

PALE BLUE DOT

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AN SUV RACES UP TO--

EXT. LOUISIANA GAS STATION - 2007 - EVENING

-- SPRAYING GRAVEL EVERYWHERE. The driver's side door FLIES OPEN before the engine's even cut off--

-- **BANG!**--

-- the SUV is too close and the door slams into the pump.

It doesn't matter. There's no stopping this driver, a woman in her late thirties, as she wiggles her way out of the car--

-- DING DING DING--

-- leaving the keys in the ignition. This is **LAURA PEPPER** and she does not have a second to spare.

Laura runs to the pump, hurrying the nozzle into the tank, leaping over the hose to insert her credit card.

She is athletic and pretty in a no-nonsense way but, right now, she's also an agitated, disheveled mess--

-- *ratatat-tat*--

-- impatiently tapping her fingernails on the roof of her car. She checks her watch, looks over her shoulder to catch the sun disappearing from the horizon.

The SUV has Texas plates. Wherever Laura's going, she's in an awful hurry to get there.

Unbeknownst to Laura, there's a **SMALL BOY**, sitting on the curb in front of the gas station, playing with a toy UFO. Or, at least, he was playing with the toy before he got completely distracted watching...

...Laura frantically pulls the gas pump from the SUV, without even letting the tank fill--

-- splattering an unnoticed bit of gasoline as--

-- she replaces the gas pump and reaches up under her dress to--

-- **PULL OFF A SOILED ADULT DIAPER.**

Laura tosses the diaper into the trash, hops back in the SUV and tears out of the gas station, leaving the stunned boy behind.

INT. LAURA'S SUV - LATER

Laura smokes a cigarette and tears down the highway. She's staring off into the distance, her gaze fixed on a distant point in the horizon-- an old Navy trick for staying awake.

Without looking away from the road, she tries the radio. She finds nothing but static.

Laura reaches over to open the glove box. She grabs a CD case. She pops the case open, shoves the mix CD in the player and--

-- "You Oughta Know" by Alanis Morissette kicks in.

Laura cranks the volume up and, as she does, we pan over to the still-open glove box--

-- to find a **loaded hand gun**.

EXT. HIGHWAY - CONTINUOUS

Laura's SUV hurtles down the highway, going almost double the speed limit. She flies past a sign:

WELCOME TO FLORIDA -- THE SUNSHINE STATE

TITLE CARD: PALE BLUE DOT

EXT. ORLANDO INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT - EARLY MORNING

Now wrapped in a giant TRENCH COAT, and wearing a bizarre, dark WIG, Laura enters the arrivals terminal of Orlando International Airport.

INT. ORLANDO INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT - CONTINUOUS

Laura walks purposefully through the mostly-empty airport. She pulls at the belt of her trench coat, tightening it as if it were a suit of armor.

Nearby, an **AIRPORT JANITOR** vacuums the loudly patterned carpet. Laura walks up and taps the man on the shoulder--

-- startling him half to death. After collecting himself, the Janitor pulls an earbud from his ear.

LAURA
Baggage from the Houston flight?

AIRPORT JANITOR

Uh, I'm not sure. Over there maybe?

The Janitor points to the other side of the terminal where a crowd waits beside a luggage carousel.

LAURA

Thanks.

Laura heads for the carousel. The Janitor watches her go for a moment, an eyebrow cocked at her bizarre getup. But, eventually, he shrugs and goes back to his vacuuming.

This is Florida, after all. He's seen worse.

INT. BAGGAGE CAROUSEL - MOMENTS LATER

A woman waits beside the baggage carousel, stretching. This is **ERIN FLEETWOOD**.

She is a few years younger than Laura but very much the same type-- blonde, fit, pretty. Though, even after a red eye flight, Erin is far more rested and put together than Laura right now--

-- which, is readily apparent as Laura peeks from behind a nearby column--

-- spotting Erin. Laura's obviously watching her, spying even. She's breathing heavily and her hands are shoved deep into the pockets of her trench coat.

Erin senses something, someone, and turns her head just as--

-- Laura jumps back behind the pillar. It's a close call but then--

-- **BEEP BEEP BEEP--**

-- an alarm goes off, signaling the arrival of the flight's luggage.

With a heavy lurch, the conveyer belt starts up. Erin spots her bag quickly-- a bright red suitcase-- grabs it and starts for the exit.

Keeping her head down, Laura steps out from behind the column and walks after Erin. As she does, she reaches in a trash can and pulls out an old newspaper.

EXT. ORLANDO INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT - CONTINUOUS

Laura's pretending to read the newspaper as she follows Erin. They make their way past a line of taxis and shuttles.

INT. PARKING GARAGE STAIRS - CONTINUOUS

Erin walks up a set of stairs. Aware of footsteps coming up behind her, she stops.

The footsteps stop, too.

Erin waits for a suspicious second but there's no sign of anyone else in the garage or stairway.

INT. PARKING GARAGE - GARAGE

Erin wheels her suitcase along the darkened parking garage, hurrying a bit now. As she does, she looks over her shoulder to find--

-- **Laura following her.** She's twenty feet back, looking downward, her wig pulled low to cover her face--

-- **Erin takes off at a full sprint,** her bag bumping and rolling behind her.

Laura doesn't run. She takes her time.

As she walks, Laura reaches in the pocket of her trench coat and removes a pair of bright yellow **DISH WASHING GLOVES**. She pulls them on as she continues to stalk Erin.

Erin makes it to her car, fumbling with her keys--

-- **WHICH SHE DROPS--**

ERIN

Shit! Shit! Shit!

-- Erin scrambles to the ground, reaching for her keys. She grabs them, unlocks the car--

-- haphazardly tosses her suitcase inside--

-- before diving in herself--

-- and **slamming the door shut and locked.**

Erin looks out the window but there is no sign of Laura. She's gone. *Vanished.*

Erin takes a long, deep breath, collecting herself. She puts the keys in the ignition and turns the engine--

-- **BAM BAM BAM**--

ERIN (CONT'D)

AHHHHHH!

-- a HAND REPEATEDLY SLAPS THE WINDOW. It's Laura and she's screaming:

LAURA

I'm sorry! I'm so sorry! I need help!

Erin stops, her eyes squinting in recognition...

ERIN

Laura?--

-- at the sound of her name, **LAURA STARTS CRYING**. It's ugly stuff-- big tears, heaving, the works.

Concerned, Erin rolls down her window.

ERIN (CONT'D)

What are you doing here? Are you okay?

LAURA

You have to stop.

ERIN

What--

-- **LAURA BLASTS ERIN IN THE FACE WITH A CAN OF MACE!**

ERIN (CONT'D)

You bitch!

ERIN SLAMS ON THE GAS--

-- **CRUNCHHH**--

-- her car lurches forward, directly into the bumper of the car parked opposite--

-- Laura stands there, the can of mace in her gloved hand, stunned at what she's done--

-- Erin blindly grabs at the gearshift, throwing her car into reverse and slamming on the gas all over again--

-- Laura drops the mace--

-- **CRUNCHHH**--

-- Erin crashes into more cars, making her getaway--

-- *BEEP BEEP BEEP*--

-- setting off a car alarm. She shifts back into drive and takes off--

-- **SCREEEETCH**--

-- the side of the car scraping along the concrete wall as Erin drives like a (blind) bat out of hell.

Laura's still crying, standing in the same spot, in a trance until, finally--

-- *she runs.*

INT. PARKING GARAGE STAIRCASE - MOMENTS LATER

Laura takes the stairs two at a time. She's wild-eyed and moving as fast as she can.

She pulls at the dish washing gloves, trying to get them off. She tosses one in a trash can, drops the other, and keeps running.

But, Laura isn't going down the stairs. **She's going up.** She's not trying to make her escape, she's trying to get to--

EXT. PARKING GARAGE ROOF - CONTINUOUS

Laura bursts out onto the roof. She has nowhere else to go.

Above her, it is a cloudless Orlando morning with stars spread out as far as the eye can see.

It's our first real look at the night's sky. The expanse of stars is breath-taking.

In the distance the *screech of police sirens* grows louder. But Laura no longer seems concerned. Instead, she looks up at the stars and, for the first time we've seen, **she smiles.**

CUT TO:

A 2-POUND DRILLING HAMMER--

-- **FLASH**--

INT. ORLANDO POLICE DEPARTMENT - DAY

-- the hammer sits on a metal table, where a beefy man, **DETECTIVE JORGE LOPEZ**, takes a series of pictures, documenting evidence.

Lopez replaces the hammer with Laura's wig. He snaps a new picture. He repeats the process with a long list of items--

-- the dish washing gloves--

-- **FLASH**--

-- a Venom action figure--

-- **FLASH**--

-- \$585 in cash--

-- **FLASH**--

-- plastic garbage bags, rubber tubing, rope of varying lengths, the mace, a potted African violet, another pair of gloves--

-- **FLASH**--

-- an 8-inch Gerber folding knife. Another detective enters, **DETECTIVE CASH CAIN**. She picks up the knife, whistling in amazement.

DETECTIVE CAIN
She just wanted to talk, huh?

DETECTIVE LOPEZ
Oh, that's not even the best part.

Detective Lopez takes the knife and hands Detective Cain a large, open package of ADULT DIAPERS.

DETECTIVE CAIN
No.

DETECTIVE LOPEZ
Yes.

DETECTIVE CAIN
She was wearing one of these?

INT. ORLANDO POLICE DEPARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Laura is turned to the left, posing for a series of mug shots.

DETECTIVE LOPEZ (O.S.)
Said every second counted. No time
for bathroom breaks.

Laura turns towards the camera, brow furrowed in
embarrassment. She looks terrible.

Laura's hair is a stringy mess, tear-smearred make-up streaks
her cheeks but, even that, can't cover the dark, tired
circles under her eyes--

-- **FLASH**--

This is the picture everyone will remember.

DETECTIVE CAIN (O.S.)
Who the hell is this lady?

CUT TO:

TITLE CARD: 12 MONTHS EARLIER

EXT. OUTER SPACE - DAY

Silence.

Darkness.

And then--

LAURA (O.S.)
Ah ha!

Laura, attached to the Canadarm of the Space Shuttle
Discovery, is maneuvered into place over a communications
satellite.

LAURA (CONT'D)
There you are.

Below her is the enveloping brightness of planet Earth, a
swirling mass of blue and white and green and Laura's own.

Laura latches onto the satellite as a replacement solar panel
is lifted up to her.

A voice crackles into her headset, payload specialist **ARIK
AVRHAHAM**, 43.

ARIK
Be careful there. Those solar
panels aren't cheap.

LAURA
You just keep the arm working. I'll
worry about the panel.

ARIK
Yes ma'am.

Laura inspects the panel. She frowns.

LAURA
This one's gonna take a while.

She sets to work, but she can't help but look down--

ARIK
Some view, huh?

LAURA
It sure is.

Laura floats on, two hundred miles above a thunderstorm
covering a third of South America.

She watches as miles-long arcs of lightning jump from cloud
to cloud below her.

LAURA (CONT'D)
I could stay here forever.

INT. SPACE SHUTTLE DISCOVERY - "EVENING"

Laura and other crew members are strapped into special
sleeping bags attached to the shuttle walls. In the micro-
gravity of low Earth orbit, the unconscious astronauts seem
frozen-- arms slightly bent, unmoving hair standing on end.

A voice crackles through one of the cabin speakers:

MISSION CONTROL (O.S.)
Good morning, *Discovery*! And a
special good morning to you, Laura.
Here's a little something to get
your day started from Drew and the
kids.

After a brief hiccup, a tinny-sounding recording of the song
"All Star" by Smash Mouth infects the speakers. (Since the
Gemini program, NASA's been sending musical wake-up calls to
astronauts at the start of each new mission day.)

The song does its work, spreading throughout the *Discovery*
cabin and waking up the crew.

Among them is **CHITHRA GILL**, a sardonic biochemist in her late thirties and decidedly NOT a morning person.

Picking the sleep-gunk from her eyes, Chithra manages to yawn her displeasure at Laura:

CHITHRA

I'm pretty sure I came up here to get away from this song.

LAURA

Be nice. My kids picked it.

CHITHRA

Well, your kids have shitty taste in music.

Laura flashes a smile at Chithra.

LAURA

Oh, I dunno. I think it's pretty good.

Laura floats over to the nearest shuttle intercom, depressing the button that connects to Mission Control.

LAURA (CONT'D)

Thanks for the wake up call, Houston. I love this song. Don't you?

She shoots a wink toward Chithra, who promptly responds with a thorough eye-roll.

MISSION CONTROL (O.S.)

We think it's great. Have a good day up there, guys.

Laura switches off the communicator and tries out some micro-gravity dance moves. It's the space equivalent of mom-dancing, but her enthusiasm is infectious.

Pretty soon the whole crew-- even Chithra-- is dancing.

The music continues to play as we see--

INT. *DISCOVERY CABIN* - "DAY"

Laura floats over to *Discovery's* computer terminal. She logs into NASA's email client and starts typing:

LAURA (V.O.)
Dear Drew, I hope this email finds
you well...

INT. *DISCOVERY* CABIN - LATER

Laura sits for a live interview with **GRETCHEN CARLSON** of FOX NEWS. **GARY SHALIMAR**, the burly, gregarious Mission Commander floats next to her, trying out zero-g backflips.

LAURA (V.O.)
That's still weird, isn't it? An
email from outer space. We're doing
our best to make it feel like
home...

GRETCHEN CARLSON
So Laura, I've gotta ask you the
big question: How do you wash your
hair up there?

Commander Shalimar CRACKS UP.

LAURA
Well, it's not pretty. But we've
found a way--

Laura produces a packet of NASA-issue shampoo and a box of baby wipes.

Carefully she demonstrates how, using the two, she can "wash her hair"

The cast of *Fox and Friends* can't stop laughing.

GRETCHEN CARLSON
And to think people say that
nothing good comes from the space
program.

GARY
Hey now--

INT. *DISCOVERY* CREW CABIN - LATER

The crew is busy eating their freeze-dried dinner. There's a lot of goofing off-- tossing food in the air, doing somersaults, playing catch.

LAURA (V.O.)
The food is better than you'd
imagine. At least if you don't
think too hard.

EXT. SPACE SHUTTLE *DISCOVERY* - "NIGHT"

Laura puts the finishing touches on the solar panel she's
repairing.

It's dark now, the sun hidden on the other side of the Earth.

LAURA (V.O.)
But believe me when I say it's all
worth it.

Below her, the bright NEON LIGHTS of the Shanghai night GLOW
and PULSE, reflecting off her visor.

LAURA (V.O.)
You see all the pictures and you
think you understand. Like, you'll
get up here and be prepared for it,
but there's no way.

A BRIGHT FLASH suddenly illuminates everything around Laura.
The sun, arcing around the curvature of the earth.

LAURA (V.O.)
There's no preparing for this. It's
majestic. It's frightening, too. It
makes you feel so small.

Two hundred and fifty miles below her, the Pacific ocean
churns and froths.

LAURA (V.O.)
Give the kids my love. Tell them
I'm keeping an eye on them, even
from up here. I miss you every day
and can't wait to see you. I know
this is hard on everyone but I hope
you understand this is something I
had to do. I hope I've made you
proud.

Laura floats for a moment, done with her work but enjoying
the view.

LAURA (V.O.)
And don't forget to water the
violets.

CUT TO:

BOOM BOOM.

The distinct double-thunderclap of the sonic boom that accompanies every Space Shuttle as it re-enters earth's atmosphere, racing through the sky at six thousand miles per hour.

BOOM BOOM.

The loud rumble of the *Discovery* crew out-running sound itself can be heard all across the Gulf Coast.

Little League Games. Shopping Mall Parking Lots. Car-choked highways. Everyone stops and looks up the moment they hear Laura shatter the sound barrier.

Forty miles above the ground, the belly of *Discovery* glows a **BRIGHT LAVA-ORANGE**. The sheer force of entering the atmosphere transforming oxygen gas into unimaginably hot PLASMA.

INT. SPACE SHUTTLE *DISCOVERY* - CONTINUOUS

If the outside of the shuttle is hell itself, the interior is a study in serenity.

Commander Shalimar, steady hands at the controls, eases the orbiter into its decent to the Eastern coast of Florida.

Laura, focused, attentive, monitors the onboard safety systems. The noise is deafening, but the crew presses on.

EXT. NASA RUNWAY 33 - CONTINUOUS

A crowd of NASA employees and families are gathered at the edge of Runway 33 near a large stage strung up with balloons.

FRANK PAXTON, a pushing-sixty NASA official with a crew cut, checks his watch.

Off in the distance, a small black-and-white speck appears.

Discovery.

It grows in size, making its way toward Cape Kennedy, touching down like clockwork on Runway 33.

PARACHUTES rocket from the rear of the orbiter.

INT. SPACE SHUTTLE *DISCOVERY* - CONTINUOUS

Discovery finally rolls to a stop.

The crew breathes.

They are alive.

GARY

All right, everyone. Remember where we parked.

EXT. NASA RUNWAY 33 - MOMENTS LATER

The outer hatch of *Discovery* opens to the roar of the crowd.

At Paxton's cue, an aide fires up the sound system, Tommy James and the Shondell's "I'm Comin' Home" blasting on the speakers.

Gary steps out to **WILD CHEERS**. He's followed by the rest of the crew and, finally, Laura.

They're hobbling under Earth's gravity-- the weight of the world literally on their shoulders-- as NASA employees help each of them to the stage. Gary grabs a microphone:

GARY

Thank you, Cape Canaveral!

Thunderous applause. The crew can't help but smile.

GARY (CONT'D)

Look, folks. This was a flawless mission, executed perfectly. I've flown four times and this shuttle was in the best shape of any shuttle I've ever flown in. We did it. We'll do it again. And God dammit, we're gonna be doing it for a hell of a long time.

Again, the crowd goes nuts.

Laura, looking particularly uneasy dealing with the gravity, squints into the sun.

GARY (CONT'D)
I think we made the *Columbia* crew
proud.

Gary pauses. It was hard to say but it was on everyone's
mind.

GARY (CONT'D)
We're going to go see our families
now. Have a good day. Thanks.

Laura gingerly makes her way off the stage.

Just off the runway, her family awaits.

There's her husband **DREW**, mild-mannered and sweet (if a
little nervous). Beside him their twelve-year-old daughter
RUTH stands a few paces away, trying to look disaffected.
Finally, Laura's twin six-year-old boys, **NEIL** and **ED**, each
holding a foil "Welcome Home" balloon.

Laura hesitates a moment. She's not quite ready for this, not
quite ready to admit her time in space is over until--

-- the boys spot her--

NEIL AND ED
MOM!

-- and come running.

They're all running for her, now, arms outstretched. Neil and
Ed have let go of their balloons. Even Ruth is tearing up.
The boys hit their mother at full speed--

LAURA
-- Oof.

Drew puts his arm around Laura. She leans into him. Smiling.
Crying. Breathing him in.

DREW
I missed you so much.

He gives her a big hug that knocks her off balance--

LAURA
Careful. I might break.

Above them, the balloons float towards the clouds.

INT. FRANK PAXTON'S OFFICE - LATER

Laura sits patiently across Paxton's desk as he thumbs through the flight report for Mission STS-121.

Paxton is warm and paternal, but he's also no-nonsense. He's been with NASA for years, and the walls of his office can easily double as a museum.

Photos of Paxton, always with the same haircut, overseeing the construction of *ENTERPRISE* (the first shuttle prototype), posing with SALLY RIDE, JOHN GLENN, other astronauts from the last twenty years.

It's clear the shuttle program is his baby. He's been a protective father for decades.

PAXTON
How you feeling?

LAURA
Well, walking's a lot more of a pain in the ass than I remember.

Paxton flips through a few more pages of the flight report.

PAXTON
It'll get easier. How was it up there?

LAURA
Amazing.

Paxton looks up from his paper work and smiles. The wonder in Laura's voice gets to him. For all his work, Paxton's never been to space. This wonder is as close as he'll ever get.

PAXTON
And the mission?

LAURA
Shuttle ran beautifully.

PAXTON
Okay.

Paxton scribbles a few notes in his report.

LAURA
The crew was a pleasure to work with.

PAXTON
Did you ever feel like you were in
danger?

LAURA
There's always a risk--

PAXTON
You know what I mean.

LAURA
No. I never felt like I was in
danger.

Paxton sets the file down. He leans in, adopting a grave tone
just to make it clear he's serious:

PAXTON
There are a lot of people out there
who believe the shuttle program
should just wind things down. Go
quietly into that good night.

LAURA
That would be a mistake, sir.

PAXTON
Nobody gives a shit anymore. It's
not like when we had the Soviets.
Americans stopped caring a long
time ago.

LAURA
That's not true. I care.

PAXTON
Would you be willing to return to
space?

Laura resists the urge to blurt what's on her mind:
ABSOLUTELY.

Instead, she opts for composure:

LAURA
I look forward to serving NASA and
my country, any way I can, for a
long time to come.

Paxton smiles.

PAXTON
You're one of the good ones,
Pepper.

INT. PAXTON'S OFFICE WAITING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Paxton escorts Laura from his office into a waiting area, where a MAN leans against the wall and thumbs through an old issue of Time Magazine.

PAXTON

It's great to have you back on Earth.

The man looks up--

MAN

Ha! That's not what you said when I came back.

The man is **MARK GOODWIN**, a 45-year-old All-American type.

Paxton grunts something like a laugh.

PAXTON

That should tell you something.
(to Laura)
Laura have you met Mark Goodwin?
He's commanding *Endeavour* in the Fall.

Laura turns to Mark.

Their eyes meet.

Time stops.

LAURA

I'm Laura--

-- the film *skips, stutters and--*

-- **BURNS RIGHT OFF THE SCREEN.**

BURN TO:

NEWSREEL FOOTAGE

EXT. ALASKA - 1970S

Black and white footage of a quiet lake. Mountains line the skyline. The sound of an *ENGINE SPUTTERING TO LIFE* is followed by:

NARRATOR (V.O.)
 Born April 29, 1965 in Anchorage,
 Alaska, Mark Nathan Goodwin was
 born to fly.

A seaplane takes off from the water's glassy surface.

INT. SEAPLANE - CONTINUOUS

A teenage Mark, baby-faced but full of confidence, is piloting the plane. He turns to the camera and takes his hands from the yoke, goofing off like a kid riding a bike.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
 From an early age, Mark was a
 skilled and confident pilot.

EXT. ALASKA - MOMENTS LATER

NARRATOR (V.O.)
 Which, is not to say his early
 flight hours were not without
 incident.

-- THE SEA PLANE CRASHES--

-- it's a horrible accident, the kind of thing no one could possibly survive, except--

-- Mark "mother fuckin'" Goodwin--

-- who, somehow, climbs out of the wreckage, shaking his head and laughing at himself.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
 Mark walked away.

As Mark walks away--

-- KA-BOOM --

-- the plane EXPLODES behind him.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
 Unharmed.

EXT. PERSIAN GULF - WAR YEARS

Standard news reel footage of a plane landing on an aircraft carrier.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Goodwin served in the Gulf War.
Earning a number of medals and a
teaching position at the Navy's top
flight school.

Having landed safely, Mark climbs out of the cockpit. He pulls his helmet off and walks across the carrier runway, a total badass.

EXT. BEACH - LATER

Mark, in a short bathing suit, struts around a volley ball court.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Where he excelled both in and out
of the classroom.

He leaps into the air and **SPIKES THE BALL** into the camera.

INT. MARK'S TOP GUN OFFICE - LATER

An **ATTRACTIVE FEMALE CADET** enters the office, where Mark sits on his desk with that same confident smile.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

He was quite popular amongst his
students.

The Female Cadet closes the door behind her suggestively...

INT. SPACE SHUTTLE *DISCOVERY* - LATER

Mark somersaults through low-gravity, not a care in the world.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

And soon, Goodwin was recruited to
NASA, where he quickly became a
star pilot and the life of the
party.

INT. PHOTO SHOOT - LATER

Back on Earth, Mark, decked out in a flight suit with a helmet in hand, poses for his NASA portrait. There's an American flag over his right shoulder, a model of the shuttle over his left, and that same ever-confident smile on his face.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Mark Goodwin has logged more than three hundred hours in space and is set to prove that, for someone this special, even the sky is not the limit--

BACK TO:

INT. FRANK PAXTON'S WAITING ROOM - DAY

... where Laura's offering her hand to Mark. He takes it gracefully, amused by her flustered stammering.

LAURA

...Laura Vine. I mean, uh, Pepper. Laura Pepper. I'm sorry it's just...I...

MARK

It's okay. Coming back is hard.

LAURA

Yes it is.

Mark laughs to himself, recognizing something in her.

MARK

Already trying to get back there, aren't you?

There's no sign of her earlier composure as Laura blurts out:

LAURA

As soon as I can.

CUT TO:

INT. PEPPER HOUSE - EVENING

Laura enters the house. It's cozy and lived-in, as clean as a house with three kids could reasonably be. She's carrying her own luggage.

As soon as she reaches the kitchen, Laura makes a beeline straight for--

-- **a row of African violets** on a window sill. The flowers look healthy but she can't be sure and she sticks her fingers into the soil. It is soft and damp, perfectly maintained.

DREW (O.S.)
You didn't think I'd remember.

Drew enters behind his wife, smiling.

LAURA
I know you didn't.

Laura lifts the potted violet, revealing a brand new price tag on the bottom.

DREW
Busted.

Laura playfully hits Drew with the pot. She's about to give him an earful when--

-- Ed runs inside with a **LIT SPARKLER**.

ED
Mommy, we're having 4th of July again! Since you missed it!

LAURA
Give me that.

Laura snatches the sparkler from her six-year-old. She turns to Drew who gives her two big thumbs up.

DREW
4th of July!

ED
FREEDOM!

With that, Ed races from the kitchen. Laura runs the sink and puts the sparkler out with a *hiss* as--

-- **POP POP POP**--

-- a loud string of firecrackers goes off outside. Drew laughs.

LAURA
What about the neighbors, Drew?
It's a weeknight.

DREW
Who cares about the neighbors? My wife just got back from outer space. We're celebrating.

CUT TO:

FIREWORKS EXPLODING...

EXT. PEPPER BACKYARD - LATER

...they're the home-variety but it's still an impressive display.

As Drew runs around like a maniac, lighting mortars and black cats and cherry bombs, the twins look on in awe.

Laura, for her part, seems to be enjoying the display from a safe distance. Ruth's a few feet from her, playing a game on her cell phone, ignoring the rest of the family.

LAURA
Hey. Come here.

Ruth answers without looking up from her phone:

RUTH
Why?

LAURA
Just come here.

Ruth rolls her eyes and shoves her phone in her pocket. She walks over to her mother. Laura pulls Ruth into her, wrapping her arms around her daughter and resting her chin on the top of Ruth's head.

LAURA (CONT'D)
What'd you grow three inches while I was gone?

RUTH
No.

LAURA
Well, you're growing so fast you could've fooled me.

The two of them stand there a moment, the constant blast of fireworks almost soothing. There's a faint hint of a smile on Ruth's lips but it'd disappear in a second if either of her parents could see.

LAURA (CONT'D)
Anything happen while I was gone?

RUTH
Dad killed your violets and got new ones from Lowe's.

LAURA
You're not supposed to tell me
that.

RUTH
Oops.

LAURA
I meant with you. Anything happen
with you? Any changes?

Ruth finally grasps what her mother is asking...

RUTH
Eww. Gross, Mom. Stop.

...Ruth pulls away from her mother's grasp, unwilling to
stick around if the topic is her changing body. Laura calls
out:

LAURA
You know I missed you, right--

NEIL (O.S.)
AHHHHHHHHH!

Laura turns towards her screaming sons, who are wrapped up in
a tangle of pulled hair and kicked shins. She runs to break
up the fight:

LAURA
Stop! Stop!

NEIL
Asshole!

LAURA
Watch your mouth!

Laura pulls the boys apart. They're both red with anger,
ready to tear each other to pieces.

LAURA (CONT'D)
Guys, what are you doing?

ED
Neil tied Venom to a bottle rocket.

Ed points to Neil's handiwork, which is, just like he said, a
Venom action figure bound with a shoelace to the barrel of a
bottle rocket.

LAURA
Neil.

Neil bursts into tears.

NEIL

I wanted him to be up there for you. I wanted you to have something to remember us.

Laura looks at the toy super villain tied to the firework and her heart breaks for her children. There really was a price to her going to space.

Laura doesn't have the words, might never have them but--

DREW (O.S.)

Don't worry, boys.

-- Drew steps up and puts his arm around Laura, pulling her in tight.

DREW (CONT'D)

Your mom's back now. And she's here to stay.

We're the only ones who catch the **momentary flicker of panic** on Laura's face at just how permanent those words seem.

CUT TO:

EXT. LYNDON B. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - DAWN

Laura runs on the training facility's outdoor track. She's sprinting, drenched in sweat. She's been at this a while, but she's still going. She's pushing herself as hard as she can.

Behind her looms the giant **SATURN V ROCKET**.

Finally, with one last burst of speed and energy, Laura sprints a hundred yards. It's intense, ugly running-- a person pushed to their limit.

And when she stops, she doubles over. She's gasping for breath, the sweat pouring from her face.

MARK

Hey, space girl.

Mark jogs casually past, making no attempt to hide the fact that he's staring at her ass. Laura struggles to get out a response between ragged breaths:

LAURA

Hey...you.

Mark continues on his jog, calling back to her:

MARK

Keep up the good work!

CUT TO:

INT. HOUSE - BETHESDA, MARYLAND - EVENING

Laura and Drew enter a darkened old house, carrying luggage.

The place is hideous, with a very heavy 70s influence on the decorating. Actually, given the thick layer of dust coating everything, it's possible no one has touched any of this since the 70s.

LAURA

Dad?

There's no response. Just the muffled sound of a television somewhere deep in the house.

Laura and Drew continue through the house, passing a wall lined with framed photographs. The pictures tell the story of Laura's childhood.

There she is as a chubby eight-year-old with no front teeth. There she is-- thinner, older-- destroying the competition at a track meet. There she is giving a speech as the valedictorian of her high school class.

There are family portraits, too. Laura looking nervous in each of them, standing between her mother and father.

Laura's mother is a heavy-set woman with kind eyes and a head of thick, brown hair. She looks incredibly warm, especially in comparison to Laura's father, **WALLACE "WALLY" VINE**. Wally is a military man with a bald head and the same stern expression in every picture.

The row of pictures ends with the final family portrait. In it, Laura's mother is obviously sick but putting on a good face. She's smaller, almost thin now and her hair's been replaced with a bad wig. Both Laura and her father look miserable.

And now, finally, as Laura and Drew reach the den, we find present-day Wally sitting in a recliner and watching TV while chewing on a big wad of dip. The years have not been kind to him-- there's an oxygen tube plugged into his nose and hair sprouting from his ears.

Wally's disposition certainly hasn't brightened, either. He doesn't even look away from the television as Laura and Drew enter.

WALLY

What are you doing here?

Laura is genuinely disappointed by her father's reaction. Drew, however, looks as if this is exactly what he expected.

LAURA

You forgot we were coming?

WALLY

I didn't forget. I just don't know what you're doing.

LAURA

We're here to visit you.

WALLY

Well, I didn't ask for that.

Wally picks up the remote and turns up the volume on the television.

LAURA

Daddy, you can't just sit here in the dark.

Laura turns on a lamp.

The dim bulb reveals the walls of Wally's den are lined with Naval memorabilia from his war days. It also appears as if Wally's been living in this one room-- there are dirty dishes everywhere and glass bottles filled with a disconcerting yellow liquid.

Laura immediately goes to work tidying up, grabbing a pile of dishes.

Drew, looking terrified, takes a seat on the couch beside his father-in-law's recliner.

LAURA (CONT'D)

Want a beer, sweetie?

DREW

Absolutely.

Laura hurries off with the mess, leaving the two men alone for an awkward moment. After steeling himself, Drew blurts out:

DREW (CONT'D)

You know, you should be very proud
of your daughter in there, Wally.
You raised quite the girl.

Wally ignores Drew. He grabs a nearby cup and **spits a big, disgusting glob of dark tobacco juice.**

INT. LAURA'S CHILDHOOD BEDROOM - NIGHT

With Drew asleep in her old twin bed, Laura pokes around in her childhood bedroom. It's mostly untouched since she left-- though, this is more from Wally's indifference than any sort of preservation.

Laura pulls a large cardboard box from the closet.

She begins to empty the boxes contents. First, there's a large Styrofoam ball painted orange. She puts the ball in her lap and reaches in for another, smaller ball. This one is painted to look like Earth.

It's an old school project, a complete set of Styrofoam planets-- even Pluto. Laura sits there, the Sun in her lap, and arranges the solar system on the floor around her.

EXT. BETHESDA MARRIOTT - NIGHT

In the middle of a heated argument, Laura and Drew make their way through the hotel parking lot.

Laura looks great in a little black dress. Drew's in a suit, but he looks more like a guy who grabbed the first thing he saw at J.C. Penney.

LAURA

I'm worried about him. I think he
needs to come stay with us.

DREW

What? No way. Where are we supposed
to put him? I don't know if you've
noticed but there's hardly enough
room for the five people who
already live in that house. Much
less an eighty-one-year-old man who
has never thrown anything away in
his entire life.

LAURA

Okay. So we get him an apartment,
then. Nearby. We can hire a nurse.
Someone to help out.

Drew stops, only now realizing how deep he's in on this one.

DREW

Wait. You're serious about this?
You want him closer?

But Laura's not stopping, she's already made up her mind.
Drew has to rush to catch back up with her.

LAURA

Of course I do. He's sick and
lonely and he needs our help. Why
wouldn't I want him closer?

DREW

Because he's awful? Because he's
never been anything but horrible to
you? Because he terrifies our
children?

LAURA

He's my father.

DREW

That's even worse. He treats you
like garbage and all you ever do is
try to get his approval. You're so
caught up trying to be daddy's
little girl that you can't see
daddy's a fucking asshole.

LAURA

I'm all he has.

DREW

Fine. We'll put him in a home.

LAURA

Are you kidding me? He'd kill
himself before he'd let us do that.

DREW

I'd say good riddance but, knowing
Wally, he'd probably try to take us
out first.

LAURA

Yeah, he probably would.

DREW

Listen to you. Your father would kill us before letting us put him in a nursing home? That's not normal.

LAURA

Who wants to be normal?

The argument still going, Laura and Drew enter--

INT. BETHESDA MARRIOTT BALLROOM - CONTINUOUS

Balloons arc the entrance along with a banner that reads "Welcome Home, Frontier High Class of '84!" The room is full of 38 year-olds catching up over alcoholic punch while a DJ spins the likes of Toni Basil and The Vapors.

DREW

Look can we talk about this later? For now, I'd really like to just enjoy being the astronaut's wife.

But Laura's already dropped the argument, stopping short in the ballroom entrance. This is all a little more than she's prepared for.

LAURA

Wow. It's been a long time.

Drew smiles. He leans in to kiss Laura's forehead.

DREW

Well, they won't think that when they see you. You haven't changed a bit since the day I met you.

Laura smiles, trying to put on a brave face. They approach a table lined with name tags where a **VOLUNTEER** watches them with an unsettling smile.

LAURA

It's Laura and Drew--

NAMETAG VOLUNTEER

Oh stop. I know exactly who you are.

The Volunteer hands them their badges.

NAMETAG VOLUNTEER (CONT'D)

And let me be the first to say how proud you've made us.

LAURA

Well, thank you. That's awful nice of you.

NAMETAG VOLUNTEER

Of course. You're an inspiration to us all.

Laura turns away from the table. She rolls her eyes at Drew but he doesn't think the Volunteer's sentiment is overblown in the least. Laura really is an inspiration.

INT. FRONTIER HIGH REUNION - LATER

Laura and Drew stand in a crowd of her former classmates. People are actually jockeying for position, trying to get into Laura's circle.

Everyone is here to see her.

LAURA

I don't know. You train and you train and then, one day, you're up there. You're floating around in space and...

...Laura makes eye contact with one of the men in the circle, **HAL FREELY**. He's handsome and slim and he nods to her, noticing the eye contact...

...it throws her off her game for a moment...

LAURA (CONT'D)

...you're not even sure it's real. It can't be. Who would let you up there? How can this be your life?

INT. FRONTIER HIGH REUNION - LATER

The crowd watches a slideshow of old pictures on a giant projector. A picture of Laura, nerdy with braces and giving a thumbs up comes on and the place goes nuts.

Laura and Drew are watching from the back, she leans over to him, whispering:

LAURA

What a dork.

DREW

Hey! That's my woman you're talking about.

Drew waves a mock fist at Laura. She laughs and shakes her head.

INT. FRONTIER HIGH REUNION - LATER

Drew's alone, whistling to himself as he refills his and Laura's punch cups.

As he turns from the punch bowl, a **DRUNK DUDE** takes him in a massive bear hug, lifting him up in the air and spilling punch everywhere.

DRUNK DUDE

Whoa! Freddie! It's been too long, brother.

DREW

Uh, I think you've got the wrong guy.

DRUNK DUDE

You're not Freddie?

Drew points to his name tag.

DREW

Nope. I'm Drew. I didn't even go to school here. My wife did. Laura Pepper.

The Drunk Dude's jaw drops. This is way better than finding Freddie, whoever he is.

DRUNK DUDE

Whoa! Awesome!

Drew nods. Yep. It is awesome. He's having the time of his life.

EXT. BETHESDA MARRIOTT - LATER

Laura leans against the building smoking a cigarette. She's alone, staring up at the stars, getting a much needed break until...

HAL

Laura Vine.

...it's Hal Freely, from earlier, with a big smile on his face-- she's just the person he was looking for. Now, without Drew around, there's a familiarity between these two, a long history.

LAURA
Pepper. Laura Pepper.

HAL
I saw that. It's still Freely here.
Not that the man changes his name
if he's married. Just, you know,
I'm not married.

Hal holds up his hand, providing the lack of a ring as proof.

LAURA
Hi, Hal.

HAL
I mean, full disclosure, I'm
divorced.

LAURA
It's okay. I'd heard.

Laura stubs out her cigarette, ready to get back inside if this is the alternative. But Hal wants to talk:

HAL
I guess word gets around, huh? How
about you? How've you been? What've
you made of yourself?

LAURA
Don't do that. You know what I do.

HAL
Okay, okay. You're a big shot
astronaut. Imagine that. Our Laura--
my Laura-- in outer space.

LAURA
And back again.

Hal misinterprets Laura's wistfulness. He leans in to kiss her but Laura stops him. Before their lips can even touch, she takes a step back and pushes him away.

LAURA (CONT'D)
Stop.

HAL
I'm sorry. I don't know what came
over me.

LAURA
It's okay. I get it. It's just, I'm
happy now.

This, much more than the fact that his ex-girlfriend has been to space, seems to really blow Hal's mind. In fact, he can't believe it:

 HAL
Really? That's...you're happy?

 LAURA
Yes.

 HAL
Wow.

Laura doesn't say anything. Hal picks at the brick wall for a quiet moment.

 HAL (CONT'D)
Why'd I ever let you go?

 LAURA
It doesn't matter.

 HAL
It does to me. You were crazy about me, once. And I got bored of it. I thought, when we left for college, I could do better. You cried and cried. You called my house at all hours of the night. My mother was so freaked out she wanted to change our number. Do you remember what you said?

 LAURA
Not really.

 HAL
You said I couldn't do better than you. You said you were the best thing that ever happened to me.

 LAURA
Yikes.

 HAL
No. You were right.

Laura thinks about this for a moment. Then she smiles.

 LAURA
I know.

With that, Laura brushes past Hal and heads back in to:

INT. FRONTIER HIGH REUNION - CONTINUOUS

Laura returns to the ballroom and finds Drew. She wraps her arms around him, kisses him deeply, and takes her drink.

The class president, **SAHAYA AHMED**, is up on stage, giving a big speech.

SAHAYA

I don't know about the rest of you, but these last twenty years have been full of some hard truths. Like, maybe we don't all get to grow up and get married and have three kids and that house with the white picket fence. And we definitely can't eat a whole bag of Oreos like we used to. And we've all lost friends. There are people who aren't here tonight who, twenty years ago, we couldn't imagine life without.

Someone yells from the crowd, echoing this sentiment:

VOICE

We miss you Dylan!

SAHAYA

But, I'll tell you what we do have here tonight. Hope. And inspiration. There's a girl-- no, a woman-- amongst us, who made more of herself than any of us could have ever dared to dream. That woman is Laura Pepper. Where are you Laura?

Laura tries to shrink away, to hide from this. This is not what she wants--

-- but Drew doesn't notice. He pushes her forward, calling out:

DREW

Here! She's here!

Everyone turns to see her. They're all beaming; they're all unable to get enough of her.

SAHAYA

Now, I want to make a toast and I know you'll all join me. To Laura Pepper! A real, American hero!

Everyone holds up their cups and calls out:

CROWD
To Laura!

LAURA
Aw, thanks, guys.

SAHAYA
No, Laura. Thank you.

The crowd goes wild. Drew whispers in Laura's ear:

DREW
I love you so damn much.

CUT TO:

EXT. HOUSTON APARTMENT COMPLEX - DAY

Laura, having won the argument (as if there was ever any doubt), carries boxes into her father's new apartment. Drew's there, with the kids, all doing their best to help. Everyone's walking on eggshells.

Wally sits in the rental truck and glares at all of them.

INT. WALLY'S APARTMENT - LATER

Wally's still glaring after the truck's been unloaded. Now, he's sitting in his recliner while Laura and Drew unpack.

The kids run around, caught up in a game of tag. They're getting along, having a good time in spite of the obvious tension.

RUTH
You're it!

Ruth tags Neil, who turns to chase her--

-- only he trips over a box--

-- falling onto the back of Wally's recliner--

WALLY
Watch it you little shits!

DREW
Wally!

Drew drops the empty box he's just unloaded. Wally laughs a mean little laugh.

WALLY

What are you going to do? You can't even stand up to her.

Drew takes a step towards his father-in-law, who, even though he's sitting in a recliner, somehow manages to not back down.

DREW

Listen here--

-- but Laura steps in--

LAURA

-- Drew. It's not worth it. Trust me. Go. Take the kids. I'll finish up.

DREW

You're sure?

LAURA

Yeah. I'm sure.

DREW

Come on guys.

The kids, who are all standing there in terrified silence run after their father.

LAURA

Be good!

Wally smiles his awful smile, his point made.

WALLY

Pussy.

INT. DREW'S CAR - EVENING

As Drew drives home, the kids sit in awkward silence, until:

ED

Grandpa's an asshole.

DREW

Hey! Watch the language.

RUTH

He's right.

DREW

I know.

NEIL

I'm glad you're not an asshole,
Dad.

DREW

Well, I'll have to be one if you
guys don't stop using that word
this second.

NEIL

Sorry.

INT. WALLY'S APARTMENT - LATER

Laura's made a lot of progress on the apartment and Wally, now sipping a beer, seems to have calmed down a bit with everyone gone.

Laura opens one of the last remaining boxes. She reaches into the box and pulls out what looks like a bundled up cloth. Whatever's in the cloth falls out--

LAURA

Jesus.

-- startling Laura. She turns to her father, concerned.

LAURA (CONT'D)

Dad?

Wally barely looks in her direction. Laura reaches in the box once again and pulls out a handgun. She holds it with two fingers, far from her body, as if it's something dead and rotten.

WALLY

What?

LAURA

Really?

WALLY

I have my rights.

LAURA

All right, all right.

Laura carefully wraps the gun in the cloth.

WALLY

This is the God damn United States
of America.

Laura pats her father reassuringly on the shoulder as she heads out of the room. She's not taking his gun.

LAURA

I know, Daddy. I know.

INT. GUEST ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Laura enters her father's guest room. She grabs a folding chair and stands on it in order to shove the gun in the back corner of the highest closet shelf.

She may not be taking it away from Wally but she's certainly not leaving it anywhere that he can find it.

EXT. WALLY'S APARTMENT - EVENING

Laura carries a load of broken-down boxes to the dumpster.

INT. WALLY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Laura sits on the ground beside her father's recliner. They're finishing off pizza. Laura's trying to have a conversation but isn't really getting anywhere.

LAURA

I wish you could have seen it up
there, Daddy.

Silence from Wally. But Laura doesn't give up:

LAURA (CONT'D)

I can't wait to go back.

WALLY

Well, I know one thing. I'm going
back. That's for sure.

Laura's heart breaks. Her father's even further gone than she thought.

LAURA

Daddy, you didn't go to space.
You've done a lot of things. Great
things. But you didn't go to space.
I did.

Or, maybe he isn't:

WALLY

Who cares about space? I'm going home. You can't keep me locked up here forever. This ain't no fucking prison.

Maybe he's the same asshole he's always been after all.

CUT TO:

INT. NASA CAFETERIA - DAY

Laura walks through the crowded company cafeteria, her tray has only a modest salad and a big glass of water. She looks around nervously, back in school for a moment, unsure where to sit.

Luckily, there's an empty table and Laura eases into a seat by herself. Just as she's about to take a bite of her lunch--

MARK (O.S.)

We're going bowling tonight.

-- Mark drops his tray on the table, it is loaded up with Salisbury steak and tater tots. He turns a chair around and straddles it.

LAURA

I'm sorry, who's going bowling?

MARK

We are, space girl. Us. You, me, the guys.

(calling out to a line of passing astronauts)

Guys! Bowling, tonight?

ASTRONAUT #1

Yep.

ASTRONAUT #2

Yep.

ASTRONAUT #3

Yep.

-- Mark turns, expectantly to Laura.

LAURA

Nope.

MARK

Oh come on.

LAURA

Can't. I've got kids and a husband.
Dinner doesn't make itself.

MARK

Bleh. Earth families. Who needs
'em? Tell them you've got a new
family, now. A brotherhood.

LAURA

Don't think they'd like that very
much.

Mark flashes a devilish grin.

MARK

Then lie. Tell them it's training.
You're serving your country. That's
what the rest of us do.

Laura looks over at him, smiling. She's obviously tempted.
But, for now at least, she just can't do it.

LAURA

Maybe next time.

CUT TO:

A SEEMINGLY ENDLESS CEREAL AISLE--

INT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

-- as Laura slowly pushes a shopping cart, lost in the
infinite options. She turns to the twins, who are tagging
along behind her.

LAURA

What do you want? I can't decide.

NEIL

That one.

Neil points to neon purple box, the least healthy option.

LAURA

That's nothing but sugar.

ED

You told us to pick.

LAURA
Well, you blew it.

Laura grabs bland, sugarless corn flakes and tosses them in the cart. She continues on, still sort of amazed by the place.

It's weird to come to the realization that you're more at home in outer space than in the suburban grocery store where you've done your shopping for the last ten years.

In fact, Laura doesn't realize something's off until she's all the way to the end of the aisle.

LAURA (CONT'D)
Boys?--

-- Laura turns to find Neil and Ed, standing in the middle of the aisle, elbow-deep in **a torn open bright purple cereal box**. They laugh through mouthfuls of sugar.

Laura sighs heavily and closes her eyes. Just as she opens them we--

CUT TO:

A BOWLING BALL ARCING THROUGH THE AIR--

INT. SUGARLAND LANES - NIGHT

-- landing on a waxed lane, headed directly for a triangle of pins--

-- **CRASH** --

-- the pins wobble and collapse but don't all fall. There's a nasty spare to be picked up.

LAURA
Damn it.

Laura's bowling, and clearly not doing the best job. Off by the ball return, Mark pals around with **PETE HOFSTRA** and **JIM MENDELSON**, two other astronauts.

Jim takes a moment to rib Laura--

JIM
Now why would you go and do that?

LAURA
I meant to do it, Jim.

Mark takes a swig from his Yuengling and hops up to Laura.

MARK

Care for some pointers, ma'am?

LAURA

That depends. You have any idea what you're talking about?

Mark smiles.

MARK

I practically invented this game.

Mark gets up close to Laura, cupping her arms in his--

--he draws her arm back and forth in large, slow practice throws.

MARK (CONT'D)

The trick is adding a slight twist at the end there. You see?

Laura smiles. She's enjoying this moment of closeness.

LAURA

That's your secret?

MARK

That's my secret.

Pete cups his hand to his mouth.

PETE

His secret is that he's hammered!

MARK

Oh, that's no secret at all.

Mark heads back to his beer but not before calling out to Laura:

MARK (CONT'D)

Remember what I told you!

Laura steps up to the line. She takes a deep breath before heaving the ball down the lane and--

-- **PICKING UP THE SPARE!**

The other astronauts cheer wildly. Laura gives Mark a high five.

MARK (CONT'D)

Go on. Say it.

LAURA

You're the best.

MARK

And now, the best in action.

Mark grabs a ball and approaches the line. He tosses it down the lane where it--

-- promptly lands in the gutter.

Laura can't help but laugh.

INT. SUGARLAND LANES - LATER

The astronauts are shooting the shit around a table, post-game. Mark swings by, placing an armful of beers on the table.

MARK

As requested: five Yuenglings.

JIM

And only four of us.

Mark gives himself an extra beer, feigns surprise:

MARK

Oh no-- how could this have happened?

PETE AND JIM

Must've been a rounding error.

Laura laughs.

JIM

Ah, so that's why he brought you along. Someone to laugh at that old joke.

MARK

The only old joke here is you, my friend.

LAURA

Ouch.

Mark gives Jim a playful shove.

MARK

Oh, don't worry about it. These guys love me.

PETE

I can assure you, we don't.

MARK

We go way back. We got called up together. Pete was with me on the *Discovery*. Jim's still waiting for his shot.

This is obviously a sore spot for Jim::

JIM

Thanks for the reminder.

LAURA

Oh, you'll get up there. It'll happen.

JIM

It better. Or I'm going to have to blow my fucking brains out.

There's a hint of misery in Jim's voice. He's joking, sure, but there's more than a bit of truth to it.

MARK

Okay. Enough of your moping. I was just saying how close we are. How you guys know all my dirty secrets.

PETE

Like the crying incident.

MARK

Oh jeez--

Without thinking, Laura **grabs Mark's hand--**

LAURA

What crying incident? I need to hear this.

He looks at her, a little surprised. Laura, realizing what's happened, takes her hand back.

MARK

Well, since you asked so nicely--

Mark takes a sip of his beer. He pauses for dramatic effect before starting his story:

MARK (CONT'D)

Four years ago. *Atlantis*-- ISS Science module, real bitch of a job. Three spacewalks, twenty-three hours of work.

LAURA

Jesus.

MARK

I'm on the third walk, just about to finish up, when-- you know that defogging solution they put on the visors?

Laura makes a disgusted face.

LAURA

Oh God, yes. Smells like fish.

MARK

Bingo. Well, my cooling system goes on the fritz and all of the sudden I'm starting to sweat. I end up getting a bit of the defogger in my left eye.

PETE

That's what he claims. I still maintain he was crying because he's a big puss--

(remembering there's a lady present)

Sorry, Laura.

LAURA

Nothing I haven't heard before, you dumb cunt.

The guys are momentarily stunned by this but then burst into laughter. She's doing a great job fitting in and Mark loves it.

MARK

See? What'd I tell you? She's one of the good ones. Now, where was I?

LAURA

Defogger in your left eye.

MARK

Right. Burns like hell. My eyes are watering. And you know space-- things are weird. Tears don't fall.

(MORE)

MARK (CONT'D)

They just hang there in your eye sockets. And it's not like you can just reach up and wipe them away.

JIM

Not unless you want it to be the last thing you ever do.

MARK

I'm blind. I'm overheating. I'm just out there and I have no idea what my surroundings are.

Laura looks sick-- this isn't the sort of story she wanted to hear.

LAURA

How'd you make it out?

MARK

Was able to shake the tears from my eyes and pull myself back into the cargo bay.

Laura lets this sink in.

LAURA

Everything is so fragile.

MARK

Yeah, but what a ride.

EXT. PEPPER HOUSE - MIDNIGHT

Mark's large truck rolls up the driveway.

He turns to Laura, seated beside him and clearly a little tipsy--

MARK

Nice place.

LAURA

It's home.

With some effort, Laura forces her door open and works to pour herself out of the pickup.

Mark gets out too, hurrying around to the passenger side.

He makes an exaggerated bow, holding his hand out for Laura to take--

MARK

M'lady.

Laura laughs, taking Mark's hand and returning the gesture with a regal nod.

LAURA

Such a gentleman.

On her way out of the truck, Laura SLIPS, falling right onto Mark.

He catches her, stopping the fall. They both crack up.

MARK

Still don't have those Earth legs,
huh?

LAURA

I'm just drunk.

Laura regains her footing, bracing herself against Mark as she gets her balance.

She looks up at the house, wistful--

LAURA (CONT'D)

I don't think my family wants me
back up there.

MARK

What'd you tell them?

LAURA

I told them the truth.

MARK

That you're going?

LAURA

That I need a break.

Mark doesn't answer at first. He frowns slightly at the house before offering:

MARK

They just don't get it, do they?

Laura laughs a short, bitter laugh. She doesn't want to talk about this right now.

LAURA

Can I get a cigarette?

Mark pulls out his softpack and removes a pair of cigarettes.

Laura stops him--

LAURA (CONT'D)
No. Let's just share one.

Mark smiles. He lights the cigarette, taking a long drag before handing it off to Laura.

The two of them lean against the pickup, looking skyward.

LAURA (CONT'D)
Do you ever miss it?

Mark turns to Laura, brushing away a few strands of hair covering her face. He looks into her eyes:

MARK
Every God damn day.

Their lips are inches apart.

MARK (CONT'D)
See you at the office, space girl.

INT. PEPPER HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Laura enters the house, dropping her bag on the kitchen floor and slowly, quietly making her way up the stairs.

As she moves down the hallway, she notices a light on: Ruth's.

INT. RUTH'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Laura enters to find Ruth seated on the floor reading a copy of Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince. She's so caught up in the book she hasn't even noticed her mother.

Laura gives a quick knock on the door to get Ruth's attention--

LAURA
Bed time.

RUTH
Okay.

Ruth dog-ears a page and crawls into bed. Laura doesn't leave. Instead, she gets into bed beside her daughter.

Laura chokes up, suddenly overcome with emotion.

LAURA
Baby, I'm sorry.

Ruth is surprised and a little scared-- she's never seen her mother like this.

RUTH
For what?

LAURA
I don't know. For not being around.
For yelling at you guys.

Ruth gives her mother a hug.

RUTH
It's okay, Mom. Sometimes we
deserve to get yelled at.

Laura hugs Ruth back. The two of them lay there in bed. They stare up at Ruth's ceiling, which is covered in **glow-in-the-dark plastic stars**.

CUT TO:

INT. SHUTTLE SIMULATOR - JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - DAY

Laura, Mark, Pete and Jim-- each in full astronaut gear-- are strapped into a shuttle simulator that's nearly as old as they are.

It's a machine built in the 1970's-- slow, and prone to breaking down. But it's all there is for training, all there has ever been.

The astronauts busily check their instruments as--

-- A FLASHING RED LIGHT FILLS THE CABIN--

MARK
Looks like we have a life-support
failure.

Loud **sirens** kick in.

Laura pulls out a large binder at her feet and begins thumbing through the Mission Protocols.

LAURA

Copy that. Houston, reporting a failure of life support system in crew cable.

MISSION CONTROL

Roger. *Endeavour*, can you confirm O2 levels?

MARK

Stable.
(to Laura)
Power reading?

Laura thumbs through her guide to the appropriate page.

LAURA

Um, power levels confirmed stable.

Mark flips through his binder, double-checking Laura's assessment.

MARK

Houston, do you read that? Power and O2 remain constant.

MISSION CONTROL

Copy *Endeavour*.

The shrieking sirens continue. Laura winces.

LAURA

We've got a lot of noise up here.

Jim flips to the back of his binder.

JIM

Any ideas, Houston?

MISSION CONTROL

Endeavour, CAPCOM is suggesting a hard restart.

MARK

Laura, that's you.

Laura's thumbing through a second binder. A second, more staccato siren begins SHRIEKING.

LAURA

Fuck. One second--

More shrieking. Lights are starting to flicker in the cabin.

MARK
Gonna need some help here, Laura.

LAURA
Almost there--

PETE
O2 dropping.

Pete starts throwing switches on his console no luck.

Mark turns to Laura, alarm creeping in--

MARK
Laura, where we at?

Finally, Laura has flipped to the page she was looking for--

LAURA
Found it!

Laura flips a series of switches on her console--

-- **the flashing lights and sirens suddenly STOP.**

Everything is still.

MARK
We're all dead.

Mark unbuckles his harness.

He storms out of the simulator.

EXT. SIMULATOR - LATER

Laura sits alone in front of the simulator. She's a wreck, still wearing her flight suit, breathing heavily. After a moment, she stands, walks over to the simulator and--

-- **punches it as hard as she can**, ripping her knuckles open against the metal exterior.

LAURA
God damnit.

She turns and kicks a wooden bench, in full meltdown mode.

She pulls off a boot, grunting loudly, tearing the thing off with little regard for whether or not she takes her foot with it.

She hurls the boot across the room. Pulls at the suit itself.

She's moaning, too. **This low, aching moan.** Real pain. She's on the verge of tears but, somehow, this is even more intense than if she was actually weeping.

Laura's completely tangled in the suit as she tries to pull it off. She's flailing at the thing, tearing at it as if it's on fire.

And then, she stops.

Half out of the suit now, wearing only one boot, Laura slumps down on the bench. Her hand is bleeding but she ignores it.

She just sits there. Breathing heavily. Completely unhinged. And then--

MARK (O.S.)

This seat taken?

Laura looks up to find Mark-- the Mark she knows: all charm and cowboy swagger and not an ounce of the anger she saw in the simulator.

She melts. All the tension leaving her in that moment.

LAURA

You sure you want to sit with a dead girl?

Mark takes a seat. He's buffing an apple against his sleeve, completely unfazed by any of this.

MARK

You did good in there.

LAURA

Are you joking?

MARK

You know how these simulators go. You fuck up so you can learn how not to fuck up.

Mark takes a bite of the apple. He offers a bite to Laura but she waves it away--

LAURA

I'm fine.

MARK

You sure are. We'll get 'em next time.

Laura rolls her eyes.

LAURA

You're just saying that because you like me.

Mark responds with an impish grin:

MARK

That can't be true. I don't like you one bit.

CUT TO:

EXT. ANGELINAS NATIONAL FOREST - DAY

A dense forest North of Houston. Laura and her family are gathered around the beginnings of a camp site.

Laura is playing with the kids as Drew is struggling to set up the tent.

He's clearly not having much luck, dropping one pole every time he tries to secure another--

DREW

God dammit!

Laura overhears and heads over to Drew.

DREW (CONT'D)

This tent isn't playing nice.

LAURA

Let me do it.

Drew steps aside as Laura takes over.

It's easy work for Laura. Time with the Navy and NASA has left her with some solid survival skills.

DREW

I feel like I'm in the way.

Laura is busy tying another elaborate knot around a post. She calls out to Drew, without looking up--

LAURA

You can unpack the gear if you want.

DREW

Right.

Drew grabs Laura's pack and brings it over.

DREW (CONT'D)
Where do you want it?

Laura hammers the fourth tentpole into place.

LAURA
Not here. Just take it out and set
it aside.

Drew takes the bag over to a clearing and begins unpacking. As he sets aside item after item-- three knives, four canteens, two compasses varying lengths of rope, kerosene, gauze, tinfoil--

And one very sharp-looking HATCHET.

DREW
We expecting trouble?

LAURA
Not unless you want some.

Laura smiles. Drew laughs-- nervously.

LAURA (CONT'D)
It's really not that much. There's
a purpose for everything I brought.

Drew holds up a length of rope.

He makes some suggestive eyebrow raises.

DREW
I can think of a use for this
tonight.

Laura laughs, rolling her eyes.

LAURA
So romantic.

EXT. CAMPSITE - DUSK

The sun is fast disappearing behind the trees as the whole family is gathered around a large campfire making s'mores.

Drew is in the middle of telling a ghost story, his face lit from below with a flashlight.

DREW
...and when her date untied the
ribbon around her neck...

Drew does his best to mime untying a knot with his one free hand--

DREW (CONT'D)
--Her head fell off!

Laura gives an exaggerated GASP. The twins are appropriately weirded out:

EDWIN
Oh that's creepy.

NEIL
Yeah definitely.

Ruth grunts. Unimpressed.

RUTH
That would never happen.

Laura gives a playful smile.

LAURA
Don't be so sure, Ruth. I knew the girl this happened to.

RUTH
Yeah right.

DREW
It's true. She went to the same high school as your mother.

Ruth perks up--

RUTH
Really?

Drew creeps toward Ruth, shining the flashlight under his face.

DREW
Really. She was your age, you know. And they say, if you listen carefully you can still hear her in these woods.

Ruth is trying to look cool, but it's obvious she's listening to the woods right now.

DREW (CONT'D)
BOO!

Ruth SCREAMS.

EXT. CAMPSITE - MIDNIGHT

Laura puts out the campfire and heads toward the tent.

The kids are already asleep and she's looking to turn in herself when--

DREW (O.S.)

Psst!

Laura turns to find Drew emerging from the trees.

LAURA

What are you doing?

DREW

Come on, I want to show you something.

Laura casts a glance back toward the tent--

DREW (CONT'D)

The kids'll be fine.

EXT. WOODS - MOMENTS LATER

Drew and Laura wander through the forest, ducking under branches and hopping over downed trees.

DREW

Watch your step. Stubbed a few toes on my way out here.

LAURA

Where are we going?

DREW

That'd spoil the surprise.

LAURA

It's late.

They come to a clearing in the trees, ending up on the shores of a warm LAKE.

DREW

This is something else, huh?

LAURA

It's nice.

Drew starts to unbutton his shirt--

LAURA (CONT'D)
What are you doing?

DREW
Skinny dipping, silly.

Drew hangs his pants on a nearby tree branch.

DREW (CONT'D)
And you are too.

With that, he slips off his baggy, white briefs and wades into the water.

Laura starts to undress herself, working her night clothes over her head. But when she looks back up at the lake--

--Drew is gone.

LAURA
Drew?

No answer.

Laura wades into the water naked. Still no sign of him.

LAURA (CONT'D)
Drew, where are you?

She continues to look but is seemingly alone when--

LAURA (CONT'D)
AHHH!!!

Laura SCREAMS as she's PULLED UNDERWATER.

She thrashes at the water when, finally, the creature that pulled at her surfaces:

Drew. Laughing hard.

DREW
Got you.

He leans in and kisses her, not noticing how she is pulling back.

DREW (CONT'D)
And I'm never letting go.

High above them the stars twinkle in a clear, cloudless sky.

CUT TO:

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - DAY

Laura walks down a long NASA hallway lined with offices. She passes a number of nondescript doors before stopping at one that's slightly ajar at the end of the line.

Laura pokes her head in--

-- to find Mark, napping. The tinny sounds of Steely Dan coming from a small radio on his desk.

Laura enters. She closes the door quietly and walks over to him. She leans close, getting just inches from his face--

LAURA

Boo!

-- Mark is startled awake, gasping a big, shocked breath before he recognizes his surroundings.

Laura laughs. Mark plays it cool.

MARK

I'm up, I'm up.

LAURA

Coulda fooled me.

MARK

Maybe I did?

Laura smiles, shaking her head and giving Mark a playful shove.

LAURA

What're you doing for lunch?

Mark places a paper bag on his desk.

MARK

Brought my own.

He reaches into the bag, pulls out a six-pack of Budweiser.

MARK (CONT'D)

Care to join me?

Laura arches an eyebrow.

LAURA

Well--

EXT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - DUSK

Laura's SUV is parked on a side road in the Johnson Complex. It's remote, but the old, decommissioned Saturn V Rocket is still visible from her windshield.

Inside, Mark and Laura are splitting an order of fries. Mark pops the top of a can of beer; hands it to Laura.

As she sips, a car drives by. Laura repositions herself to hide the fact she's drinking.

Mark laughs at Laura's cautiousness.

LAURA

It's like we're back in high school, smoking under the bleachers.

Mark takes a big swig from his can.

MARK

You never smoked under the bleachers.

LAURA

How are you so sure?

MARK

You're a straight arrow, space girl. As straight as they come. You've never done a single thing wrong in your life.

LAURA

I've done plenty of things wrong.

MARK

Name one.

Laura thinks for a moment but she is genuinely stumped.

MARK (CONT'D)

How about smoking under the bleachers?

LAURA

Nope. Never did that.

Mark laughs and takes another sip.

He stares out the passenger window and sighs. He seems a bit off, a bit lost.

LAURA (CONT'D)
You okay?

MARK
Just tired.

Laura puts her hand on Mark's shoulder.

MARK (CONT'D)
My kids--

Mark stops, surprised he said it. There is a silence, but Laura doesn't try to fill it.

MARK (CONT'D)
I love my kids. How could I not?
They're my kids for God's sake. But
I feel like I don't even know them.

Laura nods. She knows the feeling.

MARK (CONT'D)
And their mother too. She's stay-at-home, so they're all close. Like they've got their own language. Sometimes they'll say these things and burst out laughing and I won't understand a single bit of it. Sometimes I feel so alone.

That last one lands particularly hard.

Laura takes Mark's large hands in hers, turning to look directly in his eyes:

LAURA
You don't have to be alone.

She leans over and kisses Mark, fully and deeply.

She undoes his belt. He removes her shirt.

They fuck right there in the car.

CUT TO:

INT. CHILI'S RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Laura and Drew are lead through the restaurant by **CHERYL**, a friendly waitress they've known for years.

It's date night. Their first in a long, long time. Laura is distant and nervous, a few steps behind. Thoughts of Mark weigh heavily on her.

CHERYL

And here you are, your regular table. Right where you left it.

The table is nothing special, just a quiet two-top in the middle of the restaurant. Drew pulls a chair out for Laura, who drops into it like a dead weight.

DREW

Well, thanks, Cheryl. Means a lot. You know we sat at this table the night Laura got tapped for the program?

CHERYL

How could I forget? Now that was some celebration.

Laura's certainly not in the mood for any sort of celebrating right now. She's a complete wreck.

But neither Drew nor Cheryl notices. Cheryl gets out her pen and pad while Laura eyes the exit.

CHERYL (CONT'D)

I take it y'all won't be needing menus?

DREW

Nope. The usual should do the trick.

CHERYL

Great. And can I start you guys with some apps-- potato skins, hot wings, Southwestern egg rolls?

DREW

You know what? I'm feeling adventurous. Egg rolls sound great. Laura?

Laura-- still not quite there-- manages a shrug.

LAURA

That's fine.

CHERYL

Fantastic. I'll get that started
and y'all just shout if you need
me.

With a cheerful bounce, Cheryl heads for the kitchen. But, after only a few steps, she stops, remembering something. She hurries back to the table.

CHERYL (CONT'D)

Oh, and Laura? We're so proud of
you.

Laura forces a smile.

LAURA

Thanks. You shouldn't be.

Cheryl's unsure what to make of that. She gets a confused look on her face before heading back to the kitchen.

DREW

Be nice. She means well.

Laura doesn't respond. She sips her water. She looks at her hands-- they're shaking. But she can't bring herself to look away from them.

Anything to avoid looking at Drew.

DREW (CONT'D)

So...

LAURA

Drew, I have to tell you something.

DREW

Okay. I actually have something to
tell you, too. But go for it. You
first.

Laura takes a deep breath. She looks at her husband across the table. He has no idea. It terrifies her.

But still, she has to do it. It's the right thing to do. She steadies herself and is about to blurt out everything, when--

DREW (CONT'D)

Actually, can I go? I've been
working up the nerve to say this
all day. I know you're not going to
like it, but I just feel it has to
be said. And if I don't do it now,
it'll be too late.

LAURA
What is it?

Drew takes a deep breath of his own.

DREW
I don't want you to go back.

LAURA
What?

DREW
Up there. You can't go on another mission. I won't allow it.

LAURA
You won't *allow* it?

DREW
Okay. Poor word choice. But it's time to realize your life is here. Your kids are here. I'm here.

LAURA
I know that.

DREW
Do you? Do you ever even think of what I go through when you're gone? What the kids go through?

LAURA
Every single day.

DREW
Well, if you really did, you'd realize how selfish this is.

Laura is taken aback. She lashes out--

LAURA
Are you serious? How can you call me selfish and then ask for this?

DREW
I'm not asking you. You can't go back. I need you. We need you.

LAURA
And I need this. You know that. I've worked my entire life to get out there.

DREW

You got there. You did it. You went up and you came back. Safely. I'm proud of you for it. Every single god damn person in your entire life is proud of you for it. But why go back again? Why risk it?

Laura slams her hand down on the table, rattling the silverware. Everyone around her notices.

LAURA

Because it's the only thing I ever wanted.

Cheryl, back with the appetizers, cautiously places the platter on their table. A pro, she acts as though she hadn't heard a thing.

CHERYL

And here we are. They're on the house. Just our way of saying thanks to an American hero.

She leaves. An embarrassed Drew and Laura mumble gratitude.

DREW

Thanks, Cheryl.

LAURA

Thank you.

Laura and Drew sit there for a moment.

Scared. Hurt. Ruined.

The food goes cold.

INT. DREW'S CAR - LATER

Drew and Laura drive home in silence.

CUT TO:

INT. NASA'S NEUTRAL BUOYANCY LAB - DAY

A massive swimming pool. A tank, actually. It's large enough to contain a full-scale mock up of the International Space Station. This is where NASA's astronauts go to train for spacewalks.

Which is exactly what Laura's preparing to do. She's beside the pool, on a metal platform, being outfitted in a specially modified space suit.

A **LAB WORKER** holds Laura's helmet.

LAB WORKER
You ready for a six hour bath?

LAURA
Can't wait.

Laura offers a clumsy thumbs up. The Lab Worker gives a thumbs up of her own and fits Laura's helmet over her head.

INT. NASA'S NEUTRAL BUOYANCY LAB - LATER

The platform, with a fully-outfitted Laura strapped in, is lowered into the water.

INT. NEUTRAL BUOYANCY TANK - LATER

Surrounded by safety divers, Laura works underwater to install a solar panel much like the one we saw her install in space. She's great at it. A real pro.

INT. NASA'S NEUTRAL BUOYANCY LAB - LATER

Laura stands outside the pool, water pouring from her suit. The lab workers slowly go to work removing the equipment--

PAXTON (O.S.)
I want you to know we're watching
you, Pepper.

-- Laura jumps, startled, accidentally elbowing one of the lab workers. Laura doesn't even notice. Paxton's stepped up beside her, smiling.

Laura's utterly terrified by Paxton's words.

PAXTON (CONT'D)
We know what you've been up to.

LAURA
Excuse me?

Laura's sheet white. Breathing heavy. Seconds away from a panic attack.

PAXTON

Your training. You're really pushing yourself. You've made a lot of fans around here.

Laura's face fills with relief.

LAURA

I do what I can.

PAXTON

Well, nothing's official, yet, but we're sending the *Atlantis* up next August. I'll be putting in my highest recommendation to have you on the crew.

LAURA

Thank you, sir.

PAXTON

Of course, Pepper. It's my pleasure.

CUT TO:

INT. PEPPER KITCHEN - EVENING

Laura stands in the kitchen, washing dishes. She's wearing that pair of yellow, rubber dish washing gloves. There are a ton of dishes, huge piles of them, and Laura works alone.

That isn't to say she's alone, Wally sits at the kitchen table, playing solitaire and chewing dip. Ruth's beside him, reading her book. Drew's building Legos with the boys, or, rather, they're destroying Lego structures together.

LAURA

Ruth, dry for me.

Ruth doesn't even look up from her book.

RUTH

Do I have to?

LAURA

Yes, you have to.

RUTH

Ugh. Nobody else has to help.

Ruth rolls her eyes as she stands--

LAURA

Fuck it, then. Neither do I.

-- the rest of the family (aside from Wally, who just smiles and keeps at his game of solitaire) looks at Laura in stunned silence as--

-- she drops an unfinished plate in the sink and storms off, grabbing the phone as she goes.

INT. LAUNDRY ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Laura pulls the gloves from her hands and dials a number.

CUT TO:

INT. MARK'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Mark sits in a recliner, drinking a beer. **MARY GOODWIN**, his wife, sits at the kitchen table, helping their daughters with homework when--

-- *the phone rings.*

MARK

Got it!

Mark grabs the portable and answers.

MARK (CONT'D)

Hello?

LAURA (O.S.)

Hey. It's, uh, me.

There's a flicker of panic on Mark's face, it's the closest we've ever seen him to losing his cool. But, after just a second, he's got a handle on this:

MARK

Yeah, Pete. Give me a second, I'll go check on that.

Mark stands from the recliner, motions to Mary that he'll be in the garage, and hurries from the room.

INT. MARK'S GARAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Mark makes it safely to his garage before saying anything.

MARK

What are you doing? This is my house. Mary could have answered the phone. My daughters could have answered the phone.

LAURA (O.S.)

I know. I know. I'm sorry. I just needed to hear your voice. I feel so alone here. It's like, I can't stand being around them and I'm a terrible person--

MARK

Laura, you're not a terrible person. You're an incredible person. You hear that? You're the sexiest, smartest, most incredible woman I've ever met. And you're not alone.

INT. LAUNDRY ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Laura looks as if she might melt.

LAURA

Really?

MARK (O.S.)

Really.

LAURA

You're not mad at me?

MARK (O.S.)

Of course not. How could I be mad at you when it's so good to hear your voice?

LAURA

I'm really sorry.

MARK (O.S.)

Don't be. Just be careful.

LAURA

I will.

MARK (O.S.)

I'm here for you, space girl. I'll always be here for you. See you tomorrow.

Mark hangs up. Laura stays in the laundry room, enjoying this moment alone.

INT. NASA CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Paxton stands in front of a crowd of astronauts and other NASA personnel. Behind him, stands **a line of recruits**. This is the latest NASA class-- what will eventually be the final class of shuttle astronauts-- and they look both terrified and full of pride.

PAXTON

Now, I know you all remember what this was like, being up here. You were nervous and proud, unsure of what you were really getting into...

As Paxton's speech continues, Laura, Mark, Jim, and Pete stand in the back of the room. They're the cool kids, whispering amongst themselves:

JIM

Fuck me. Don't they already have more of us than they could ever send up there? Now they're just rubbing it in my face.

LAURA

It'll be fine, Jim. You'll get your shot.

JIM

Yeah, a self-inflicted shot. Straight to the temple.

PETE

Jesus.

JIM

Look at them. They're all so...

LAURA

Young.

PETE

Clueless.

JIM

...hungry. It's disgusting.

MARK

I don't know, that one on the end
there's pretty cute.

And now we see, there at the end of the row of new recruits,
is Erin Fleetwood. She is young, hungry, and, yes, a little
clueless.

Laura clocks the way Mark is openly gawking at Erin.

PAXTON

...don't forget you've worked your
entire lives to get here. You join
a brave, select group. You have
made your families and country
proud. But your work is far from
over. In fact, it's only just
begun.

INT. NASA MEET AND GREET - LATER

Over boxed wine and terrible cheeses, the new recruits mingle
and chat.

Laura, holds a plastic cup of wine and searches for Mark and
the others. She has no luck. They're not here, were smart
enough to take off and avoid moments like--

PAXTON (O.S.)

Laura Pepper...

Laura turns to find Paxton standing beside Erin.

PAXTON (CONT'D)

I'd like to introduce you to Erin
Fleetwood. Pepper's one of the best
we've got.

Laura and Erin shake hands.

LAURA

Thank you, sir.

PAXTON

I've assured Fleetwood here that
you'll be looking out for her these
next few weeks. Help her learn the
ropes around this place.

LAURA

Of course, sir.

PAXTON

Well then, I'll leave you to it.

With that and a nod, Paxton's off, leaving Laura and Erin alone. It's an awkward moment for both of them. But then, Erin gives it a shot:

ERIN

Pretty crazy, huh?

LAURA

What's crazy?

ERIN

All of this. We're astronauts. It still feels unreal.

LAURA

Well, don't celebrate just yet. You've got a long ways to go before getting up there, where the real work is.

Laura walks off without another word.

INT. FIRST GRADE CLASSROOM - DAY

Laura stands in front of Ed and Neil's classroom. The boys are their usual, fidgety selves but obviously proud of their mother.

LAURA

Now, I was about your age during the Apollo 11 mission. Does anyone know what the Apollo 11 did?

Neil and Ed's hands shoot up but they're the only ones. It's been a long time since the moon landing.

Still, Laura looks around for a hand other than her sons' but they get impatient, calling out:

ED

They landed on the moon!

LAURA

That's right, Ed.

NEIL

And Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin were the first men to step foot on the moon and you watched on TV when you were a little girl.

ED

And that's when you knew you wanted
to be an astronaut.

LAURA

Yes, boys. That's true. But why
don't we give someone else a
chance? Someone who doesn't see me
every single day. What do you say
guys, any questions out there?

A few hands shoot up across the room. But, Laura focuses on a
chubby girl in the back, with thick glasses. The girl,
SIMONE, barely gets her hand up before Laura points to her.

LAURA (CONT'D)

What's your question, sweetheart?

SIMONE

What's it like up there, in space?

LAURA

That's a very good question. First
off, it's terrifying.

Laura's answer continues as we...

CUT TO:

INT. LAURA'S OFFICE - DAY

Laura's getting her stuff together to leave for the day, when
she finds a card on her desk. It's nothing special, just a
piece of folded over yellow paper.

LAURA (V.O.)

But, you hardly even notice because
you're so busy. So, caught up in
how amazing it all is.

Inside, the card reads: "Thinkin' bout you, space girl."

Laura reads the card and blushes.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - EVENING

Mark picks up his wedding ring from the dresser in a cheap
hotel. He buttons his shirt as Laura, still naked in bed,
watches him with a smile.

LAURA (V.O.)

Your heart's always racing. And every time you wake up you have to remind yourself you're not dreaming. This really is your life. You'd be one of the luckiest people on Earth but you're not even on Earth anymore.

Before leaving, Mark walks over and kisses Laura on the forehead.

INT. PEPPER HOUSE - NIGHT

Laura quietly enters her house. It is dark, everyone gone to bed. She slowly tip toes her way up the stairs.

LAURA (V.O.)

There's this picture of Earth-- actually, it's a picture of a lot of things-- called "The Pale Blue Dot." It was taken by the Voyager 1, a space probe, from six billion kilometers away.

INT. LAURA AND DREW'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Laura climbs into bed beside Drew, who is still awake but not saying anything.

LAURA (V.O.)

And the picture, it just looks like a bunch of lines, in all these different colors. Except, in one of the lines there's this little blue dot. That's Earth. It's just this tiny, little speck. You might not even notice it if you didn't know to look.

EXT. PARK - NIGHT

Laura and Mark lay in the bed of Mark's truck with blankets and pillows. They look up at the stars.

LAURA (V.O.)

And sure, we can't get that far out there. Not yet, anyway. We're just a couple hundred miles out, but you can still see the Earth. You can see all of it.

(MORE)

LAURA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Everything that existed, everyone
 you know, everyone you ever will
 know, they're all just on this
 little circle you can cover up with
 your thumb.

BACK TO:

INT. FIRST GRADE CLASSROOM - CONTINUOUS

LAURA
 It all seems so insignificant. And
 you feel lost and alone and more
 vulnerable than ever before. It's
 the greatest feeling I've felt in
 my entire life. It's a feeling that
 makes it all worth it.

Simone and the rest of the class-- especially, Ed and Neil--
 look at Laura in **stunned silence**. They have no idea what she
 was talking about.

It's gone completely over their heads.

LAURA (CONT'D)
 Uh, sorry about that. How about
 you? You have a question?

Laura points to a boy in the front row, **ROY**, whose hand isn't
 up. It doesn't matter, though. No one's hand is up after
 that.

But, after a moment's thought, Roy does have a question:

ROY
 How do you take a dump in space?

INT. DREW'S CAR - NIGHT

Drew drives as Laura applies makeup.

DREW
 So what are they like?

LAURA
 What do you mean, what are they
 like? They're like regular people.
 They're like me.

Drew shrugs.

DREW

It's just, I don't know. I never get to hang out with your work friends. What if they don't like me?

LAURA

They'll like you. Why wouldn't they like you? Everyone likes you.

Laura closes the visor mirror. The car goes dark.

INT. SUGARLAND LANES - EVENING

Drew steps up to the line. He closes his eyes. He takes a deep breath. He throws his ball--

-- straight into the gutter.

The astronauts from the previous bowling trip-- with the new addition of ERIN-- give Drew some weak pity claps.

MARK

Tough break, pal.

Erin steps up to select a ball.

Drew slumps down next to Laura, doing his best to look miserable.

DREW

Of course I'd look like an idiot in front of a bunch of astronauts.

LAURA

You're doing fine.

DREW

Thanks for lying.

Laura is busy, focused on Erin. Mark is giving her pointers, his arms wrapped around her waist as he demonstrates the proper form.

LAURA

No problem.

Laura watches Erin throw the ball down the lane--

A PERFECT STRIKE. Mark goes wild.

MARK

Oh my God, you're a natural! I need
a double high-five here.

Mark gives Erin an enthusiastic two-handed high five before
turning to the others--

MARK (CONT'D)

This girl's amazing, right?

LAURA

Beginner's luck.

INT. SUGARLAND LANES - LATER

Post game, Pete pours beers for the astronauts and Drew.

Pete raises his glass.

PETE

I'd like to propose a toast to a
son of a bitch we all know. Mark--
somehow, somehow, the bosses
upstairs saw fit to send you back
up.

JIM

And if they have any sense they'll
leave you there.

Everyone laughs.

PETE

To Mark. Safe trip, buddy. Come
back soon.

The group clinks their glasses together.

INT. SUGARLAND LANES - LATER

It's nearly closing time at Sugarland but the astronauts are
still there, enjoying themselves. But one person is
noticeably absent: Drew.

He sits alone at one of the lane tables, clearly ready to
leave.

VOICE (O.S.)

This seat taken?

Drew turns to find Mark, a big smile on his face.

DREW
Go right ahead.

Drew takes his jacket from the seat to make room for Mark.

DREW (CONT'D)
So you're going up for a second
time, huh?

Mark tips his glass back, emptying the last of his beer as he holds up three fingers.

MARK
Third.

DREW
And what does your wife think?

MARK
My wife?

DREW
Yeah. You're married, right? You
have kids?

MARK
Two girls.

DREW
And yet you're still going back?
Even if it means leaving them here,
unsure if you'll make it home?

MARK
I'll make it home.

DREW
You don't know that. Not for sure.
It's dangerous. Do you even care?
Do you even know what's it's like
for the rest of us?

Mark laughs. Hard. He puts his arm around Drew, leans in close.

MARK
You're not jealous of your wife,
are you, chief?

DREW
What? That's ridiculous.

MARK

But you want her to give up her dreams though, don't you?

Drew's stunned by this.

Does Mark know something? Was that just a lucky guess?

Drew tries not to let on what a chord Mark's just struck, stammering--

DREW

Of course not.

MARK

Good. You couldn't stop her if you tried.

Mark shoots Drew a wink just as--

-- Laura walks up, eyeing the two of them suspiciously.

LAURA

You two sure look like you're getting along.

DREW

Swimmingly.

LAURA

What are you talking about?

MARK

You. We were both just saying how swell you are.

Laura's not sure if this is the case but she's going to have to let it slide as Erin walks by. Mark calls out to her--

MARK (CONT'D)

Hey newbie, quick question.

ERIN

Yes?

MARK

You think your man would be upset if you went to space?

ERIN

I'm single.

MARK

You don't say.

Erin gives a demure shrug and moves along. Mark turns back to the Peppers, slapping Drew on the back.

MARK (CONT'D)

Now that's the real shame right there, brother.

Laura grimaces, getting up from her seat.

LAURA

I need some air.

Mark watches her go from the corner of his eye:

MARK

So Laura tells me you're a computer programmer?

DREW

IT services.

MARK

Yeah, I can see that.

CUT TO:

EXT. SUGARLAND LANES - MOMENTS LATER

Laura's outside, angrily smoking a cigarette when--

MARK (O.S.)

Hey, space girl.

She turns to find Mark, giving her his biggest smile.

Laura folds her arms. She takes a step back.

LAURA

Don't.

Mark stops. He puts his hands up to indicate he won't come any further.

MARK

You've got yourself a swell guy in there.

Laura turns away. She's in no mood to hear this.

MARK (CONT'D)

Really. Drew's great. A bit of a square but, you know, super nice guy.

LAURA
Fuck you.

MARK
I wish you would.

Laura chuckles-- it surprises her.

LAURA
Right here?

MARK
What? In the parking lot?

Laura shrugs. Mark laughs.

MARK (CONT'D)
You're all right, Pepper. But
that's a little crazy. Even for me.

LAURA
So why are you really out here?

Mark places his hands loosely around Laura's waist.

He draws her close.

MARK
I'm here for us, babe. Let's get
away for a few days.

LAURA
It's not that easy. I can't just
get up and go.

Mark runs his fingers through Laura's hair. He shoots her a
wink.

MARK
You'll figure something out.

CUT TO:

LAURA FLOATING IN THE OCEAN...

EXT. BEACH - COCOA BEACH, FLORIDA - DAY

She's on her back, in a bathing suit. Her eyes are closed and
there's a smile on her face. She's at peace.

EXT. COCOA BEACH, FLORIDA - LATER

Laura makes her way to shore. The beach is full of families on vacation. Kids splash and women tan and Laura walks through all of it, until she reaches...

...Mark, sitting in a lawn chair and reading a Tom Clancy novel.

MARK

Hey, there.

LAURA

Hey.

Laura plops down on a towel beside him.

MARK

What do you say, space girl? Do my back?

Mark holds out a bottle of suntan lotion. Laura can't believe it. Even here, on vacation together, this is such a brazen display.

LAURA

Really?

Mark shrugs.

MARK

Flight suit'll be a real bitch with a sunburn.

Laura takes the sunscreen but holds back. There's a condition.

LAURA

Only if you come swimming.

MARK

Not happening.

LAURA

You're a butt.

Laura squirts some sunscreen on her hand and starts rubbing it on Mark's back.

LAURA (CONT'D)

I don't get it. You're going to outer space in a few days. You know that, right? What's so scary about the ocean?

MARK

Everything. Up there, you're all there is. It's just you and the ship and your crew. That's it. I know exactly what to expect. I'm in charge.

(motioning to the ocean)

Who knows what's out there? I'm not giving up that much control.

Laura smiles, enjoying this.

LAURA

Well, if you ask me, maybe you could stand to give up a little control every once in a while.

INT. HOTEL BATHROOM - EVENING

Laura sits in the bathroom, on her cell phone. She's dressed up, in the same tight little dress from her reunion. She's talking quietly, to Ruth back at home.

LAURA

Sweetheart, I know. But, your dad can handle this. He knows what to do. I told him what to get for you and I'll be back tomorrow.

Laura listens for a moment.

LAURA (CONT'D)

Ruth, you're a woman now. I know this is scary and confusing but it's all completely natural. You have to realize it's nothing to be upset about. You're getting older and more mature and I couldn't be more proud of you, okay?

She listens again, while looking herself over in the mirror.

LAURA (CONT'D)

Okay. I miss you and I love you very much.

With that, Laura hangs up the phone. She gives herself a final once over before heading out into the room...

...where Mark sits in his socks and boxers drinking a beer.

LAURA (CONT'D)

You're not ready.

MARK

I'm ready. I was planning on going like this. What do you think?

Mark stands, models his outfit. Laura smiles and shakes her head.

LAURA

I like it. Not sure what everyone else will say but I like it.

MARK

They'll say you're the luckiest girl in town.

He pulls her in close, wrapping his arms around her, and starts unzipping her dress.

Laura slaps his hand away.

LAURA

I am. But we still need to get going. We'll miss our reservations.

But Mark doesn't give up. He grabs her again, with a mischievous grin.

MARK

Reservations? I've got news for you, space girl. People like you and me, we don't need reservations.

Mark kisses Laura passionately, falling back on the bed.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - ORLANDO - LATER

Their reservations long past, Laura and Mark fall back on a tangle of sheets. They're naked and sweaty.

Laura turns to Mark, watches him as he dozes. It's possible he's fallen asleep right there. She holds her breath, building up the courage to say something.

When she blurts it out, it's hardly even a whisper...

LAURA

I love you.

...there's no way Mark heard it. But then--

MARK

Yeah, yeah. I love you, too.

-- he answers, without even opening his eyes. He wraps his arm around her and pulls her closer.

INT. FANCY RESTAURANT - ORLANDO - NIGHT

Laura and Mark, now fully dressed, enter a crowded restaurant. The place is packed. There's no way they're getting a table.

But, Mark, as always, is unflappable. He walks straight to the **HOSTESS**.

MARK

Hey, there. Now, I know my lovely date and I have missed our reservation-- missed it by a long shot-- but, something came up-- official NASA business-- and I was wondering if you could, maybe, find a spot for us.

HOSTESS

NASA business?

MARK

Yep. NASA business. I'm Mark Goodwin, and I'm piloting the Space Shuttle *Endeavour* next week.

HOSTESS

Really?

MARK

Scout's honor.

The Hostess look around, obviously charmed. She leans in to Mark and whispers:

HOSTESS

Let me see what I can do.

MARK

Thank you. It'd mean a lot.

The Hostess picks up the phone. Mark gives her his biggest smile before turning and walking back to Laura.

MARK (CONT'D)

Watch this.

LAURA

There's no way.

MARK

Just watch.

And then, as if on cue, the MANAGER approaches, carrying two menus.

MANAGER

Mr. And Mrs. Goodwin?

MARK

Yes.

Laura smiles at this, thrilled that Mark hasn't corrected the manager. If only for the night, they're a married couple. She could not be happier.

MANAGER

If you'll just follow me, your table is ready.

INT. FANCY RESTAURANT - ORLANDO - LATER

Laura and Mark don't just have a table. They have the best table in the entire restaurant, with a giant window, overlooking the city.

They're picking at dessert-- small, fancy, decadent things. A long way from the Chili's brownie ice cream sundae.

LAURA

This has been really nice. All of this.

MARK

I did all right, didn't I?

LAURA

More than all right.

Laura drops her fork. She's about to burst into tears.

MARK

What's wrong?

LAURA

It's just...I don't know what I'm going to do when you're gone.

MARK

Oh, space girl. You'll do what you always do. You'll fight. That's what I like about you. You're a fighter.

LAURA

I know. I know. And it's only twelve days. We can email each other and...

(noticing a look on Mark's face)

What?

Now Mark sets his own fork down. He's not sure how to say this...

MARK

Actually, I've been meaning to bring that up. I don't think I can put you on the contact list.

LAURA

Why not? You can put anyone on there. No one will read it--

MARK

-- It's too risky. No one can know about this. You know that. We could be court marshalled. Paxton would toss us both out on our asses. Is that what you want?

LAURA

No.

MARK

It's just twelve days. And, when I get back, we'll figure something out. We won't be a secret for long.

This is what Laura needed to hear. She regains her composure.

LAURA

Promise?

MARK

Promise.

CUT TO:

EXT. KENNEDY SPACE CENTER - BANANA RIVER VIEWING SITE - DAWN

Laura, Drew, the kids, and Wally are gathered near the large countdown clock at the Banana River Viewing Site on Cape Kennedy.

It's the closest any civilian is ever allowed to a launch.

As the friends and family look on, we hear the sounds of mission control:

MISSION CONTROL (V.O.)
T-minus 4 minutes, stand by for
readiness check.

MISSION FLIGHT DIRECTOR (V.O.)
Roger.

Laura watches the kids as they chase each other around.

MISSION CONTROL (V.O.)
Cooling systems: Go/no go?

MISSION FLIGHT DIRECTOR (V.O.)
Go.

CHHHHHH!!

Wally, cracking open an early morning can of beer.

Laura turns to him, surprised.

LAURA
Dad, where'd you get that?

Wally opens his jacket to show what's left of a six pack
dangling from his jacket pocket.

DREW
A little early for that, isn't it?

Wally waves Drew off.

MISSION CONTROL (V.O.)
Fuel cells: go/no go?

MISSION FLIGHT DIRECTOR (V.O.)
Go.

Laura reaches out to her father. But, instead of taking the
beer from him. She grabs one for herself.

CHHHHHH!

DREW
Real great example you're setting.

MISSION CONTROL (V.O.)
Life support: Go/no go?

MISSION FLIGHT DIRECTOR (V.O.)
Go.

Laura takes a long pull on the beer. Drew just shakes his head.

MISSION CONTROL (V.O.)
T-minus ten seconds.

The large clock rolls backward from ten seconds. The crowd gathered starts chanting numbers backward--

Ten. Nine. Eight. Seven. Six.

The twins are beyond excited.

ED NEIL
FIVE. FOUR. THREE. TWO-- FIVE. FOUR. THREE. TWO--

MISSION CONTROL (V.O.)
--ONE. Main engines start.

The countdown clock rolls to ZERO.

In the distance, a **BRIGHT FLASH** of smoke and light as *Endeavour's* twin booster rockets ignite.

MISSION CONTROL (V.O.)
Liftoff.

Endeavour arcs skyward, the flames from its engines reflecting on the waters of the Banana River.

At this early hour, the light cast shines brighter than the rising sun. Monstrous plumes of smoke and steam, thousands of feet long, billow from the launch site.

WALLY
Jesus Christ.

The friends and family of *Endeavour* track the arc of the space ship as it breaks free from the influence of the planet.

The astronauts travel at speeds most humans will never know, covering a mile every three seconds as they're propelled by over one million pounds of fuel.

The crowd cheers-- how could they not?

NEIL
Whoa. So cool!

Laura-- eyes fixed on the orbiter-- starts to cry.

Drew puts his arm around her, drawing her close.

DREW
It's okay, babe. You had a good
run.

She doesn't stop crying.

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - SHUTTLE SIMULATOR - DAY

SIRENS BLARING.

Laura, intense yet detached, is at the helm of the simulator--

RED LIGHTS FLASHING.

Calmly, she turns back to the crew member responsible--

-- **ERIN.**

LAURA
Erin. It's you.

A *SECONDARY ALARM SOUNDS.*

Erin thumbs through her book too quickly, dropping it to the
ground.

ERIN
Shit. Sorry sorry sorry.

LAURA
We're dying right now. Our families
will never see us again.

ERIN
Okay. I hear you.

Erin starts hitting buttons. Nothing is working.

LAURA
You're fucking up. There's not
gonna be anything left of us to
bury.

ERIN
Okay!

Erin flips one last switch and--

The simulator shuts down. Failure.

Laura is furious:

LAURA
What's wrong with you?

ERIN
I'm sorry--

LAURA
You're not properly prepared. When
you're sloppy, people die. Do you
understand?

ERIN
Yes.

LAURA
This job is a privilege. You need
to show it the respect it deserves.

Laura unbuckles her harness and leaves the simulator,
brushing past a dumbfounded Paxton.

PAXTON
What the hell was that?

Laura storms by without answering.

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Laura lumbers down the hallway, fists clenched.

Behind her, a door flings open: Erin.

ERIN
Wait!

Laura stops. She takes a deep breath.

LAURA
If you want an apology it's not
happening.

Erin catches up to Laura.

ERIN
It's not that. I'm the one who
should apologize.

LAURA
What?

ERIN
You're right. I was fucking up in
there. But I'll get better.

LAURA
You'll have to.

ERIN
I will. I can do this. I'm sure of
it. And a big part of that is you.

Laura doesn't answer.

She works to hide the grimace that twists on her face every
time she hears Erin speak.

ERIN (CONT'D)
You've been to space. You have a
family. You're strong and smart and
everything I want to be. I know I
can get there because I have you to
look up to. Thank you so much for
that.

Erin moves in for an awkward hug. Laura does her best to
reciprocate, grateful that nobody else is around.

LAURA
I'm not that great.

ERIN
You are. You're not afraid to go
after what you want. I wish I could
do that.

Laura hugs her back.

CUT TO:

DREW'S FACE: DEVASTATED. RAGGED.

INT. PEPPER HOME - NIGHT

He looks like he's had the wind knocked out of him.

Drew and Laura sit on opposite ends of their kitchen table,
unable to look at each other, unable to speak.

And then--

DREW
How long?

Laura wipes a tear from her eye. She shakes her head.

LAURA
Does it even matter?

DREW
I want to know how long you've let
me look like a fucking idiot.

LAURA
Drew--

DREW
I guess your life here with a
husband-- with your children-- just
wasn't good enough?

LAURA
Stop it.

DREW
Maybe if I was an astronaut, huh?
Like your new boyfriend?

LAURA
It's not that.

DREW
I deserve to know why, dammit.

LAURA
Because he gets me, Drew.

DREW
And I don't?

LAURA
No. You don't. I wish you did. But
you don't. Mark-- he knows what
it's like.

DREW
What does that even mean?

LAURA
I just don't want this anymore. I'm
sorry. I'm really sorry.

DREW
Sure you are.

Drew looks away-- he can't take this.

LAURA
I'll leave.

Drew doesn't respond. Laura reaches for his hand, but he pulls it away.

EXT. BACKYARD - LATER

Ed and Neil sit in the backyard, playing with action figures and toy trucks. Laura's crouched beside them, watching.

NEIL

It's kind of like when you went to space?

LAURA

Kind of like that. But you'll still get to see me. I'm going to be much closer.

NEIL

Okay.

LAURA

Ed?

Ed doesn't answer. He doesn't even look at his mother. He just crashes two trucks into each other over and over again.

LAURA (CONT'D)

I love you both.

Laura stands. She looks at her boys before heading back inside.

But, just as she reaches the sliding glass door--

ED (O.S.)

Mom.

-- Laura turns to find Ed running towards her, something clutched in his hand. He holds it out to her.

ED (CONT'D)

Here.

He hands Laura the Venom action figure.

ED (CONT'D)

To remember us.

Laura grabs her son in a huge hug.

LAURA

Oh, Ed. How could I ever forget you?

INT. RUTH'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Ruth's been crying. She's standing on her bed, using a broom to try and scrape the plastic glow-in-the-dark stars from her ceiling.

There's a knock on her door before Laura quietly enters.

LAURA

Ruth?

Ruth turns on her mother, yelling at her with all the pre-teen fury she can muster:

RUTH

Get out!

LAURA

Sweetheart, I have to tell you something.

RUTH

I know what you have to tell me. You're leaving, right? I already know.

LAURA

You're right. I am leaving.

Ruth drops onto the bed. She lies on her back, looking up at her now blank ceiling.

Laura walks over and sits beside her.

RUTH

It's because Dad doesn't want you going back to space, isn't it? You're leaving because he doesn't want you to be an astronaut anymore.

LAURA

Who said that?

RUTH

I can hear you arguing. I live here, too.

LAURA

Ruth, listen. This isn't your father's fault--

-- Ruth sits up at this, angry once again.

RUTH

I know it's not his fault. It's your fault. You'd rather go up there than be here with us. You went up there and you changed and now getting back there is all that matters to you.

Laura's stunned. This whole time, she's felt crushingly alone in this house, completely misunderstood. But her daughter gets her.

Ruth knows exactly who Laura is. And she hates her for it.

LAURA

Ruth.

RUTH

Go. Get out. You want to leave so badly just do it.

Ruth climbs off the bed and starts collecting the plastic stars from the ground. She's done with her mother and doesn't even look up as Laura exits.

EXT. PEPPER HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Laura sits in her car, unable to believe this is all happening. The Venom action figure is on the seat beside her.

She looks up at the house-- her house, until just moments ago. It is quiet, with just a few lights on. There's no sign of the drama going on within its walls.

Laura takes a deep breath and tries to calm herself. She tries to make herself as blank and hard to read as the house. But, as she turns the ignition it may be too much to handle.

She's about to break entirely as we--

CUT TO:

A "WELCOME HOME DADDY!" BANNER

EXT. GOODWIN BACKYARD - DAY

Mary and the girls are throwing a welcome back barbecue for Mark. It's huge.

There are kids splashing in the pool, men smoking cigars and drinking beers, and women setting out potato salad and deviled eggs.

And there, over by the grill, is the man of the hour. Mark's surrounded by neighbors, manning the grill. He seems to have completely recovered from being in space only a few days before.

MARK

The secret's the charcoal. You need exactly twenty-two medium-sized charcoals lit in a chimney starter. You let those burn to eighty percent grey and then spread it evenly.

Mark's wife, Mary, walks past, carrying a plate of lettuce, tomatoes, and onions. She runs her hand across her husband's shoulders as she passes him.

MARY

Easy there, honey. Don't push yourself too hard.

MARK

You know me, babe. No other way I can push myself. But I feel great. Going up there, it's like a vacation for me. A nice, relaxing, break from the grind down here. Now who wants a burger?

Everyone does, especially from an American hero. Mark's thrilled. There's nothing he likes more than an audience.

As he hands out the last of the burgers, someone speaks out behind him:

VOICE (O.S.)

Hope you saved one for me.

Mark turns to find--

-- **Laura, all dressed up and holding a potted African violet.**

LAURA

Welcome home, Commander.

INT. GARAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Mark pokes his head into the garage to make sure the coast is clear before pulling Laura in with him.

As soon as they're alone, with the door closed, Laura goes in for a kiss. She's hungry for him, reaching to unbutton his jeans. Mark pushes her away.

MARK

Stop. What the hell are you doing here?

LAURA

I left him.

MARK

What?

Laura hands Mark the African violet, as if it were the key to her explanation.

LAURA

You're back and I brought you this and I left Drew so that we can be together.

Mark looks at the potted flower in his hand, the full extent of this finally crashing down on him.

MARK

Laura, you can't do this. Not here. I have kids. I have a family to think about.

LAURA

I have a family, too. And this is going to be hard on all of them. I'm not going to pretend it won't be. But they'll get over it. We'll form a bigger, stronger family because of it. You and me. We'll be a family. Together.

MARK

It doesn't work like that. We can't just snap our fingers and fix all of this. We have to be careful. Our jobs are at risk. Our lives. It's going to take time.

Laura's stunned. This possibility hadn't even occurred to her. She and Mark were supposed to be on the same page with everything. He was the only person who understood her.

LAURA

How much time?

MARK

I don't know. More than this. We'll talk about it, I promise. But not now. Right now you have to get out of here.

Mark gives Laura the African violet back and heads for the door.

MARK (CONT'D)

Don't ever do this again.

He leaves.

INT. GOODWIN HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Laura rushes through the house, on the verge of tears. She's desperate to get out before the water works start but the house is one of those big, suburban monstrosities-- square footage and dining nooks at every turn. But, then--

-- there's the door. Laura rushes for it, the potted African violet clutched to her chest. As Laura grabs for the knob--

VOICE (O.S.)

Laura?

Laura turns to find Erin, in a cute outfit and ponytail, smiling at her. Before Laura can say anything, Erin grabs her in another big hug.

ERIN

How about that Mark? He really is something else, isn't he?

LAURA

I'm sorry. I have to go.

With that, Laura hurries from the house, leaving a stunned Erin behind.

INT. WALLY'S APARTMENT - DAY

Laura lugs her suitcase into her father's place.

He is dozing on the couch, a baseball game playing on TV.

MARTINA, Wally's live-in nurse, turns off the TV.

MARTINA

I've just set him down for a nap.
Do you need a hand?

LAURA

No. Thank you. I think I've got it.

MARTINA

I'm so sorry about what happened.
Husbands can be garbage sometimes.

LAURA

Actually, this was my choice. I
wanted this.

Martina isn't quite sure how to take this--

MARTINA

Oh. I see. Well good for you.

Laura takes a look over at Wally. He's snoring gently.

LAURA

Listen, why don't you take the rest
of the day off? I can handle him.

INT. WALLY'S APARTMENT - LATER

WALLY

Get your fucking hands off of me!

Wally's eyes well up.

He's on his back as Laura works to change his adult diaper.

LAURA

Dad, please. I'm just trying to
help.

WALLY

I'm not some God damned baby!

But Wally doesn't have the fight in him.

Exhausted, he relents, letting his daughter change his
diaper.

He stares daggers at Laura as he lies there, helpless.

INT. GUEST ROOM - EVENING

Laura unpacks her suitcase in the apartment's guest room.

She unfolds a couch bed, when something catches her eye--

-- an old box, dusty and stuffed under an end table. The word **MARGARET** is Sharpied on the side in thick black lettering.

Laura opens it up.

It's a box of her mother's things. Her wigs. Her old pictures. Notebooks. Pressed flowers.

Laura hasn't seen these things in years. She chokes up, searching for more when--

WALLY (O.S.)

What the hell are you doing?

Wally is in the doorway. He is furious.

LAURA

Why haven't I seen this, dad?

WALLY

Those belong to your mother.

LAURA

How long have you kept these?

WALLY

Get out of here. Those aren't for you. You left your family. If your mother was still here she'd be ashamed of what you've become.

LAURA

Daddy--

WALLY

I said get out.

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - DAY

Laura carries the African violet down the row of offices until she reaches the door marked "GOODWIN".

She stops, listening just outside the door. Is that laughter coming from inside?

When she can take it no more, Laura opens the door, revealing--

INT. MARK'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Mark and Erin, a little too close.

Mark looks up, surprised--

MARK

Laura!

There is something suspicious about Mark and Erin's body language.

MARK (CONT'D)

I was just helping Erin out with a few things. She's having trouble with some of the launch protocols.

LAURA

Ah, it can be tough.

ERIN

Yeah. But you guys have been so helpful. I know I'll get the hang of it eventually. Thanks, Mark. See you around.

Erin rushes past Laura, keeping her eyes low.

Mark closes the door behind her. He turns to Laura.

MARK

I was worried about you, space girl.

LAURA

I thought you might want this.

She hands him the African violet. He takes it and places it on his desk.

MARK

I wanted to tell you, you did the right thing. Drew's a nice enough guy but he doesn't deserve you. You're special.

He leans in, kissing her. He reaches to unbutton her blouse but--

-- Laura stops him.

LAURA

No. Not here. I want to be with you. I mean, really be with you.

MARK

I know. I want to be with you, too.

LAURA

So take me out to dinner. Be with me. There's nothing stopping you.

MARK

You know that's not true. We have to figure out--

LAURA

So let's do it. Let's figure it out. You're right, we are special. There's nothing we can't do.

Mark looks at his watch.

MARK

Look, I'm headed to Orlando for a few days. My flight leaves in just a few hours. Work stuff. We'll talk about this when I get back.

Now it's Laura's turn to step in and take hold of Mark. All her earlier restraint disappears at the possibility of losing him again.

LAURA

Don't go.

MARK

I have to. It's training. I'm serving my country. You understand.

Laura's heart sinks. She's heard that line before and it's enough to make her panic inside.

She hides it. She smiles.

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - GYM - LATER

Laura sprints around the NASA running track. There are others working out, but not like this--

She doubles over, gasping for air. She covers her head with a towel, hobbling over to the nearest trash can to puke when--

PAXTON

I thought I'd find you out here, Pepper.

Her breath becoming regular, Laura looks up to find Paxton wrapping up a workout of his own.

PAXTON (CONT'D)

I have good news. It's official:
you've been selected for crew duty.
You're going back to space.

Laura eyes widen.

LAURA

Atlantis?

PAXTON

That's right.

LAURA

Who else?

PAXTON

Let's see-- Gary Shalimar. Jeffrey
Watts. That new cadet Erin
Fleetwood. Oh, and we've got a
cosmonaut hitching a ride, too--
Sergey-something. You'll love him.

At the mention of Erin's name Laura's face blanks. There's a
hole in her gut-- she looks ill.

PAXTON (CONT'D)

You seem disappointed.

LAURA

It's not that. I just don't know
what to say.

Paxton unlaces his sneakers, packing them into his duffel
bag.

PAXTON

Say thank you. I know how badly you
wanted this.

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER GYM - SHOWERS - LATER

Laura stands motionless under the shower head in the Johnson
gym. Hot water streams over her.

She starts to cry. She tries to stop herself but she can't.

Desperate for it all to stop, she makes a fist--

--and **PUNCHES the shower wall.**

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - NIGHT

After hours at NASA.

Late enough that everyone has gone home-- that is, *almost* everyone.

Laura stalks the hallways of the Johnson Space Center, making her way toward Mark's darkened office.

Even if he wasn't in Florida, Mark isn't exactly the midnight-oil sort. It doesn't seem like anyone is inside-- Laura tries the handle.

Locked.

Undeterred, Laura reaches into her pocket, pulling out two PAPERCLIPS. She bends them into a tension wire and lockpick, goes to work--

-- *CLICK*--

-- the door opens.

INT. MARK'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Laura slips in, gently shutting the door behind her.

Mark's office is the same as it ever was-- more man-cave than workspace. Laura takes a moment to enjoy it.

There are two framed pictures-- Mark with his family and Mark with the *Endeavor* crew-- Laura picks up the picture of the crew. She runs her finger across it. This is what she wants. This is all the family she'll ever need.

She goes through Mark's drawers but doesn't find much more than a few Playboys and a giant tub of cheese puffs.

Finally, Laura boots up Mark's computer. Laura eats a few cheese puffs as she leans in, pecking at a few keys.

Something catches her eye: an email, sent from Mark.

MARK (V.O.)
Hey Space girl--

Laura stops. She checks the address-- it's meant for **ERIN**.

MARK (V.O.)
Last night was amazing.

She searches Mark's mailbox for messages containing Erin's name.

There are hundreds. The African violet sits in Mark's trash can, where he apparently dumped it.

ERIN (V.O.)
Hey babe. Miss you. Miss your body.
Hope you're having fun in space.

INT. ERIN'S CAR - DAY

We FLASH to images of Erin and Mark undressing each other. The two of them having sex in the back of Erin's car.

The affair playing out before Laura's eyes.

MARK (V.O.)
Hey Space girl, it's great out here. Would be better if you were here with me. Gonna try and take some naughty photos. You should send some too-- sure gets lonely up here.

EXT. MARK'S BACKYARD - DAY

We flash to Mark's Barbecue. Mark is sticking his hand under Erin's shirt. She leans into him. In the distance, we see his wife preparing the grill.

MARK (V.O.)
Space girl, Can't wait for our weekend away. Orlando's great. You're going to love it. There's this restaurant I'll take you to. Super fancy. No one can get a reservation. But I know a guy.

EXT. PARK - NIGHT

Erin and Mark lay in the bed of Mark's truck with blankets and pillows. They look up at the stars.

ERIN (V.O.)
Here's my flight info. There's a two hour layover in Atlanta-- gross-- but I should be getting in at two in the morning. Can't wait to see you.

INT. MARK'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Laura clicks through email after email, until finally:

MARK (V.O.)
Hurry, space girl. I want to be
with you forever.

Laura is devastated.

INT. WALLY'S APARTMENT - EVENING

Laura paces in her bedroom. The door locked. She's frantic, breathing heavily. Unsure what to do. Unsure what any of this means.

The emails are all there, printed out and wrinkled from so much handling. The box of Laura's mother's things is all spread out across the bed. She's pulled the African violet from Mark's trash, it's sitting there on the bed, too.

Laura pulls her cell phone from her pocket. She dials a number, waiting a few rings before an answering machine picks up:

ERIN (V.O.)
You've reached the office of Erin
Fleetwood. I will be out of the
office for--

-- Laura hangs up. She throws her phone across the room.

Laura walks over to her wall, where she's pinned up a number of printed out maps. The maps form the Southeast coast of the US, Texas to Florida.

There are routes drawn on the map. First, a flight path in red-- Houston to Orlando, with a layover in Atlanta. "Travel time: 756 minutes. ETA: 04:32"

The other routes are less certain. They're are driving routes, drawn in black marker. Most of them are abandoned halfway, ETAs and travel times crossed out here and there.

But now, finally, she might have it. Laura plots a route, cutting across six different states. She does a quick calculation before writing:

"ETA: 4:30" Bingo.

If Laura wants to make it, she'll have to leave right away. There is not a second to spare.

INT. WALLY'S APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Laura rushes through the apartment, grabbing various items. Wally sits in his recliner, watching television and ignoring her as she grabs--

-- a pair of hunting knives--

-- the drilling hammer--

-- the dish washing gloves--

-- all the cash in her father's safe--

-- the handgun from his closet--

-- and, finally, her mother's wig.

Her arms full, Laura stops behind her father. She leans over him, kisses the top of his head, and heads out.

On her way, she passes a box of Depends adult diapers. She grabs them, just in case..

EXT. PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER

Laura sets all her supplies in the back of her SUV and slams the door shut. She hurries to the driver's side, whistling to herself.

She is ready for this.

CUT TO:

INT. LAURA'S SUV - LATER

"You Oughta Know" blasts, the SUV's speakers pushed to their limit. Laura smokes a cigarette and stares out towards the horizon. The gun is out on the passenger seat.

Laura's in the zone, flying down the highway.

Nothing can stop her. Nothing can get in her way, until--

-- **sirens flash.**

Laura looks up at her rearview mirror. There's a squad car behind her, signaling for her to pull over.

EXT. HIGHWAY - CONTINUOUS

Laura comes to a stop at the side of the highway. The **POLICE OFFICER**, hefty and drowsy, climbs out of his car and slowly ambles over.

When, the officer finally reaches the SUV to find Laura, window down and offering her best smile.

LAURA
Sorry 'bout that. Got lost in my
thoughts, I guess.

The Officer isn't charmed.

POLICE OFFICER
Licence and registration.

Laura hands him her paperwork. Her glove compartment is closed and there's no sign of the gun--

-- except, there it is, **beneath the seat, in Laura's left hand!**

POLICE OFFICER (CONT'D)
You in a hurry?

LAURA
A bit.

The Police Officer spits, taking his time, proving a point. He's got no where to be--

-- beneath her seat, **Laura cocks the handgun--**

-- she's gone this far. She has to get to Florida. Nothing can get in her way--

-- she puts her **finger on the trigger--**

POLICE OFFICER
Navy, huh?

LAURA
Yes, sir.

The Officer smiles, completely unaware of his close call.

POLICE OFFICER
I'm a Marine. Afghanistan. Two
tours. Where'd you serve?

LAURA
Lower-Earth Orbit.

POLICE OFFICER

Huh?

LAURA

I'm an astronaut.

POLICE OFFICER

You don't say. What's it like up there?

Laura looks up at the stars above.

LAURA

I don't even know. I guess, it's the only place where anything makes sense.

POLICE OFFICER

I know exactly what you mean.

He hands back Laura's licence and registration without giving her a ticket.

POLICE OFFICER (CONT'D)

Just try and take it a little easier. This ain't no space shuttle.

The Police Officer pats the SUV's roof before heading back to his squad car.

Laura lets out a deep breath. She pulls her finger from the trigger, eases off the hammer of her gun. She tosses the gun on the passenger seat, shocked at what she was about to do.

But there's no time for reflection. She has to hit the road, she's already off schedule.

She quickly turns the ignition and takes off once again.

CUT TO:

EXT. AIRPORT GARAGE - NIGHT

And we're back. Laura's on the roof, running around, staring up at the stars above.

Sirens are closing in on her.

She drops her gun in a garbage can.

She pulls her 8-inch Gerber folding knife from her boot, tosses that in another.

At a third trash can, she removes her mother's wig and, after a moment's hesitation, tosses it.

There's no direction to where she's going. She's not making any sort of escape. She's just zig-zagging across the parking lot, tossing evidence in trash cans as--

-- **four police cars arrive.** The officers pull their guns and Laura stops.

She puts her hands in the air. She doesn't put up a fight.

CUT TO:

INT. - INTERROGATION ROOM - ORLANDO - NIGHT

Laura is locked in a small interrogation room, seated across from Detectives Cain and Lopez. She is withdrawn, still in shock.

Her wrist is handcuffed to a tabletop rail. Next to her is a full cup of coffee, unsipped.

The detectives fire off questions in rapid succession--

DETECTIVE CAIN

What were the white gloves for?

DETECTIVE LOPEZ

What about the tubing?

DETECTIVE CAIN

The cash?

DETECTIVE LOPEZ

Who is Mark Goodwin?

DETECTIVE CAIN

Were you trying to kidnap Erin Fleetwood?

DETECTIVE LOPEZ

Were you trying to *kill* Erin Fleetwood?

Laura stares down at the table. She doesn't answer.

Detective Cain sighs. She softens her tone, leaning in--

DETECTIVE CAIN

Laura, I need you to answer me.

Laura looks up.

DETECTIVE CAIN (CONT'D)
How do you know Erin Fleetwood?

LAURA
NASA. We're both astronauts.

The detectives exchange a glance.

DETECTIVE LOPEZ
You're shitting me.

CUT TO:

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - BREAK ROOM - MORNING

Commander Paxton is busy with a coin-operated machine in the NASA breakroom. It's a temperamental machine, and only really gets going after a few good bangs on its side and a healthy stream of expletives.

He slaps the machine a couple of times.

PAXTON
Piece of junk.

As if on cue, the machine sputters to life. Coffee drips haphazardly into a styrofoam cup.

Coffee in hand, he starts to sip when **DIRK**, a subordinate, rushes in--

DIRK
We've got trouble.

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - MOMENTS LATER

Dirk leads Paxton down another long NASA corridor to an open office.

Several NASA employees are crowded around a television.

We see the ORLANDO POLICE CHIEF giving a press conference. The news headline reads:

LAURA PEPPER ASTRONAUT KIDNAPPING SCANDAL

REPORTER
Is it true that Pepper will be charged for attempted murder?

POLICE CHIEF
 We'll be having a full briefing
 later today. Thank you.

The chief leaves the lectern as cameras FLASH and reporters jockey to get one last question in.

The newscast cuts from the press conference to an ANCHOR. She breathlessly delivers the sensational headline:

ANCHOR
 A sexy space love triangle? It
 happened. We'll be bringing you all
 the latest on this breaking story.

The program cuts to some fancy onscreen graphics: NASA LOVE TRIANGLE.

Paxton holds his head in his hands.

PAXTON
 Oh no. No no. No no no no.

DIRK
 They're calling her the "Diaper
 Astronaut"

Paxton looks like he's going to be sick.

PAXTON
 This is bad.

RING-RING. RING-RING.

A phone is heard in the adjacent office.

PAXTON (CONT'D)
 That's my phone.

Other phones start ringing throughout the building.

It's a sound they're going to have to get used to.

CUT TO:

INT. LA QUINTA INN - ORLANDO - AFTERNOON

Erin sits alone in her Orlando hotel room, blinds drawn. The TV is on mute, but she still watches. She sees her picture flash onscreen.

Over and over, they replay the story in exhaustive detail-- playing frame-by-frame the security cam footage of a crazed Laura stalking her through the baggage claim.

RING RING

Erin **SHRIEKS** at the sound of her phone.

Cautiously, she picks it up. She hears a familiar voice:

MARK (O.S.)

Erin?

ERIN

Where are you? Why aren't you here?

EXT. ORLANDO INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT - CONTINUOUS

Mark is hunched over a payphone outside Terminal B at the Orlando Airport. Intercut as needed.

MARK

I'm catching a flight home. This is bad. I don't know what that maniac said to you but none of it's true.

ERIN

She seemed so sad.

MARK

Fuck her. We gotta worry about ourselves.

ERIN

Why are you going back then? Why aren't you here with me.

Mark hesitates.

MARK

I gotta get there before Mary finds out.

ERIN

I thought you were going to leave her anyway. We're supposed to be together.

A graphic reading "WHO IS LAURA PEPPER?" flashes on the television.

MARK

I know. It's going to happen. This just isn't the right time. We've got our careers to think about our--

ERIN

Stop.

MARK

What?

ERIN

Just go.

Erin hangs up the phone back on the receiver. She reaches for the TV remote, turning off the news coverage.

She sits alone in the darkness. She cries.

INT. GEORGE BUSH INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT - MORNING

Mark steps off his flight in Houston. The paparazzi are already there, waiting at the gate, taking his picture.

EXT. GOODWIN HOUSE - LATER

Mark pulls up to the house in his truck. A news crew waits outside.

So does Mary. She sits on the steps in front of the house. She's obviously been crying. Mark walks up to her, his arms open. But she's not having it:

MARY

You're not coming in. You don't live here anymore.

MARK

Baby, please. Let me explain.

MARY

You've done enough explaining, Mark. This was supposed to be over with. I'm done giving you second chances.

With that, Mary turns and walks into the house, locking the door. Mark's left, surrounded by cameras, his trademark smile nowhere to be found.

CUT TO:

INT. LAURA'S CELL - EVENING

The heavy door to Laura's holding cell slides open. A guard leads Paxton in. He sees Laura-- tiny, afraid.

Neither can speak, neither has the words for this. Paxton takes a seat next to Laura on the cell bench.

PAXTON

You've caused me an awful lot of trouble here, Laura.

LAURA

I didn't mean to.

PAXTON

Doesn't matter. Damage is done. I suppose I'd tell you how against NASA's code of conduct this all was, if we had one.

LAURA

We didn't have a code of conduct?

PAXTON

We will from here on out. They're drafting it up as we speak.

LAURA

I guess you can thank me for that.

Paxton laughs. He can't help it.

LAURA (CONT'D)

Sir, I just wanted to let you know that I am eager to put this all behind me. I want to go back to training for my mission.

PAXTON

Laura-- that won't be happening. You have to know that.

LAURA

What?

PAXTON

I mean you're out. We can't have you at NASA. Not after this.

Laura is devastated. Her eyes well with tears.

LAURA

Please. Don't do this to me. It's all I have.

PAXTON

I'm sorry. It's already done. You're out. Goodwin's out. Fleetwood. All three of you, this whole sordid love triangle.

Laura collapses. She can no longer hold it in, gasping an anguished cry.

PAXTON (CONT'D)

Have you ever heard of the "Overview Effect"?

Laura shakes her head.

PAXTON (CONT'D)

Sometimes, when people go up there, when they're able to see the Earth in full view-- no borders, no boundaries, no context-- it changes their outlook on everything.

Paxton pauses-- he looks around Laura's tiny cell. The small, barred window. The guard a few paces away watching their conversation. It breaks his heart.

PAXTON (CONT'D)

You're different, Laura. In a way not many people can understand. You came back changed, didn't you?

Laura nods.

PAXTON (CONT'D)

Seeing it all up there. You must've felt--

LAURA

Alone.

Paxton gives Laura a pitying look. They've known each other for so long. He doesn't want to have to say this--

PAXTON

I'm sorry. I know it won't be much comfort but I think this is for the best for you. I don't think going back there would do you any good.

Laura wipes away her tears with the back of her hand.

PAXTON (CONT'D)
Goodbye, Laura.

Paxton waves for a guard to let him out. Laura never sees him again.

CUT TO:

INT. ORANGE COUNTY COURTHOUSE - DAY

Laura, wearing an orange jumpsuit, is led before a **JUDGE** in a cramped courtroom.

The gallery is choked with onlookers.

Laura takes a seat next to her **ATTORNEY**, a stressed-looking public defender.

The Judge glances at his notes, muttering into a microphone.

JUDGE
State of Florida versus Laura
Pepper. Does counsel have a plea?

Reflexively, Laura begins to answer. She's quickly cut off by her legal counsel--

ATTORNEY
Not guilty, your honor.

JUDGE
Noting the defendant's plea of not guilty. I'm setting bail at thirty-five thousand dollars. Court will resume three weeks from today.

The Judge pounds his gavel as Laura is led from the courtroom by two uniformed police officers.

EXT. ORANGE COUNTY COURTHOUSE - LATER

Laura's led by the police down the courthouse steps. They are immediately swarmed by a pack of **reporters** shouting questions.

REPORTER #1
Were you going to kill her Laura?

REPORTER #2

Do you blame NASA? Do you believe you're suffering from post-traumatic stress?

REPORTER #1

Tell us about the diapers! Did you use them?

REPORTER #2

Are you aware that the Navy is planning a dishonorable discharge?

Laura ignores the questions. The roar of them begins to fade, replaced with Neil Young's "After the Gold Rush," which plays over the following:

INT. RUTH'S ROOM - NIGHT

Neil and Ed zip themselves into sleeping bags on the floor in Ruth's bedroom. Drew's there, watching his kids get ready for a night of indoor camping.

Ruth is on her bed, reading her book.

DREW

This okay?

RUTH

Yeah. It'll be fun.

The boys smile and turn on an electric lantern. Drew hits the lights and leaves them to it.

INT. LAURA AND DREW'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Drew enters the empty bedroom. He takes a seat on the bed and puts his head in his hands.

EXT. ALASKAN WILDERNESS - EVENING

Mark, now with a full beard, wanders the woods. He has a walking stick, a large backpack, and a compass. He's walking a trail, taking it slowly. There is no hint of his smile.

He is a man without a purpose and this is the most lost we have ever seen him.

INT. DINER - NIGHT

Erin sits alone at a booth, eating dinner--

-- and then she jumps in fright, turning her head--

-- but there is no one there. She returns to her food, tries to convince herself that there is no one there but it will be a very long time before she feels safe anywhere.

INT. NURSING HOME - NIGHT

Wally sits with a number of other elderly tenants around a television. It's tuned to Fox News and the story, the only story that's been in rotation for the last month, is Laura's.

An **OLD WOMAN** gives him a pitying look but Wally won't have it:

WALLY

At least she did something with her life. She went to space. What'd your kid ever do?

INT. JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - DAYTIME

Paxton stands behind a lectern speaking to a large crowd. He's joined onstage by a long row of seated recruits.

Behind him, projected on a huge screen, is the new NASA CODE OF CONDUCT.

PAXTON

And we think that these new regulations will help usher NASA into its next phase-- one that adheres to the standard of ethics at the heart of this organization. And with that, I'd like to introduce our new class of astronauts. I know they'll make us proud.

Paxton leads the room in a round of applause for the young cadets seated.

He gestures for them to stand up.

He tries to hide it, but he looks nervous.

CUT TO:

INT. LAURA'S CELL - EVENING

Laura is led into her cell by a **GUARD**. He undoes her handcuffs.

LAURA

Thank you.

The guard **SLAMS** the door shut.

For the first time in a long time, it is silent.

Laura sits down on her jail cot. She stares out the window-- the moon is rising above the horizon line.

A tear streams down her cheek. Then another. And another.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SPACE SHUTTLE *DISCOVERY* - DAY

We're close in on Laura's face. She's nervous. Apprehensive.

We hear the crackle of a headset:

MISSION CONTROL (O.S.)

Five. Four. Three. Two. One. Main engines start.

Liftoff.

Still on her face: We see her recoil slightly as the thrusters kick in.

The ground below her dropping away with each passing second. The initial shock fading, giving way to elation.

At long last, Laura smiles.

CUT TO BLACK.