying...

Cory switches off the TV and goes to sleep on the couch.

INT. MEETING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Singh enters to see Collins, agitated, nervously tapping his foot.

SINGH

The hell's wrong with you?

COLLINS

It's not over, it can't be.

SINGH

Come on, get over it, it's been
scrapped before, it's nothing new.

Collins, wide-eyed, gets up towards Singh.

COLLINS

We're so close! I can't give up
now, there is another way, there is
another man.

SINGH

Another man? Who?

The receptionist opens the door.

RECEPTIONIST

Sir, Congressman King is here.

Singh looks at Collins, stunned.

SINGH

No! You didn't!

Congressman WILLIAM KING (57), a tall suited man, wearing his
usual red tie representing his party, enters the meeting
room.

KING

Oh it's so good to be back!

COLLINS

Congressman King, it's good to see
you.

Collins hugs him.

KING

Congressman? No, in here I'm always
Astronaut King! So what brings me
here? You said it was important.

Collins gestures for King to sit down as he remains standing.
He turns on the projector and the name Jupiter Mission
appears.

KING (CONT'D)

Yeah I heard about that? Why was it
called off? Where is the volunteer?

COLLINS

He's gone now, so we have to move
on without him.

KING

And what do you want from me exactly?

COLLINS

I want you to replace him.

King remains quiet for a few seconds.

KING

Look, if you don't agree with my politics then I will change, just don't send me away on this one-way mission.

COLLINS

Bill, I'm not joking.

KING

Collins, my friend, be realistic! I'm retired, doing something else now, why would I want to go on this mission?

COLLINS

Because you would kill for what will come with it! No one has ever come close to being on your level, there is Astronaut King, and then there is everybody else! Now imagine what will happen to your status if you become the first man to go to Jupiter! You have the Moon, you took us to Mars, and this will make you king of the universe!

King crosses his arms and sits back, intrigued.

KING

Go on.

COLLINS

First off, it's not technically a one-way mission, there is a chance that you could make it back.

KING

How much of a chance?

COLLINS

Twenty percent! But, even if you don't make it back, you will be immortalized here.

(MORE)

COLLINS (CONT'D)

Your family will be guaranteed compensation and scholarships for your kids to any college.

KING

Okay.

SINGH

What?!

Singh and Collins look at each other surprised.

KING

I am saying Okay because there is only one condition that I want, and I am sure you cannot fulfil it.

COLLINS

What is your condition?

KING

I want a crew! Going to Jupiter and back will take approximately 2 years, correct? There is no way I'm going to be spending all that time alone, so give me a crew. But I have a feeling that you cannot do that, can you?

Collins lowers his head, disappointed at not being able to give an answer.

King gets up, closes his jacket button and goes to stand facing Collins.

KING (CONT'D)

I always knew you were crazy Hank, but I didn't realize you were crazy enough to come up with an idea as batshit as this!

(snickers)

Scholarships for my kids? That's funny! It was good seeing you, good luck with your mission.

INT. SHRINK'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Cory enters the Shrink's office and heads to the receptionist.

CORY

I'm Cory Fox, I have an appointment with Dr. Schlupp.

Before the receptionist could answer, the office door opens and DR. Elizabeth SCHLUPP (42) stands in the doorway.

DR. SCHLUPP

Oh it's the space man! You finally landed in my office!

CORY

I'm not the space man anymore!

DR. SCHLUPP

Then tell me all about it! Please, come in.

INT. SHRINK'S THERAPY ROOM - AFTERNOON

The two sit down.

DR. SCHLUPP

Now, usually the first thing I do with a new patient is ask them what's wrong, but I follow the news, I heard about your mission, and how it was called off, and a couple of days later you're in my office! So why is that?

CORY

I don't know... I have always struggled to find a purpose in my life, and it wasn't because of the diagnosis, it was way before that. But when I walked into the center again after having been fired. Being accepted again into that mission which I built!

(puffs his cheeks)

I felt something in me scream yes! This is what I was born to do! This is my purpose in life! But... like everything else that brought me joy in my life... it was taken away from me. Even though I kept having second thoughts all through my training, doubting myself if I could do it, now that I won't do it... I'm 100 percent certain I could have done it!

DR. SCHLUPP

You were doubting your health, and not yourself.

CORY

What do you mean?

DR. SCHLUPP

Now that the mission is officially off, have you gone back on treatment?

Cory shakes his head no.

DR. SCHLUPP (CONT'D)

Getting hired by NASA once is a miracle. Getting hired by them twice... that takes some doing, and you did that!

CORY

Technically I didn't, they just called me a volunteer, they didn't re-hire me.

DR. SCHLUPP

Still, you made them take you back in some form. So maybe a healthy Cory Fox will get officially re-hired.

CORY

A healthy Cory Fox?

DR. SCHLUPP

I know it's hard but forget about space for now, and focus on your health. Get back on treatment, and you might beat this thing, you never know. And when you do, you go back knocking on NASA's door, and you can still play your part, your purpose... maybe you weren't supposed to be the guy who actually goes to Jupiter, but you can still take them there.

Cory scratches his forehead and looks at Dr. Schlupp without saying a word.

FADE TO:

INT. TRAINING FACILITY - AFTERNOON

Singh enters gasping for air, frantically looking around.

SINGH

Where is he?

Singh is looking for Collins, he is shocked to see him suited up in a space suit, ready to enter the pool. He runs to him.

SINGH (CONT'D)

What the hell are you doing?

COLLINS

I'm not gonna give up on my dream for a second time. I scrapped this project before, I'm not gonna do it again. If no one wants to go on this mission, then I will just do it myself. Oh c'mon and put the helmet on already!

The worker hurriedly locks Collin's helmet and he is lowered into the pool. Patrick rushes in the facility and goes to Singh.

PATRICK

Has he lost his mind?

SINGH

I don't know what's gotten into him, he completely lost it after... after Cory left.

(Alarm) The sound of the alarm starts blaring through the facility. Because of Collins' hurry the worker didn't lock the helmet correctly, and water begins filling his suit.

PATRICK

Get him out of there!

The engineer pulls the lever to operate the crane and lift him out but it's not working.

POOL ENGINEER

It's jammed!

PATRICK

Then pull him out of there yourselves!

The trainers swimming with Collins try to lift him out but they are struggling with his weight. Water is filling his helmet and they try to remove it to give him oxygen but it is stuck. Singh and a few more engineers standing by jump in and they all lift him out of the pool.

Collins lays on the edge of the pool, his helmet removed, gasping for air.

PATRICK (CONT'D)

What is the matter with you? The mission is over! Move on before you kill yourself!

Still gasping for air, Collins blurts out one word.

COLLINS

Clipper...

PATRICK

What?

COLLINS

Twenty years ago, after the failure of the Europa Clipper, you turned to me and said, "come up with something better, take us to Europa!" You turned to me Patrick, not the guys who worked on the Clipper, but to me! And I took it as a challenge... I figured out a plan and told you it will work if we make it a manned mission. We just needed one man smart enough to execute the mission, and brave enough to be willing to do it... and we found him... but you let him go! We need Cory!

Patrick kneels near Collins who is still laying by the pool.

PATRICK

You are lucky that you are Hank Collins, else I would've fired you right now. No, we don't need him, what we need is for you to get up off your ass, stop thinking that you're an astronaut, and go back to the drawing board, you'll figure out a way, and if you can't, then I will personally throw this project in the trash. Don't go to Europa, go back to your sanity instead.

Patrick gets up and walks away.

COLLINS

We scrap it now, then what? A few years down the line, we will look back on this missed opportunity.

(MORE)

COLLINS (CONT'D)

You will look back and you will realize your mistake, but it will be too late. There is a chance he might die, but there is an even bigger chance he can make it, and we can achieve the most important milestone in the history of humanity... just bring him back... Bring back Cory!

FADE TO:

INT. CORY FOX APARTMENT - MORNING

Cory wakes after sleeping on the couch. A beat, before his phone rings, and he answers.

KATIA

Cory, its Katia.

CORY

Kat, how are you?

KATIA

I'm afraid I'm disappointed.

CORY

Why? What's wrong?

KATIA

What's wrong? Well, I recently met a lovely man, who had a childhood dream of going to space. I saw determination in his eyes that reminded me of me, when I was chasing my dream. I thought he was just like me, but I'm disappointed I was wrong, because unlike me, he gave up on his dream.

CORY

Kat, the Director himself called it off, what was I supposed to do?

KATIA

Who was going to space, you or him? I saw the report on TV, they said it was called off because you weren't fit enough. I won't believe anything unless I hear it from you. Do you think you are fit enough to go on this mission?

CORY

Yeah... I could have done it.

KATIA

Good, that's what I wanted to hear,
otherwise, we would have just
wasted our time.

CORY

We?

KATIA

Look out the window.

Cory goes towards the window, pulls the curtain back to see Katia, her bodyguard and a large group of TEENAGERS standing in front of a large bus. Katia disconnects the phone and waves to Cory to come down.

EXT. CORY FOX APARTMENT - AFTERNOON

Cory exits to see the teenagers are his former students, with the Principal and few teachers alongside them.

CORY

What's going on?

PRINCIPAL

Miss Mohren came to our school
yesterday and kindly offered to
sponsor an unofficial field trip to
the Kennedy Space Center.

CORY

Unofficial?

PRINCIPAL

Everything was organized last
night. Miss Mohren took out her
phone right in front of me, made a
few calls and everything was set! I
guess that's the power that fame
and money bring, huh? So, I made
some calls to the parents to get
their consent, as many were
concerned about the sudden nature
of this trip... But you know what
made them agree? I told them that
we were doing this for you.

Cory is clearly moved when he looks at Katia and the students, all smiling at him.

CORY

You guys really want to see me go
into space, huh?

They all nod.

CORY (CONT'D)

Well, its launch day, and I'm not
even in my spacesuit yet!

The students cheer as they excitedly board the bus.

INT. KENNEDY SPACE CENTER - AFTERNOON

Patrick and a couple of NASA GREETERS are waiting at the
entrance to greet the students on their field trip.

PATRICK

"Welcome to NASA," shake hands,
smile, yada-yada, which school is
this again?

GREETER

Ever-heart high school.

PATRICK

Ever-heart, why does that sound
familiar? Isn't that...

The sliding glass doors open and Cory Fox enters, with Katia
and her bodyguard by his side, followed by the students and
teachers in a large posse behind them.

Cory determinedly walks straight towards Patrick until
they're face to face.

PATRICK (CONT'D)

Cory...

CORY

Mr. Director! I signed a contract
with NASA to take me to space, so
why am I still here?

The workers stop to look at what is happening.

INT. MEETING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Collins and Singh are having a meeting when Erik rushes in.

ERIK

He's back! Cory is back!

They jump out of their chairs and follow Erik.

INT. KENNEDY SPACE CENTER - AFTERNOON

Collins, Singh and Erik join nearly every employee at the center, in watching the standoff between Cory and Patrick.

CORY

Look at these people, they are all looking forward to seeing a launch today. My former students and colleagues want to see me go into space. I can go into space and complete this mission!

Patrick looks around, seeing that everyone seems to be supporting Cory.

PATRICK

So the volunteer returns! I admire your courage Mr. Fox, but there is no Jupiter mission, you can just go home.

CORY

What if I don't go home?

PATRICK

You seriously think that by coming here...

(looks at the students)

With your little army, that you can scare me into letting you through? Just go home before I have you escorted out of here.

COLLINS (O.S.)

No!

Collins rushes down the stairs and stands next to Cory, confronting Patrick.

COLLINS (CONT'D)

If he goes home, then I'm going home too.

Collins removes his badge and throws it on the ground in front of Patrick.

PATRICK

Oh geez, you're seriously doing this?

Collins, with a serious look on his face, nods yes.

PATRICK (CONT'D)
So we go ahead with this mission,
we launch the shuttle, then what?

COLLINS
Then the world will witness the
greatest achievement in the history
of NASA; we're going to Europa!

Patrick takes a few seconds thinking, looks around at everyone staring.

PATRICK
I'm glad everyone is watching, that
way I have witnesses. Hank
Collins...
(points at him)
You are in charge of this mission,
If you mess this up, then you will
never step foot in this center
again!

Cory takes a step to the side to be in Patrick's sight.

CORY
But Patrick, I'm the one going to
Europa, and I promise you, I'm not
going to mess this up!

Patrick kicks Collins' badge back at him and he leaves. Cory turns to look at Collins who is smiling. Cory raises his arms high and looks at the heavens.

CORY (CONT'D)
NASA! Take me to Europa!

He screams out.

ERIK
Yeah Cory!

Everyone applauds. Singh rushes down the stairs to join Collins and Cory.

SINGH
Welcome back Mr. Fox... again.

CORY
So, do we have enough time to
launch?

COLLINS

Not today, but we can do it in 48 hours!

SINGH

48 hours?

Singh questions the short time span, and he looks at Collins, but he doesn't reciprocate the eye contact. Cory frowns, disappointed.

COLLINS

What's wrong?

CORY

My students and friends are already here, I really wanted them to see the launch.

COLLINS

You want us to launch a mission of this magnitude in a minute? We're gonna do it in 48 hours and that's still cutting it close! Wait.

Collins goes towards the group of students and teachers.

COLLINS (CONT'D)

Who's in charge of this field trip?

PRINCIPAL

I am! I'm the Principal.

COLLINS

Congratulations, your school has been chosen to be the special spectators for our launch. We'd love it if you could be here again in 2 days.

PRINCIPAL

Of course... Yes! We will definitely be here.

Collins looks at Cory and gives him a thumbs up.

FADE OUT.

INT. CHANGING ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

Staff help Cory into his suit, when Katia arrives.

KATIA

You look good in a spacesuit!

Cory turns around, surprised to see her.

CORY

You helped get me into it.

The staff leave and it's just Katia and Cory.

CORY (CONT'D)

Are those red cheeks that I'm
seeing?

Katia is blushing.

CORY (CONT'D)

Do you still think I'm crazy for
doing this?

KATIA

Yeah, but it turns out I'm just as
crazy as you.

CORY

How so?

KATIA

Well, I finally meet a decent guy,
and I'm helping him go into space
where I'll never see him again...

Cory moves closer to kiss her, but the door opens and a crew
member sticks his head in.

CREW #2

Fox, whenever you're ready.

Moment ruined, to Cory and Katia's disappointment.

KATIA

Timing is not on our side. Go to
space Cory, fulfill your dream. I
wish I could say come back safely
but... I will be just as happy if
you could complete the mission you
were given. Promise me you will get
it done!

CORY

I promise... I will complete my
mission.

The door opens again, but this time, Collins enters.

COLLINS

Miss Mohren, you mind giving us a minute?

Katia leaves. Collins and Cory each grab a chair and sit facing each other.

COLLINS (CONT'D)

So, how are you feeling?

CORY

Honestly Mr. Collins, I'm scared! My heart is just going...

(jerks his fist rapidly)

But then again, who has ever gone into the unknown feeling calm? Let me rephrase that; who has ever gone into the unknown alone... Feeling calm?

COLLINS

When I first came to NASA around 23 years ago after quitting teaching, I had dreams to explore our solar system. I had ideas and plans, written in a folder labelled "ways to..."

CORY

"... Improve space travel!" I know, I remember that folder.

COLLINS

You helped me build it! I used to run around with that folder, showing it to just one guy; our chief engineer at the time, Patrick Wright! The only reason I am in the position that I am now in, is because of him. He always trusted me and I never let him down. I am sure its the reason why he agreed to go ahead with this mission, because he trusts me.

CORY

No sir, I don't need added pressure!

COLLINS

You didn't let me finish! It's not pressure, it's motivation.

(MORE)

COLLINS (CONT'D)

Because in my 23 years here, only once have I threatened to quit, and that was 2 days ago! And I only did that because I trust you Cory! I taught you everything I know, but everything you know, you taught yourself. I know you can do this!

Cory puts his head in his hands and puffs his cheeks, overwhelmed by the moment.

CREW #2

Fox, anytime now!

The crew member sticks his head again to call for Cory. Cory gathers his composure, gets up and looks at Collins.

COLLINS

You go on ahead Cory, I'll catch up.

Cory grabs his helmet and leaves.

EXT. LOCKER ROOM - EVENING

Cory exits to find his father standing in front of him.

CORY

Dad?

IAN

I can't let you go into space without saying goodbye.

CORY

So you're not mad at me for doing this?

IAN

I was, but then I remembered that you're a crazy SOB! It makes sense that you're doing this!

CORY

I got my crazy from you!

The two hug each other.

IAN

Take care of yourself out there... I'm proud of you son... Here, take this with you.

Ian removes his necklace that has a cross and places it in Cory's hand.

IAN (CONT'D)

I know you're not gonna wear it,
but at least keep it with you.

CORY

Thank you, I will take care of it.

Cory continues on towards the shuttle.

EXT. LAUNCH VIEWING - EVENING

Katia and Ian join the students and teachers, who are given a special section outside to view the launch.

EXT. LAUNCH PAD - EVENING

Cory is walking in the middle of a thirteen man entourage. Until they reach the point where they have to leave him. Cory stops and turns around to face Collins and Singh.

CORY

I guess this is it.

ERIK (O.S.)

Wait! Wait!

Erik catches up with Cory as he is running up the steel steps. He hunches over trying to catch his breath, holding two pictures in his hands.

CORY

Hey, I was wondering where you
were! I thought you were coming up
with us?

ERIK

I had... to pick up... something.

The two pictures are of the selfie he took when Cory first arrived.

ERIK (CONT'D)

I got these done a while ago. One
is for you and one is for me. The
small one is perfect for you to
take on board.

CORY

I don't know what to say, this means a lot. Thanks.

ERIK

Could you also just sign mine?

CORY

(sarcastic)

Oh now you want my signature?

Erik smiles. Cory signs the portrait and hugs Erik goodbye, then Erik leaves.

CORY (CONT'D)

He's a good kid, take care of him.

SINGH

Don't worry about him, he's in good hands, we just need you to take care of yourself.

Cory enters the cockpit of the shuttle, and staff help strap him in.

INT. COCKPIT - EVENING

Cory sticks the portrait from Erik on the dashboard, and hangs his dad's cross on one of the knobs.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - EVENING

ANNOUNCER

Lift off in t-120 seconds.

Collins and Singh are back in the control room to prepare for takeoff.

INT. COCKPIT - EVENING

Cory is strapped in, and is nervously looking around.

CORY

Oh what the hell am I doing? What the hell am I doing?

INT. CONTROL ROOM - EVENING

Collins presses the speaker.

COLLINS
Your mic is on Cory.

INT. COCKPIT - EVENING

CORY
I know, I'm asking you.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - EVENING

COLLINS
You're taking us to Jupiter, Cory.

CORY
(V.O)
Good, just wanted to make sure. Say
a prayer for me?

COLLINS
You're religious now?

INT. COCKPIT - EVENING

CORY
Not a bad time to start.

Cory stares at his dad's cross.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - EVENING

Collins looks at Singh who shakes his head. He then looks at the other crew present, for someone that could grant Cory's wish. The crew member announcing the countdown opens his mic.

ANNOUNCER
So you do not lose heart. Though
your outer self is wasting away,
your inner self is being renewed
day by day. For this light
momentary affliction is preparing
for you... an eternal weight of
glory beyond all comparison, as you
look not to the things that are
seen but to the things that are
unseen... God be with you Cory...
Our systems are a GO for launch.
Fox?

No reply...

ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)

Fox?

INT. COCKPIT - EVENING

Cory has his eyes closed, taking slow deep breaths. He opens his eyes and stares out of the shuttle window. His breathing is normal again as he is seeing Earth for the last time.

EXT. LAUNCH SITE - EVENING

The outside speakers are turned on and Cory finally answers.

CORY

(speaker)

I just want everyone to know, that when I am alone in space, I will be looking out the window, and I will see Earth again, I will see you all again, but no one will see me! This is Cory Fox... a GO for launch... goodbye!

INT. CONTROL ROOM - EVENING

ANNOUNCER

We have a GO for auto sequence start! Lift off in t-20 seconds.

EXT. LAUNCH VIEWING - EVENING

Katia sees Ian with his head down, praying. She grabs his hand.

KATIA

Mr. Fox, your son is gonna be okay.
I know it!

Ian looks at her with just the faintest of smiles.

INT. COCKPIT - EVENING

Cory finishes the final sequences for the launch, then takes a deep breath and closes his eyes.

CORY

7... 6... 5...

Cory counts down with the announcer.

EXT. LAUNCH SITE - EVENING

The shuttle begins to shake, signaling the boosters are ready.

ANNOUNCER

(speaker)

Ignition... 3... 2... 1... and lift
off of the Jupiter Shuttle.

The shuttle successfully launches to the sound of applause from those watching on the ground, and the crew in the control room.

INT. COCKPIT - EVENING

Inside the cockpit, the force of the launch is making everything shake vigorously, as if they are about to fall apart. Cory is looking around scared, tightening his grip on his safety straps.

CORY

Umm... things are shaking... why
are things shaking? Is this normal?

COLLINS

(radio)

You're fine Cory, relax.

The shuttle continues its ascent into the sky as the boosters separate from the shuttle. The large shuttle stationed on Earth is now a tiny blip in the clear sky, leaving a trail of smoke behind it. The shuttle leaves the atmosphere and Cory is in space.

INT. SHUTTLE - DAY 1

The Jupiter Shuttle is floating in space. Cory looks around and gazes at the space all around him; the stars filling up almost every inch of the universe he can see. He looks at Earth, with the majestic bright blue of its mighty oceans, and he looks at the moon, almost haunting in its presence, a shining ball, in the backdrop of total darkness.

CORY

This is beautiful! You guys, this
is just too beautiful!

COLLINS

(radio)

That lift off couldn't have gone
any better.

(MORE)

COLLINS (CONT'D)

You're on your way to Jupiter, so
just sit back and relax. We are
here if you need anything.

CORY

I need to pee.

COLLINS

(radio)

Yeah, we can't help you with that!

Cory removes the straps on the seat and floats out of it.

CORY

All my life, I have been dreaming
of going to space, and when I do,
the first thing I do is pee!

INT. SHUTTLE - DAY 37

Cory turns the radio on...

CORY

Mr. Collins? Singh? Anybody there?

COLLINS

(radio)

I'm here Cory.

CORY

I really feel like talking to
someone, you have some time?

INT. CONTROL ROOM - NIGHT

COLLINS

For you? Of course! I was just
about to contact you. Guess who
called us yesterday?

INTERCUT:

CORY

Who?

COLLINS

Your girlfriend, Miss Mohren!

CORY

Seriously? What did she say?

COLLINS

She wanted t see if the mission was going OK. You know, I always wondered what happened after you guys had coffee here. The security cameras showed you going back to your room and then to the Hubble Theater. C'mon, it's just me listening.

CORY

Sorry Mr. Collins, I don't kiss and tell!

COLLINS

Oh really? Because she already told me that you fell asleep on the floor of the theater!

CORY

Ah shit!

COLLINS

That is hilarious, you're lying next to Katia Mohren and you fall asleep! You had coffee just before that!

CORY

Hey, I feel tired all the time now, couldn't help that I dozed off. Plus, she talks a lot so one cup of coffee was not enough to keep me awake through that!

COLLINS

Hey Cory, what's it like?

CORY

You mean space or listening to Katia ramble on?

COLLINS

Space!

CORY

I can't describe it, I said it was beautiful but that's not enough. I'm seeing a new part of space every day, for a person that doesn't love space they might think it's all the same, just a dark sky filled with stars, but no.

(MORE)

CORY (CONT'D)

Every area of this dark sky is different, every star more beautiful than the one next to it.

COLLINS

I wish I could be experiencing what you are right now.

CORY

Really?

COLLINS

You never knew this but I entered NASA to be an astronaut, just like you, but I failed as well. Only a lucky few get to make it as astronauts. The others get to stay here in the control room talking to the lucky ones out in space.

CORY

But I'm unlucky too. I don't get to make it back.

FADE TO:

INT. CONTROL ROOM - EVENING

Collins is packing his things, and closing his work station, ready to go home. But before he leaves he turns around to address his team.

COLLINS

It's been over a month now since the launch, and I never got to thank you guys for making it possible. I know I put you under a lot of pressure with the 48-hour launch, but you guys did amazing. Proud of you all.

The crew smile and nod their heads, happy at being acknowledged. Collins turns around to leave.

EXT. CONTROL ROOM - EVENING

Collins exits the control room, stops, and looks at the ground, in deep thought. Singh arrives to take over the shift.

SINGH

If you lost your car keys its best
to look for them under a lamp post,
cause the lights better there.

Singh jokes at Collins staring at the ground.

COLLINS

No... it's just...

SINGH

What's wrong?

COLLINS

I just thanked the guys for helping
out with the launch, I never got
the chance to do that.

SINGH

And you're feeling sick that you
thanked people?

COLLINS

It got me thinking about the launch
again, and I got this weird feeling
all of a sudden... like there was
something we forgot to do.

SINGH

That's what you get for going ahead
with that launch on short notice,
you're gonna overthink it. But the
launch went perfect, we did
everything right, no need to worry
about it.

COLLINS

You're right, I guess, I'm just
being paranoid.

INT. SHUTTLE - DAY 190

Cory is sleeping, the toll of space travel and the cancer is
visible as he is looking more frail now. Having not shaved
since he was last on Earth, his hair is more scruffy, with
his usually beard free face, now covered with a dark and
thick stubble.

COLLINS

(radio)

Cory... Can you hear us?

Cory is too tired and weak to answer the radio.

COLLINS (CONT'D)

(radio)

Cory... I know you are there and that you can hear me... your radio signal is getting distorted already, we might lose contact with you soon... you just have a few days left until you reach your destination... you will know because the dash will beep... when you hear it, you will know what to do... and please get into your pod... Godspeed Cory and good... lu...

The transmission cuts off and Cory is the loneliest man in the universe. A tear rolls down his cheek as he goes back to sleep.

INT. SHUTTLE - DAY 201

Cory is sitting in the cockpit admiring the view, when suddenly the map on the dash starts to beep.

CORY

Oh shit! Come on... focus, I can do this.

Cory begins the sequence to release the pod and orbiter. He inputs the sequence, but an "ERROR" shows up on the pod's screen.

CORY (CONT'D)

What the fu... Dammit! What's wrong?

Cory removes the seat straps and floats towards the end of the shuttle. He goes down the chute.

Outside the pod and orbiter is a screen that shows their status. He begins running diagnostics to identify the problem, when the coordinates for the pod and orbiter show up on their respective screens.

CORY (CONT'D)

You gotta be kidding me! Why do they have the same coordinates? They said they should be different! One of them is wrong!

Cory riffles through the gap between the pod and orbiter and takes out the manual the team added, that has the correct coordinates.

CORY (CONT'D)
You forgot to change the
coordinates for the orbiter! Of all
people, I can't believe you messed
up your job Mr. Collins!

Cory enters the correct coordinates for the orbiter and floats back to his seat and straps himself back in. The dash still beeping. He begins to enter the release sequence again, but his vision becomes blurry.

CORY (CONT'D)
No, no, no... I can't see
anything... not now!

Cory appears dizzy; barely opening his eyes. The dash is still beeping and he is yet to detach. He raises his arm to continue inputting the sequence, but his arm floats upwards; Cory passes out.

The dash keeps beeping for a little while longer until it stops, to signal the passing of the Gold Mine and the failure of the mission.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - MORNING

Collins and Singh are following the shuttle status in the control room. Patrick walks in to check on them.

PATRICK
Still nothing?

SINGH
No... he's there but... he's at the
gold mine but we are not getting
any signs that he detached the pod
and orbiter.

PATRICK
Is he dead? Did he die before he
could get his job done?

COLLINS
We don't know... but it's probably
just a delay... give it some time.

Patrick turns around to leave but he accidentally bumps into the folders that are on the desk and they fall to the ground.

Patrick picks up the two folders and he is surprised to see that they are for two different missions. One is labeled "Jupiter Shuttle" and the other "AUTO Pod".

PATRICK

You guys used that pod? Is that pod in the shuttle? I thought I told you to scrap it?

COLLINS

To be precise, you told us to scrap it before Cory came along. When he did, we thought this was the best opportunity to go ahead with this mission.

PATRICK

On whose authority?

SINGH

Collins is the head of both projects, he had the authority.

Patrick paces angrily.

COLLINS

Patrick, before we can think of any future Jupiter mission, we need to first find out if we can come back from a Jupiter mission. That's our goal here... we can explore Europa another time, but for now... we just need the pod to come back.

PATRICK

Did he know?

COLLINS

Fearing that he may back out of the mission, I thought it best not to tell him... and I know; I sent my own student, my prodigy, out to die and I didn't even tell him the real reason why he's going out to space! I feel bad, the thought of it is killing me everyday... but it was the right thing to do.

PATRICK

Oh, for God's sake! The man gave his life to help you, and you don't tell him that you are bringing him back?! The whole time he was preparing for this mission, he had no idea that your real intentions were to use him as a guinea pig for your stupid pod?

COLLINS

We calculated that there is less than a twenty percent chance of this successfully happening. There was no need to tell him because he could be dead by then.

PATRICK

And what will happen in that eighty percent?

SINGH

He and the pod might end up in a ball of fire!

PATRICK

You're playing with a dying man!

COLLINS

This was our best and only chance to see if this will work. And no disrespect to Cory, but trying this out on a dying man is better than trying it on someone with hopes for the future.

PATRICK

How long will it take for the pod to get back?

COLLINS

The pod will automatically start its return to Earth once he completes the release sequence. It won't happen unless he does that. Then it will take a year for the pod to return. I'm sorry Patrick, but this was too big to pass up; a pod as far away as Jupiter, that is pre-programmed to come back to Earth on its own without anyone controlling it. We had to try!

Patrick becomes silent, remembering something Collins said to him.

PATRICK

It was perfectly aligned...

Collins nervously looks up at Patrick.

PATRICK (CONT'D)

When you came to me and said that, what did you mean exactly?

COLLINS

When the shuttle reaches the gold mine, Europa will be at its farthest point from Jupiter... Aphelion. That will make it perfectly aligned for the AUTO Pod to...

PATRICK

For the AUTO Pod to escape both their gravitational pulls! Of course.

Patrick snaps his fingers in realization.

PATRICK (CONT'D)

I hate when you do that!

Patrick shakes his head and storms out of the control room.

INT. SHUTTLE - DAY 201

Cory wakes up to the sound of silence. He pulls himself up and faces the dash.

CORY

No... what happened... Goddamit!

Cory looks at the status of the pod and orbiter and sees that they are still attached to the shuttle.

CORY (CONT'D)

I failed! All that work, all that time, and I fail... no... there has to be another way.

Cory sits at the cockpit and looks around. He sees a map which shows that he is now past the "gold mine". He eyes the controls for the shuttle and back at the map again. He squints his eyes for a few seconds, and realizes something.

CORY (CONT'D)

The gold mine is still a gold mine... in the other direction! I have to go back! How can I make it go back?

Cory looks at the map, and then raises his head to look out of the window. He spots the icy surface of Europa in front of him.

CORY (CONT'D)

I have to go forwards to go back!

He sets the shuttle's path towards Europa.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - AFTERNOON

Patrick is in the control room checking on the mission.

PATRICK

Why the hell has he not released
the orbiter yet?

COLLINS

I'm not sure, but he is still
alive, the shuttle is moving, but
the path changed, it can't do that
on its own, he must have altered
it... but we are not sure why.

PATRICK

I wanna know what's going on, is
there no way to get in contact with
him again?

SINGH

The electric current from Io is
still too strong, we can't get
through it.

PATRICK

Alright, everyone listen up, we
need to get in contact with him
ASAP! Put your heads together, come
up with an answer... you have two
days.

Patrick leaves the crew, who group together to brainstorm
ideas.

INT. PATRICK OFFICE - MORNING

Collins and Singh enter.

PATRICK

What have you got?

COLLINS

We got nothing, yet.

PATRICK

Our volunteer is out there! God
knows what he's doing, but I want
to know!

SINGH

There is nothing we can do, we need more time.

Patrick lays back in his chair, and looks up at the ceiling.

PATRICK

Umran, can I have a private conversation with Hank.

Singh gets off his chair and leaves.

PATRICK (CONT'D)

Hank, Hank, Hank. Remember when we were both up for this post? You were the better candidate I admit, you are clearly the smarter one, everyone knew you should be director, even me, but you turned it down.

COLLINS

The suit and sitting behind a desk... It fits you more than me! I wanna be down there, right in the thick of things, that's where I belong Patrick, you knew that, why bring it up?

PATRICK

Because I wanted to remind you, that no matter how smart you think you are, I'm always bailing you out.

COLLINS

What?

Patrick places a newspaper article in front of Collins, who picks it up and reads the headline.

COLLINS (CONT'D)

"Russian Spy Satellite explodes in space."

PATRICK

This happened a couple of months ago, remember? The Russians had a secret satellite orbiting Earth, and some said it was a spy satellite, others said it was a weapon. But it was neither.

(MORE)

PATRICK (CONT'D)

I know what the Russians are trying to do, they wanna set up a dual-satellite network, one orbiting Earth, and the other orbiting the moon. This will allow them to reach any signal out there in real-time, so you'd be able to have a live conversation with someone... someone who is as far away as Jupiter!

COLLINS

The Russians? I'm sorry but are you suggesting that we ask the Russians for help?

PATRICK

Oh I already asked them. Shit! I hope he didn't hang up, I forgot that I put him on hold.

Patrick picks up the remote and turns on the TV screen on the wall. The Director-General of Roscosmos, Cosmonaut Morozov appears, with a thick mustache covering his upper lip, and wearing military attire.

COSMONAUT MOROZOV

(video call)

Mr. Collins! It is great to finally meet you, on TV screen at least!

COLLINS

Cosmonaut Morozov... umm I don't know what's happening here... what is happening? Hanging up on him on live TV, that was just for show?

PATRICK

Hank, the reason that our two agencies work together so well, is because no one knows about it. And they don't need to. You know it will be politicized if they know we are friends.

COSMONAUT MOROZOV

(video call)

I agree 100%! Let the politicians fight, and let us focus on space, that's our job. Patrick ask for our help, and he call just in time, because we can help you. We are ready to launch satellites again. But...

COLLINS

But what?

COSMONAUT MOROZOV

(video call)

Simple question people not asking;
why astronaut not come back in
shuttle? No need for mission to be
one-way, shuttle can come back. But
you want shuttle to stay there,
because you want to go again, it's
space station! And, we want to come
with you. The new Europa
International Space Station... a
project by Russia and America!

Collins looks at Patrick, puzzled.

PATRICK

Hank, like I just told you, you
were the better man for this
position, so I want you to be the
suit this one time... you make the
call.

Collins hunches over, puts his elbows on his knees and rests
his head on his hands. The two men stay silent, letting him
think.

COLLINS

It's my call? We can talk to Cory
but we have to let the Russians in?
Okay... you're in!

COSMONAUT MOROZOV

(video call)

Mr. Collins, if I was there I would
kiss you...

(kisses the screen)

COLLINS

So when can you launch your
satellite?

COSMONAUT MOROZOV

(video call)

We can do it tomorrow morning, 0900
your time. We will call before to
connect our systems... after all,
we are partners now.

(SHOUTS IN RUSSIAN)

Morozov ends the call. Patrick looks at Collins.

COLLINS

Did I make the right call?

PATRICK

You made the call that I would've.
Go tell your crew, we have another
big day tomorrow.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - MORNING

The crew sit at their stations. Patrick's phone rings, at the same time as the landline, stationed near one of the engineers.

PATRICK

Put up the firewall. Make sure the
Russians only see what we want them
to see.

The engineers set up the protection for their system, as Patrick's phone stops ringing. The engineers give Patrick the thumbs up, and an engineer finally picks up the landline.

PATRICK (CONT'D)

NASA, go ahead and link our systems
with Roscosmos.

Moments later, Morozov shows up on the big screen.

COSMONAUT MOROZOV

(screen)

Good morning America!

PATRICK

Good morning Cosmonaut. Are you set
for the launch?

COSMONAUT MOROZOV

(screen)

We link up just in time! Start
countdown.

Morozov orders one of his CREW.

RUSSIAN ENGINEER

(screen)

Devyat, vosem, sem...

Morozov slaps him on the back of his head.

COSMONAUT MOROZOV

(screen)

Do it in English, the Americans are watching!

RUSSIAN ENGINEER

(screen)

Three, two, one... lift off!

The crew watches on as the satellite successfully launches. The Russian crew on the screen applaud, and Morozov turns to speak to NASA.

COSMONAUT MOROZOV

(screen)

That's step number one, in three days it will reach moon and it will be all yours.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - EVENING

Singh and his engineers are going about their work when they get a shock on the radar.

SINGH

What? Where did it go?

The Jupiter Shuttle suddenly disappears from Singh's screen.

CONTROL ROOM CREW

Umm, Sir, are you seeing this?

The shuttle disappears from every crew member's screen. The landline phone rings and Singh picks it up.

RUSSIAN ENGINEER

(phone)

Where is your signal America? We have one hour and then we can start satellite, but we need Jupiter signal!

SINGH

(phone)

Umm... We'll call you back.

Singh quickly hangs up and speaks to his crew.

SINGH (CONT'D)

Call Collins... tell him we have major problems here.

A crew member picks up the phone.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - EARLY MORNING

Collins has joined Singh, and the crew.

SINGH

Did it crash on Jupiter... like the Clipper?

COLLINS

Check the telemetry again, maybe we missed something.

CONTROL ROOM CREW

We checked it already, there was nothing there. The shuttle went straight towards Europa, and that was it.

COLLINS

No, not the telemetry of the shuttle. The AUTO Pod has its own readings, check it.

Collins hands the passcode to access the AUTO Pod data to the crew member, and he pulls up the data. He stops hitting the keyboard, smiles and turns around to look at those standing behind him.

COLLINS (CONT'D)

I'll be damned! It turned!

CONTROL ROOM CREW

I think I know what's going on; not only is Cory Fox alive, but he is taking the universe's biggest U-turn around Europa! That's why we lost the signal, he is behind Europa.

SINGH

Who taught him how to do that?

CONTROL ROOM CREW

Nobody! I mean, he was taught the basic controls of the shuttle. But this... you can't teach what he is doing.

COLLINS

He's improvising... he missed his shot the first time, so he's going back to the gold mine to try again... calculate ETA for the shuttle to orbit Europa.

The crew member again pounds on the keyboard to calculate the time needed to orbit Europa.

CONTROL ROOM CREW

45 hours.

Singh goes back to his computer and he sets a 45 hour timer that shows up on the big screen.

COLLINS

And the Russians?

CONTROL ROOM CREW

It's there, their satellite is already in orbit around the moon. Once he turns Europa and his signal returns, they should catch it.

COLLINS

Lets hope so, cause now, it's urgent that we talk to him.

SINGH

Why is that?

COLLINS

That little turn he's making will now give him a push... making him go faster through the gold mine than the first time... so he will have a shorter span of time in which he has to release the pod... and I wanna make sure he knows that!

INT. CONTROL ROOM - EVENING

Patrick and the whole crew are present. The timer that was set for 45 hours is now showing just 2 minutes.

CONTROL ROOM CREW

Damn, he has been on the wrong side of Europa for the past 45 hours, what must that have been like?

COLLINS

It's dark, no hint of sunlight. He's alone, hasn't been with anyone for a year. But he will see the light at the edge of Europa and come back to us... that's not the mission, but our hope.

They all stand in silence looking at the seconds tick down and the timer hits zero. The Russians are back on the screen.

CONTROL ROOM CREW

He should have turned Europa by now.

Collins and Singh look at each other not knowing what to say. Patrick eyes both of them.

PATRICK

What were we expecting; our fate was in the hands of an astronomy teacher! We had no chance of this going right.

Patrick turns around to leave the control room.

ROSCOSMOS CREW

(screen)

Wait! Look!

The NASA crew all lift their heads and look at the screen.

SINGH

Russia, what did you see?

ROSCOSMOS CREW

(screen)

We saw signal! I saw signal!

The entire crew is now staring at the big screen. A beat before finally, the shuttle reappears as a dot, to the sound of cheers and applause from the crew.

PATRICK

How the hell did he do that? Kir start your satellite... Now! I want to find out what is going on from him.

The Russian engineer starts up the satellite. The NASA big screen shows a black screen and a white dot where they can type their message to Cory.

RUSSIAN ENGINEER

(screen)

It's yours America.

The NASA engineer leaves his seat so that his computer can be used to talk to Cory.

PATRICK

So, who's going to talk to him?

Collins nods no and he looks at Singh.

INT. SHUTTLE - DAY 267

Cory is at the controls.

SINGH

(O.S)

Captain Fox, how much longer until
we reach our destination?

Cory looks next to him to see Singh, in a space suit.

CORY

Stop nagging will you! It won't be
long until we get there.

COLLINS

(O.S)

Well we're supposed to be there
already, why is it taking so long?
Have you lost the way captain?

Collins also in a space suit walks up towards the cockpit
from behind.

CORY

I haven't lost the way Mr. Collins!
I just took a detour, that's all.

ERIK

(O.S)

Captain Fox will get us there, I'm
sure of it.

Cory turns around to see Erik, sitting in one of the seats
behind.

CORY

I'm the Captain of this shuttle,
and I told you guys I'm taking you
to Jupiter, and I won't break my
promise... I won't let my crew
down.

Cory looks around again and he no longer sees Collins, Singh
and Erik.

CORY (CONT'D)

My crew... I don't have a crew...

Suddenly, the on-board computer screen turns on. Confused, Cory turns his seat and looks at the screen and begins to cry.

CORY (CONT'D)
(reading message)
Cory... this is Singh, are you
there?

INTERCUT:

INT. CONTROL ROOM - EVENING

Silence. Everyone stares at the screen waiting to see a reply. "THIS IS CORY FOX... I'M HERE." appears on screen to loud cheers from the crew.

SINGH
(reading as he types)
The orbiter never released when you
reached the Gold Mine... and you
are going back to try again?

"YES" appears on screen in response.

Then - "BUT I HAVE NO IDEA WHERE I AM!"

The worried and disappointed looks remain on the crew's faces.

SINGH (CONT'D)
(reading as he types)
Don't worry Cory, we can see you,
you already set the path to go back
to where you were! So you're good!
But you are going faster this time,
and you will not get a signal when
you reach the gold mine again, but
according to what we're seeing, ETA
is in...

An error appears on the screen and the message ends...

INT. SHUTTLE - DAY 267

CORY
ETA is in what??

Cory punches the screen.

INTERCUT:

INT. CONTROL ROOM - EVENING

PATRICK
What the hell happened??

COSMONAUT MOROZOV
(screen)
There is error with the satellite.

PATRICK
I can see there is error! Fix it!

RUSSIAN ENGINEER
(screen)
We lose it... moon satellite
down...

Patrick grabs a coffee mug and smashes it on the wall.

COSMONAUT MOROZOV
Patrick... I'm sorry.

PATRICK
Cut the link! Cut it!

The engineer cuts the link with Roscosmos, and they disappear from the screen. Patrick looks at Singh.

PATRICK (CONT'D)
ETA is in what?

Singh lifts his head and looks at Patrick for a few seconds before answering.

SINGH
One minute...

INT. SHUTTLE - DAY 267

Cory is alone again, not knowing that he is now at the gold mine once more.

CORY
I'm sorry guys... if I'm going
faster then I have no time! Screw
this!

Cory enters the release sequence at the point he is at now. It works this time and he hears his pod opening but he isn't moving from his seat.

CORY (CONT'D)
I'm not leaving until I see the
orbiter detach.

The seconds are ticking before his pod detaches, but he wants to see the orbiter release first, and it does.

CORY (CONT'D)
Yes!

He grabs a water bottle that is placed next to him, his dad's necklace, and the photo he stuck on the dash, but in his haste, it tears in half with just Erik left in the pic in his hands, and the half he is in remains stuck on the dash.

He floats down to his pod, gets in, and it detaches from the shuttle, with the force knocking him into the walls of the pod and knocking him out.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - DAWN

Collins is alone, dozing off, with his head resting on the desk. One of the screens suddenly lights up. He looks at the computer screen and sees the magic words; Europa Orbiter.

A few seconds later, the other computer screens begin transmitting visual footage of what the orbiter is observing.

COLLINS
No way! No freakin' way!

Collins laughs in disbelief and jumps to pick up the phone.

COLLINS (CONT'D)
Singh! Get your ass down here! He
did it! We did it! We struck gold!

INT. POD - DAY 268

Cory wakes up and looks around to see the pod fitted with rations, a blanket, a Walkman, and his reading material. He lies down next to the window and sticks the half-torn picture of Erik.

CORY
I guess this is it, I can rest now.
(sighs)

He takes the reading material; a red folder with the projects and letters of his former students.

CORY (CONT'D)

Let's see what these kids wrote.

He takes a pen and begins correcting his students' projects over a year after they did them. He reaches Jeff's project.

CORY (CONT'D)

(reading)

"Why don't astronauts travel in pods instead of the big shuttles?"
Interesting title.

(continues reading)

"...Pods are lighter and faster, which means astronauts can complete their missions faster and come back to Earth. A pod is enough for one astronaut per mission, and if you remove the emergency chute release that is fitted under the seat, you can fit a mini-bar filled with Energy Drinks, because astronauts will need the energy to complete their mission!" Oh Jeffrey, Jeffrey, Jeffrey! You had to ruin it at the end!

Cory stretches his leg to remove the blanket that has covered what is beneath the seat, and to his surprise, there is a lever to release the pod's chute manually.

CORY (CONT'D)

Huh! At least you did your research. You get a B!

INT. POD - DAY 280

Cory is once again sat at his window, mesmerized by the view in front of him. Cory can see the actual rotation of the giant gas planet.

CORY

Wow! That is amazing! Where is it?
Where is it?

Cory is looking for Jupiter's Giant Red Spot, and it finally makes its way into his view, a giant orange-reddish eye staring right at him.

CORY (CONT'D)

There it is! The greatest and most powerful storm in our Solar System right in front of my eyes! Beat that storm chasers!

Still in awe, almost mesmerized by the counterclockwise spinning of the Red Spot, Cory continues to stare at the view from his window.

CORY (CONT'D)

Wow! I guess I'm lucky; no one on Earth gets to see what I'm seeing right now... this is beautiful!

INT. POD - DAY 365

Cory is curled up, feeling weaker and weaker, hair more scruffy and thicker, staring out of the window. He opens up his palm and inside is the engagement ring he bought with him.

FLASHBACK:

INT. LIVING ROOM - EVENING (2035)

Cory is lying on the couch with his head on the lap of his girlfriend LAURA (29), long dark flowing hair, big hazel eyes.

CORY

Did I doze off again?

Cory wakes up from his nap.

LAURA

You always do! You were smiling this time, what were you dreaming about?

CORY

Space...

LAURA

Why do I even ask! You're always dreaming about space!

CORY

Well, I already have one of my dreams right here in front of me, so space is the only dream I have left.

LAURA

Did NASA get back to you yet?

CORY

Not yet! But I'm starting to lose hope, I mean it's NASA for God's sake, it's a one in a million shot to become an astronaut.

LAURA

Honey, you would make a great astronaut! It's something you love so much, so you have to keep trying to make your dream a reality, no matter how difficult it seems. But you have to promise me one thing; when you become an astronaut, could you take me with you? I want to see space too!

CORY

If I become an astronaut, just point to whatever planet you want to see and I will take you there!

END FLASHBACK:

INT. POD - DAY 365

Cory looks at the ring in his hand as a tear rolls down his cheek, and he smiles. He opens the disposal unit and places the ring inside. He presses the release button, then stares out the window, and he sees the ring floating away in space.

INT. POD - DAY 400

Cory wakes and moves to sit in his usual place next to the window. He punches the window, and again, then repeatedly.

CORY

I told you not to come with me.

Cory talks to Erik's picture on the window.

CORY (CONT'D)

Nah but you had to come because they told you to look after me... I'm not a child Erik! I could have done this on my own! And now your life is ruined cause we are both going to die alone in space!

Cory again smashes his fist on the window.

CORY (CONT'D)

I know! The window will break if I hit it hard enough, what do you think I'm trying to do?! I'm going to kill us both! It's your fault for agreeing to come on this mission.

FADE TO:

INT. POD - DAY 430

Cory, barely able to move, is now facing Earth, just visible as a tiny dot.

CORY (CONT'D)

(heavy coughing)

ET, if you are out there, I could really use some company!

He takes out the Walkman and inserts a tape marked "Sagan".

CORY (CONT'D)

They can take me to Jupiter, but they give me this ancient thing to listen to music with.

He stares at the tiny dot and presses play.

CARL SAGAN (V.O)

That's here. That's home. That's us. On it everyone you love, everyone you know, everyone you ever heard of, every human being who ever was, lived out their lives. The aggregate of our joy and suffering, thousands of confident religions, ideologies, and economic doctrines, every hunter and forager, every hero and coward, every creator and destroyer of civilization, every king and peasant, every young couple in love, every mother and father, hopeful child, inventor and explorer, every teacher of morals, every corrupt politician, every "superstar," every "supreme leader," every saint and sinner in the history of our species lived there-on a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam.

Cory keeps the tape playing and closes his eyes.

FADE TO:

INT. POD - DAY 501

Cory is curled up in his pod, shaking his head, looking at the last few packets of ration left.

CORY
I can't do this anymore... I
can't... When will this end?

Cory is slowly losing his strength and having trouble breathing. He grabs his blanket and curls up under it, ready to sleep one last time.

LAURA (O.S.)
Cory... Baby, don't give up just
yet...

Cory hears Laura's voice, and he turns around to see her sitting next to him.

CORY
Laura?

LAURA
It's beautiful.

Laura is looking at the engagement ring on her finger.

CORY
I lost you because of that stupid
thing! I'm sorry... sorry about how
things turned out. God we should
still be together! We would have
had four kids by now, living in a
nice home, with me working at NASA
and you, still teaching at Ever-
heart.

LAURA
We all have our plans, and God has
his. Everything that happened in
your life, brought you to this
moment, it brought you here; my
love, the astronaut.

CORY
And what is this moment? What is
here?!

(MORE)

CORY (CONT'D)

They never even gave me the title of astronaut, I am just a volunteer. I am alone, nobody knows where I am... I don't know where the hell I am.

LAURA

I thought you wanted to be alone?

CORY

Not anymore! I can't take this, I wanna see people again, I don't wanna die alone... but I have no choice now...

LAURA

It didn't have to end up like this! You forgot about everyone that loved you, just because you lost me!

CORY

You were my world! I lost my world!

LAURA

But you gained the universe! Look at Jeffrey, his dad is one of the top surgeons in the country, but it's you he looks up to! That's love! Jeffrey loved you, your students loved you, your colleagues... your dad. Why did you not see that?

Cory holding back tears, puts his head in his hands. A beat before he lifts his head again.

CORY

I wish I could go back... back in time, so I can stop myself from doing this. I don't wanna be here anymore.

Cory turns to the window and punches it, weakly.

LAURA

What are you doing?

CORY

The only thing I want now is to die, so I can be with you, so we can be together again.

LAURA

Baby we will be together again
soon, but not now. You have to stay
alive, they are waiting for you.
They won't let you die alone.

CORY

Who's waiting for me?

LAURA

Look out the window.

Cory turns around to look out of the pod and he sees Earth as
visible as ever.

LAURA (CONT'D)

That's here... that's us... that's
home, isn't that how it goes?
You're going home.

CORY

I'm going home? Why am I going
home? Are you coming with me?

Cory turns around but she is gone.

CORY (CONT'D)

I'm going home... I'm going home!

Cory keeps repeating that as he slowly wakes up from his
dream. Groggy, he pulls himself towards the window to look
out. Just like his dream, he can see Earth.

CORY (CONT'D)

I am going home! I need to be in my
seat!

Cory slowly moves himself to his seat, and he straps himself
in.

CORY (CONT'D)

I'm ready! Take me home... take me
home!

INT. CONTROL ROOM - MORNING

The crew is monitoring the AUTO Pod, when Patrick walks in.

PATRICK

What's the latest?

SINGH

It should be re-entering the atmosphere in five days, but the trajectory is off, we have it landing in the Nevada desert.

PATRICK

Let's hope the trajectory is the only thing that you messed up.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - LATE EVENING

Singh sees Collins sitting alone at his desk with most of the lights turned off, papers littered over his desk, a glass half-full of whiskey, and a near-empty bottle next to it.

SINGH

Are you planning on going home soon or are you sleeping here tonight?

Collins grabs one of the papers on his desk and he turns around to give it to Singh.

COLLINS

It all started with this; that simple illustration on a piece of paper, twelve years of my life, hours at the drawing board, millions of dollars spent, me almost killing myself, and it all comes down to tomorrow. I try to act like I'm calm but man, I'm nervous.

SINGH

Seriously? That's you being calm?
(points at whiskey glass)
It's okay to be nervous, it means you're human! This is your life's work like you said, of course, you would be nervous.

Collins opens a drawer and takes out another whiskey glass and pours a shot for him and for Singh.

SINGH (CONT'D)

You know Erik told the media about this, told them when and where the pod was coming back, so there's going to be a media frenzy in Nevada.

COLLINS

Damn that kid doesn't know how to keep his mouth shut! But I don't care anymore, we kept it hidden for so long, we can't hide it forever, let them know.

Collins takes a sip of his whiskey.

COLLINS (CONT'D)

Do you feel bad about using Cory like I... like we did?

SINGH

Not if everything goes well! Then he will turn out to be a hero... we all will. But if it doesn't... then he will still be a hero, and we will be the villains. But as bad as it sounds, he is probably already dead so it's not like we killed him.

COLLINS

I still can't believe that we had the perfect guy for this mission, right under our noses and we let him go.

SEQUENCE -- Flashbacks Cory working with the crew before being cut from NASA.

COLLINS (CONT'D)

Funny thing is I doubted him at first! I just pushed him hard cause he was my student, and I wanted him to do well. We had some pretty smart guys on the team, but he never stood out. Guess that's why he was one of the first to be let go. Or maybe we were too ignorant to see... his name was all over this mission!

Collins gestures for Singh to look at the rest of the papers on the desk. He picks a few up and reads them.

SINGH

Signed... Cory Fox... Cory Fox...
Cory Fox!

SEQUENCE -- Flashbacks Cory working alone at the center at night.

COLLINS

Son of a bitch was the heart of the mission when we started. This project was his baby, I just adopted it. I buried my own student with my ego, the guy that I helped more than anyone, just because I wanted the glory.

Collins says as he grabs Cory's own folder he named "My Baby".

SEQUENCE -- Flashbacks Cory controlling the shuttle in space.

SINGH

I guess it's poetic then, that he got to die, bringing his baby to life.

Collins begins to chuckle.

COLLINS

Do you want to find out if he is still alive?

Collins then searches through the many papers on his desk, and takes out a small folder to give to a confused Singh.

SINGH

COMMS?

COLLINS

When I was planning to go myself, I snuck in and fitted it, I couldn't stand the thought of being alone, so this would have been my saving grace; I could contact Earth when the pod gets close enough. He's been in range for a while, and I've been trying to get in contact with him but I'm getting nothing! I guess there's no harm in trying once more.

Collins and Singh sit up, put their glasses aside and turn on the speaker and mic.

COLLINS (CONT'D)

(into mic)

Cory, this is Collins and Singh, it's been almost two years, and without meds... you might have expired by now...

Singh shakes his head and cringes at Collins' expression.

COLLINS (CONT'D)

Sorry, I have quart of Jack in me so excuse whatever I say. My grandma had cancer, a battle which she lost unfortunately. But she pushed on and on, she gave it everything she had and she outlived the time given to her by the doctors. I'm hoping that she wasn't a one off, that you could give it the same fight that she did. So, if you are alive, please... please let us know... just say anything.

Collins removes his finger off the speaker button. Moments pass and all they hear is static. Then...

CORY

(speaker)

E.T if you are out there, I could really use some company!

Collins and Singh both jump out of their chairs on hearing his voice. Collins quickly presses the speaker button.

COLLINS

Cory! Hello? Can you hear us Cory??

CORY

(speaker)

Damn Jupiter is a big ass planet, I am moving away from it and it is still taking over my view.

SINGH

Jupiter?

Both men have a sudden realization that what they are hearing are old transmissions. They look at each other and smile.

COLLINS

That's another thing I screwed up!

The men laugh at the error and recline in their chairs, glasses in hand, listening to see what else was recorded.

CORY

(speaker)

Laura... The only thing I want now is to be with you!

SINGH
Who's Laura?

COLLINS
His deceased fiancé.

CORY
(speaker)
I can't take this anymore... I
can't breathe...

Collins and Singh both look down in shame, at hearing Cory suffer. They sit up in their chairs, hoping to hear more. But that is the last thing recorded. Collins reluctantly closes the speaker.

FADE TO:

INT. CONTROL ROOM - AFTERNOON

The whole crew is present, preparing to welcome back the AUTO Pod. Patrick is standing near the exit, talking on the phone.

PATRICK
(into phone)
You guys ready? Around 4PM.
Remember, there's a big chance it's
going to be a dead body, so make
sure no pictures are taken of him.
Alright?

Patrick closes the phone and goes to Collins and Singh.

PATRICK (CONT'D)
That was the Nevada PD, they are
all set to intercept our pod. Let's
hope this goes well, for both your
sakes. But if it doesn't, and it
ends up in a ball of fire like you
said... I will be expecting both
your resignation letters first
thing tomorrow morning.

Patrick sends a warning look to Collins and Singh.

EXT. NEVADA DESERT - MORNING

A news reporter, NATALIE (27), young brunette, with a presence made for TV, is covering the big return.

NATALIE

The loneliest man in the universe is coming home today! After spending almost two years in space, and successfully launching the Europa Orbiter, Cory Fox is finally going to have his proper send off. As you may recall, Mr. Fox was suffering from cancer, and he gave up his treatment to go on this mission. So, it is believed that he has already passed, but nonetheless, the crew made sure to bring his body back home to give him the send off that he thoroughly deserves.

INT. POD - DAY 650 (FINAL DAY)

Cory is still strapped in his seat, lying motionless with his eyes closed. The window is covered by the automatic shutters, ready to enter Earth's atmosphere again. Darkness begins to overcome the pod, fittingly, resembling a coffin.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - EVENING

CREW #2

AUTO Pod to begin entering Earth's atmosphere in ninety seconds.

Everyone is on the edge of their seats, praying.

EXT. NEVADA DESERT - EVENING

A crowd has gathered in the desert to witness the return. Partitioned behind barriers, they have signs which read "Welcome home hero". Firetrucks, ambulance, and many police cars are waiting.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - EVENING

CREW #2

AUTO Pod is entering Earth.

The crew is observing the pod, making sure it doesn't overheat.

CREW #2 (CONT'D)

AUTO Pod maintaining its speed at 17,000 mph. Heat signatures stable.

(MORE)

CREW #2 (CONT'D)
Completion of re-entry in twenty
seconds.

Patrick has taken off his suit jacket and is pacing around, too nervous to look at the screen. Collins and Singh are sitting next to each other watching their own computer screens.

CREW #2 (CONT'D)
Re-entry complete! AUTO Pod is back
home!

The crew jumps off their seats and begin cheering.

EXT. NEVADA DESERT - EVENING

Cheers and applause are also echoing in the desert as the pod is now soaring over the Nevada sky.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - EVENING

The crew is still high-fiving each other, but they fail to see the problem on the screen.

PATRICK
You guys set a chute to deploy
automatically, didn't you?

Collins and Singh, nod yes. The pod's chute is not deploying, and it is showing no signs of slowing down.

CREW #2
Speed is picking up, it's nearing
18,000 mph.

PATRICK
Open his damn chute!!

COLLINS
We have no control over the pod,
everything was set to deploy on its
own!

The pod is hurtling faster towards a horrible crash on Earth.

PATRICK
Somebody open the damn chute!!

The crew members scramble around trying to find a solution.

CREW MEMBER

I can hack into the pod! It's
within range now!

Patrick, Singh and Collins rush to stand behind the crew member's computer as he is hastily banging his keyboard.

CREW MEMBER (CONT'D)

Just... just give me a minute.

PATRICK

We don't have a minute... do it
now!

EXT. NEVADA DESERT - EVENING

NATALIE

Shouldn't the chute have opened by
now?

(to cameraman)

Keep rolling!

The crowd also senses that there is something wrong, and most are silent and have their hands covering their mouths.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - EVENING

CREW #2

We're losing the pod! It's gonna
burn up!

EXT. NEVADA DESERT - EVENING

Pieces of the pod are flung in the sky, as the pod begins disintegrating from the heat.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - EVENING

Screams and beeps are ringing in the control room as the entire crew is putting all their hopes on the crew member to hack the pod.

SWOOSH!

A clear and audible sound echoes in the control room. Patrick looks up at the screen and he can't believe his eyes, the three chutes have opened and the AUTO Pod's speed has stabilized.

With louder cheers erupting, Patrick collapses on a chair behind him, putting his hand on his chest in relief. But Collins and Singh remain quiet, just a stunned look as they stare at the crew member's screen.

PATRICK
(laughing)
You did it!

Patrick vigorously rubs the crew member's head.

CREW MEMBER
I... I didn't have enough time!

PATRICK
It released on its own?

He looks at Collins and he nods his head no.

PATRICK (CONT'D)
So it didn't open automatically,
and it wasn't you... then who was
it?

Patrick finally takes a look at the crew member's screen and he sees the words "Manual Release" flashing.

PATRICK (CONT'D)
Son of a Bitch!

Patrick freezes in his chair, his eyes and mouth wide open.

EXT. NEVADA DESERT - EVENING

Sirens are blaring from all the vehicles, speeding up to the pod as it safely lands. The ambulance readies a stretcher along with a body bag. Two FIREFIGHTERS turn the latch and open the pod...

Both firefighters each stretch an arm into the pod as an arm stretches out of the pod.

NATALIE
Oh my God... look... I don't
believe it!

INTERCUT:

INT. CONTROL ROOM - EVENING

The big screen is now showing the TV coverage of the landing.

EXT. NEVADA DESERT - EVENING

NATALIE

Zoom in on him...

(whispers)

Ladies and gentlemen, this is
astonishing, Cory Fox is alive! He
is alive!

The rescue CREW pulls out a frail but alive Cory from the pod, clutching his water bottle in one hand, looking around confused. The two firefighters serve as crutches and help him onto the waiting stretcher.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - EVENING

Silence has overcome the control room - too stunned to cheer.

PATRICK

Get a plane ready... we're going to
Nevada!

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - MORNING

Cory wakes up the next morning. He opens his eyes and sees Collins, Singh and his father standing beside him.

CORY

(breathing slowly)

What happened? Where am I?

IAN

Cory... you're home son.

COLLINS

You are on Earth that is a question
that we can answer. But how the
hell are you still alive?

CORY

You seem disappointed...

COLLINS

I'm just surprised. You stopped
your treatment two years ago, and
you are still here. How?

Cory doesn't answer, and he still looks out of it, so Collins and Singh leave Ian to tend to his son.

INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - MORNING

Collins and Singh stand with the doctor.

DOCTOR #1

From the tests we have already done, he should be dead, and a long time ago at that. There is no indication whatsoever to show that he should be alive. I can only put it down to pure willpower! This man didn't want to go down without a fight. But I'm afraid that this fight might end at any moment now.

COLLINS

What's with the water bottle? It's one of the bottles from the shuttle, did he say anything about it, or why he is holding on to it so tightly?

DOCTOR #1

They brought him in holding it pretty firmly, we had to pry it from his hand. We did our tests and he was passed out, but when he woke up he immediately asked for it. We knew by then that he was on his last leg and we thought maybe the bottle has some special meaning to him, so we decided to give it back, and he has been holding on to it ever since.

The doctor leaves and they go back into the room.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - MORNING

Cory seems to be more awake now.

COLLINS

Cory, what happened yesterday was a miracle. And you don't know how much you saved us by pulling that chute release. Thank you!

CORY

Thank you for bringing me back!

The hospital room door swings open, Katia Mohren comes running in followed by a NURSE.

NURSE

Excuse me ma'am, you're not
supposed to be in here!

She ignores the nurse and goes to Cory's bedside and grabs
his hand.

COLLINS

It's OK, she's with us.

The nurse leaves.

KATIA

Hi... what... what happened? How
are you here?

CORY

Hi Kat... I got bored out in space,
so I decided to come back.

Katia smiles as she squeezes his hand tighter. Cory sees an
engagement ring on her finger.

CORY (CONT'D)

I thought love and fame didn't go
together?

KATIA

You showed me that you shouldn't
let anything stand in the way of
what you really want.

CORY

He's a lucky guy...

KATIA

A different time... it could have
been you...

CORY

Don't worry about me... I'm going
to see my love now...

Singh sees Cory getting weaker, so he decides to jump in.

SINGH

We didn't think we would have the
chance but would you mind a
debriefing?

Cory tilts his head and sees Patrick through the glass
partition, with a few more members of the crew waiting.

CORY

Can I make a request first? Could the rest of the crew come in?

COLLINS

But the doctor said only two could go in with your dad.

CORY

Please... I don't... I don't wanna die alone!

Collins and Singh look at each other, then gesture everyone to come in.

Cory's smile grows bigger as each member walks into the room. Patrick, Erik and several crew members walk in and surround the bed. Cory looks at Singh and nods for him to begin.

SINGH

You spent 650 days in space and went 365 million miles away from Earth...

CORY

650 days?! That's how long it was? Damn...

SINGH

We lost contact with you but the pre-programmed pod did its job and sent you back to Earth, although we didn't aim for Nevada. The rations in the pod were enough to last for the return journey. But what we want to know is what happened when you reached the gold mine?

CORY

The coordinates for the pod and orbiter were the same! So I reset them. But I passed out before I could release them. I'm sorry... you were right, my condition got in the way of me completing the mission. When I woke up, I was disappointed in myself that I let you all down... so I thought of a way to make it work... figured my best hope was to go back. And Patrick, I know who would pick me up when I passed out... it was me.

Patrick smiles as the entire crew listens intently.

COLLINS

You reset them in time? You did my work in a minute? No Cory, I'm sorry, it was my fault you missed the first time.

CORY

The automatic chute... it doesn't work!

SINGH

Yeah, we noted that too. Would you recommend another astronaut go on the same journey?

Cory shakes his head 'no'.

COLLINS

Why not?

CORY

I was alone, I didn't have anyone. I believed the loneliness would kill me before cancer... it hurt... it hurt so much to be alone. Don't send an astronaut on the same mission as me, send them in twos or threes... but not alone, because it was unbearable. You want to know why I managed to stay alive for so long?

(to the crew)

It was because of you... and you... and you. I wanted to see faces again, I didn't want to be alone anymore... I didn't want to die alone... and I wanted to come back and share a glass of Jack with you guys! Yeah... I heard you, but you couldn't hear me.

Singh and Collins look at each other and smile.

CORY (CONT'D)

But... every dark cloud has a silver lining, I'm glad I missed my shot the first time. For you...

Cory then raises his bottle towards Collins.

COLLINS

Huh, you brought us a souvenir from the shuttle.

CORY

No... It's water... from Europa...

COLLINS

Come again?!

Cory doesn't reply, and he turns his head to the other side.

SINGH

Cory, we know you love a joke,
but... are you joking?

Cory turns back, taking slow deep breaths.

CORY

When I was turning Europa, the
underside of the shuttle was facing
it, and I heard something smash
into the shuttle... then I saw what
it was as it splashed in front of
me... it was water...

SINGH

The Europa water vapor!

CORY

I was focusing on making the turn,
but I knew that this was something
I couldn't pass up... I didn't even
know if I would make it back... but
I still had to get that water... so
I slowed the shuttle down, and went
out...

COLLINS

You went out?? Cory... did you
space walk?!

A faint smile as Cory begins recalling his one and only space
walk.

FLASHBACK:

DAY 234 - OUTER SPACE

The underside doors of the shuttle open and Cory slowly moves
out into space, with the safety tethers attached to him,
holding the water bottle in one hand, with the cover in the
other hand.

CORY

Ohhh... this is scary!

The water vapor is still being sprayed, and Cory waits for it.

CORY (CONT'D)
I can do this, come on and spray me!

Cory holds his arms out...

END FLASHBACK:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - MORNING

CORY
I was floating in space with my arms open... like an idiot... and then it hit me... literally.

FLASHBACK:

DAY 234 - OUTER SPACE

The strongest water vapor to erupt smashes into Cory and the force spins him around.

CORY
Oh shit!

END FLASHBACK:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - MORNING

The entire crew look surprised to see Cory smile at his recollection.

PATRICK
And how was it?

Cory's smile grows even bigger as he answers.

CORY
It was the greatest joy... I ever felt in my life...

FLASHBACK:

DAY 234 - OUTER SPACE

Cory is laughing hysterically, realizing that he hooked himself well, and nothing is going to happen to him.

He stabilizes himself and faces Europa again and sees another plume shooting towards him. It hits him and spins him around again but this time he laughs with joy, knowing that he is safe.

CORY

Woooo! Spray me again!!

Cory enjoys spinning around in space, he collects some vapor in the bottle and pulls himself back into the shuttle.

END FLASHBACK:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - MORNING

Collins is holding the bottle in his hand.

COLLINS

So is it safe to say that your experience in space wasn't all bad?

CORY

It had its moment...

(smiles)

It's not a lot, but it was what I could get...

COLLINS

No Cory... this is incredible.

Collins gestures for one of the staff to take the bottle to the lab immediately.

COLLINS (CONT'D)

I just can't believe you did that... how? What made you do it?

CORY

I had nothing to lose! I failed my mission, and I guess that was still weighing heavy on my mind. I didn't know if I was going to make it back to the Gold Mine again, let alone release the orbiter. So I figured, if I failed my mission again, I would have something else to compensate for it. But did I? Did I fail my mission? Nobody mentioned it.

Singh opens up his laptop to show Cory the screen showing visual from the orbiter that he launched. A tear of pride rolls down his cheek and he smiles.

SINGH

This is you, Cory! You did this!
You are going to help teach us
about astronomy in ways that no one
has ever done before.

Patrick laughs and shakes his head.

PATRICK

How the hell did we fire you?! You
were born to be an astronaut!

CORY

I thought I was just a volunteer.

PATRICK

No Cory, you're no volunteer,
you're an astronaut, you're a
scientist, you're whatever you want
to be at NASA... even Director. You
know what, as of this second, I
Patrick Wright, resign my post as
Director of NASA, and name Cory Fox
as my successor.

Everyone turns to Patrick in shock.

PATRICK (CONT'D)

We made a mistake letting you go,
I'm sorry, and I want to correct
that! So I want you to... I want
you to have that title to your
name.

Collins looks at Patrick, and decides to follow suit.

COLLINS

I, Hank Collins, resign my post as
Chief Engineer, and name Cory Fox
as my successor.

Singh looks around and he sees the rest of the crew smiling.

SINGH

It will take a while if we go one
by one, but we all do the same.

Singh speaks for the rest of the crew as everyone gives their
title to Cory. Katia is still holding his hand, and begins to
cry along with Ian, moved by the symbolic gesture.

Cory, with the biggest smile, is taking slow breaths, looking
at each of them, as he addresses them for the last time.

CORY

Thank you... truly... but you can
all keep your jobs... I already
have a title... I'm an astronomy
teacher...

Cory's eyes slowly close and his head slumps to the side. The heart monitor shows a flat line. Everyone in the room begins to shed a tear. Patrick, standing behind Ian, puts an arm around his shoulder, consoling him.

EXT. CEMETERY - MORNING

The funeral for Cory Fox is attended by thousands, which includes employees from NASA, his former students and teachers from Ever-heart High School, Cosmonaut Morozov and a few Roscosmos crew, and Katia Mohren with her Fiancé.

Ian Fox is sitting in the front row, with the American flag that was draped over Cory's casket, folded on his lap. Patrick is delivering the eulogy.

PATRICK

I don't know if I am the right person to be doing this... it takes a brave man to stand in front of thousands of people and admit that they made a mistake... and I am not that. So I am only addressing Mr. Ian Fox when I say this... Sir, on behalf of NASA, we apologize for letting your son go, we apologize for the pain you went through when we picked Cory to do this mission. But you, along with the rest of the country, and maybe even the world, should take pride in what Cory did. The courage to embark on a mission alone, when he thought he wouldn't come back again, the wherewithal, the ingenuity, to come up with a plan B when things went wrong for him, and to go through with it, execute it to perfection... I mean... It's the greatest sacrifice any human can make; to give their life for the betterment of humanity, for the betterment of science. He put us as an organization, and as a humanity, on the path to maybe one day make Europa our home.

(MORE)

PATRICK (CONT'D)

We have numerous projects now concerning Jupiter and Europa... in cooperation with our colleagues from Roscosmos, details of which will be shared with the rest of the world when the time is right. But what I can share with you now, is that we made a change to the name of future Jupiter missions. From now on, they will be known as "Fox Missions", and that, is the least we can do, for the bravest man to ever work for NASA.

The adjacent streets are lined up with thousands more, as Cory's coffin is finally laid to rest under a tombstone that reads "here lies the loneliest man in the universe."

FADE TO:

The funeral is ending and people are leaving the cemetery. Patrick is faced with an unfamiliar and youthful face, standing confidently in front of him.

JEFF

Umm... excuse me Mr. NASA
Director... my name is Jeffery
Brody, I'm a former student of Mr.
Fox...

PATRICK

You are huh? You must be really
proud to call him your teacher.

JEFF

I am! You know what was the
greatest lesson he taught me? It
wasn't something he said in class,
or at school. It was what he did.
We both love space, and I always
found it funny that I have
something in common with a man as
smart as him. I used to always tell
him that I dream of working at NASA
one day, and he never discouraged
me at all, instead, he pushed me,
even though I was full of self-
doubt. But seeing with my eyes what
he did... he taught me that
anything is possible. So Sir, I
know this is not the appropriate
time, or even the right way to do
it, but I would like to apply for a
position at NASA.

PATRICK

You know, if you had come a few years ago, I would have told you to get out of my face! But Cory taught me something as well; never ignore someone's passion. Because that's what Cory had; he had basic training of how to be an astronaut, but passion in abundance for space, and look what he did.

Patrick smiles and looks back towards Cory's tombstone, and then back again at Jeff.

PATRICK (CONT'D)

What was your name again?

JEFF

Jeffery, Sir, Jeffery Brody.

PATRICK

Are you in college?

JEFF

I just got accepted to MIT.

PATRICK

My Alma Mater! Impressive.

JEFF

I worked really hard to lift my grades, because I wanted to make my favorite teacher proud of me. I wanted to follow my dream and his footsteps and work at NASA.

PATRICK

I am sure he is proud of you. Good luck at MIT, and when you are done, give us a call, and we will see what we can do.

JEFF

Thank you sir, thank you so much.

Patrick leaves and Jeff goes and squats at Cory's grave.

JEFF (CONT'D)

Rest easy Mr. Fox, I'll carry on what you started.

(looks up at the sky)

(MORE)

JEFF (CONT'D)

Among the stars, I will see you
again.

TRACKING SHOT:

INT. JUPITER SHUTTLE

The Jupiter shuttle is safely orbiting Jupiter. It is dead
silent inside. The half-torn picture of Cory is still stuck
on the dashboard, where it will remain, forever in orbit.

FADE OUT:

THE END