

The Endeavour

They came out of the sky in a roaring gale, all fire and sparks. The ship was moving too fast. At this rate there would be no time to make corrections, no time to salvage the situation. The Martian landscape below unfolded like a movie on fast-forward, jerking like old film, sepia-toned. The *Endeavour*, carrying some four thousand human souls, was going down in a rush of smoke.

In the Recreation Room, Maya clung to a handrail with her hair in her face. Everything was shaking. She could hear screaming down the hall.

She snaked a clumsy hand to her belt, flipped the switch on her radio with trembling fingers. "Presler! What the hell?"

Presler's harried voice came back in a bray of static: "I don't know! Equipment malfunction, how the fuck should I know?"

"How the--? You're the pilot!"

"I only fly the bloody thing, Maya, I don't know every intimate fucking detail." Over the bass rumble of the ship and the screams and the radio static Maya could hear him hammering buttons. Sirens were wailing in the control room. When he wasn't talking to her, Presler was muttering under his breath, his words stitched together with expletives.

Maya placed a hand on her face. Four thousand human colonists on the *Endeavour*, along with six thousand tons plus of supplies, everything the human race needed to make a new life for themselves.

All of it falling out of the sky.

Maya closed her eyes, shutting out the chaos, focusing on the heartbeat drumming in her ears. He breathed like her father taught her to when she was young: in-two-three, out-two-three. No panic. Presler was panicking enough for the both of them.

After a moment, Maya stood and pushed her hair back. "Is there anything I can do?" she asked.

Presler did not immediately respond. The control room sirens screamed on and on, steady and toneless. "Find Lando," he said. "I don't know, do whatever you engineers do to fix things. Pray. But leave me alone, I'm working here."

Maya chose not to take offense to that. There was a time and a place, and now it was neither. “I know. Maya out.” She flicked another switch on her radio. Lando’s channel opened to an entirely new level of noise; wherever he was, the booming of the ship was multiplied tenfold. There was a rhythmic clanking somewhere in the background. After a moment, Maya understood: it was the underbelly of the ship—and something was broken.

“Lando!” she shouted.

Lando said something that was lost in the din.

“What? I don’t copy. Lando—”

The noise receded a little. “I said, ‘something’s wrong!’”

“Yeah, I can hear that,” Maya said. “What the hell is it?”

“No, you don’t understand. That’s not what I mean.” There was a creak in Lando’s voice, like he was close to tears. It put a pit in Maya’s stomach. “The problem was in the control room. It started there, it caused the break. We’re not going down because of an equipment failure, we’re going down because of a programming error.”

“That...sounds like a much bigger problem.”

“It is,” Lando said. “It—I don’t know how to fix this, Maya, it started in the control room and sparked a whole chain reaction. We’d have to crack open the *Endeavour*’s programming to even start to reverse the damage.”

There was ice in Maya’s veins. “Oh my god. We’re not going to have time for that.”

“No.”

Silence from both ends. Then Lando said, “Did you talk to Presler?”

“He didn’t know anything.” Maya gave a soft laugh, humorless. “He said we should pray.”

Lando returned the laugh. “I’m a Methodist. I already *was* praying.” He paused. “You?”

“I don’t believe in God,” Maya said. She ran a hand through her hair. Her eyes were wet. “No offense.”

“None taken,” Lando replied. He sounded like he meant it. “Maya? I’ll pray for you. If that’s okay,” he said. “I’ll pray for everyone.”

Wearily, Maya said, “You do that.”

“Should we...make an announcement? To the colonists?”

In the Recreation Room, Maya sank down the wall and sat. The *Endeavour* was bucking so hard her vision blurred; she was at the epicenter of an earthquake. She tried hard not to cry. She bit down on her lip until a bead of blood welled. Four thousand colonists, plus ship crew, plus supplies—the last hope for humanity. And all of it was falling into a desert on another world.

“I think they already know,” she said.

Three minutes and twenty seconds later, the *Endeavour* crashed in the bed of a dry river on the surface of Mars. The impact sent up sand and smoke and fire like a banner.

The time of the human race was over. On Mars, the sun was coming up over the rolling hills. It was a beautiful morning.