

## Hero From the Shadows

By Josie Calder

I've been waiting for nearly hours in this small, cramped, and clammy room. I'm starting to get the feeling my boss Mr. Portman is trying to put off this conversation as long as possible. I consider getting up, when I hear his new, yet old secretary Mrs. Craigmen's scratchy voice saying, "Leslie Coldport! Mr. Portman is ready for you."

I feel like a small child again walking into the principal's office waiting for an undeniable punishment. Yet this time, I am in full power and the one delivering the ultimate fate. With a grim expression he mummurs, "You wanted to see me Ms. Coldport?"

"Yes," I say harshly, "I'm quitting sir!"

He looks at me, sighs, and then says quietly, "Why Leslie, you have a great future here. You are best accountant."

I interrupt him, "End of discussion. I cleared my desk out. Goodbye Mr. Portman."

I smile as I walk out of the old building with vines growing up and down nearly covering the company sign "Grayson's Backpacks". I hated it there. Everyone was miserable, the air was always cold and dry, but worst of all, nothing ever happened. Every day was the same, look at stats and figure out math problems all day long. It's a wonder my job wasn't replaced by computers yet. To quote my favorite magazine, "The Talk," "There are just some jobs meant for humans." Of course, that article was written by a robot named Fred.

I open my iPhone 20 and checked the date: July 30, 2030. While scrolling down my social media account, I see an article that states "NASA looking to launch first human Mars trip." I can't believe my luck! I'm only a three minute drive from the NASA headquarters in Washington DC. I run up the steep stairs to the SkyLink super train like a lightning bolt racing raindrops. As I get off the SkyLink, I see the NASA main building. It has a sparkling sign that reads "NASA: where people become space people!" I think, what a weird slogan! I look at the

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building with its glistening windows that you can see your reflection in. I run up to the doors where two big security guards stop me. One asks, “And who are you?”

I reply, “Leslie, Miss.”

He says, “And what are you here for.”

I smugly say, “I’m applying for an internship.”

They silently agree to let me go into the building, where I see a smiling receptionist, who says, “Job interviews are down the hall and conference rooms are to the left.” I walk down the hall and see a bright neon sign with black font that says, “Enter door for job interviews!” A secretary hands me a resume to fill out. I wait and look at the TV screen. They are playing some vintage movie called Star Wars. From the looks of it, it’s a drama about a boy in space who finds out his father has a dark past. I don’t get much of a chance to watch the film because as soon as the first corny commercial break ends, I hear a small voice peep out, “Miss Coldport! Mrs. Vice is ready for you.”

When I enter the room, I notice the wallpaper is a radiant neon decorated with cartoons of astronauts. Mrs. Vice motions for me to have a seat and exclaims, “I read your resume and you sound great! You’re good with numbers and have great experience. We will put you as an intern for now, but I see a promotion possibility!”

I’m starstruck and ask her, “Why aren’t you even attempting to interview me?”

She responds bashfully, “To be honest, we have no interns right now and could use some help. You start tomorrow.” I practically sprint out of her office and can hardly wait to start tomorrow. Her secretary Patty hands me a stack of papers and nods for me to go out.

I wake up the next day with a feeling of exhilaration. I get into my nicest clothes, a collared shirt from the Robo collection and khakis. I jump on the quickest SkyLink and read the

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papers Patty gave me. Most of them talk about where to go and who to talk to, but one stands out. It says that under no circumstance may any employee of NASA ever discuss work with anyone associated with the USSC, which stands for United Space Station of Connecticut. It seems a tad odd but nothing that bad. Once I get into the building, I rush over to the left wing and see Mission Control. I type in my name into the security system. They do a quick ID check and I'm in the room where everything important happens.

When I walk in, no one even glances at me. They're all talking to three people: a woman wearing a dark ocean blue shirt with dark curly hair and a man wearing a suit with a purple and pink colored tie and brown shorts. I also spot a man wearing a white shirt with a black bowtie and blue shorts. One of the people surrounding them is a small woman with gorgeous long brown hair with a name tag that says Maya Bens. She approaches me frantically and extends a pale hand and gives me what would receive first place for the fakest smile I've ever seen. She exclaims, "I'm Maya Bens, head of NASA's Mission Control. I presume you're the new intern." I nod my head so quickly that I feel like my head's about to blast off like one of NASA's very own spaceships. She continues, "Why don't you start the day by bringing the donuts from the break room for us and our guests, the astronauts going to Mars!"

I find the break room right away. I'm so bewildered that I'm about to be in the same room as the daring astronauts making a monumental voyage to Mars. Once I grab the box of donuts, I rush out and give them to Maya, who introduces me to the astronauts. The woman in the dark ocean blue shirt is Christy, the man in the purple and pink tie is Noah, and the man with the black bowtie introduces himself as Alex. About 20 minutes later, they leave, and the room erupts with talking. One of the workers Paul Rits talks to me and seems pretty nice. Our conversation is interrupted by Maya yelling, "Back to work everyone!" With no hesitation,

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everyone scrambles back to their desks. I do the small tasks Maya assigns me, like figuring out how much something will cost or leftover work. I accomplish a lot in the next few months and Paul and I develop a close friendship. I find out stuff about him like he has extreme panic attacks and faints if something surprising and bad happens. And he really hates sushi because as a kid that's all his mom ever made.

I start to grow on Maya. One day she invites me to her office to talk and says she's giving me a promotion. Now I will figure out calculations for the spaceships--basically one step down from pure rocket science. It's September, two months before the mission to Mars. As we all prepare for the launch, panic rises. Even though I can see everything looks like it will go perfectly. All of the simulations went perfect, there are no flaws in the rocket, and the astronauts are fully prepared. On September 29, the astronauts visit Mission Control again to double check everything. I get a chance to chat with Christy and we talk a while. We exchange phone numbers and that night we text like we've been good friends for life, discussing intriguing topics and telling each other hilarious jokes.

It's November 8, 2030, the day we launch the astronauts up to Mars. In Mission Control we do a quick overview of how the mission will proceed. Ms. Bens says the mission should take about 10 minutes due to our new technology. Paul says its less time for something to go wrong, but also less time to fix something if anything goes lopsided. Maya informs us that Christy and the fellow astronauts will be staying in Mars for the night when another Mission Control team will relieve us. I hear a voice I don't recognize on the intercom announcing, "One minute 'till takeoff." The one minute passes by like light in space. My job is to keep the stopwatch, which means I cue them for stuff like when they will run out of gas and how much longer until they get to Mars. I feel like a "copilot" on a family road trip. Before I know it, I hear the intercom voice

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again saying, “The Humanity 7 has lifted off.” For the first six minutes everything is running smoothly until seven minutes when the worst thing imaginable happens: the USSC had gotten in the spacecraft!

It happened right when we could finally relax. The difficult part was out of the way and it was a smooth ride from here. Paul had just explained to me what the USSC was and why it was a threat. He said that they were a space station that wanted to destroy NASA. Then it happened. The astronaut named Alex goes right up to the camera inside the spacecraft and shouts the USSC has finally won! Then he continues to knock poor Noah out with a hard punch and laughs like a stereotype villain. Suddenly Christy jumps in front of Alex and kicks him hard in the guts, which knocks the air right out of him. Christy is panicking and so is Mission Control. I turn over to look at Paul, remembering his panic attack issue. He is out cold. The rest is kind of blurred. I pull my chair up to Paul’s desk and fill in for him. Christy is yelling at us for what to do because it’s nearly impossible to land a spacecraft with only one person. Matter of fact, that’s one of the things she yells at us. After she says that for the fifth time, I turn my mic on and say, “You’re not the only one handling this spaceship. You have a team behind you, and we will land this no matter what!”

Christy nods at the camera and jumps back to the controls. The spacecraft is getting closer to Mars until the ninth minute when another bad thing happens, a wing comes out that was meant for the trip back to Earth. Everyone gets in another panic since this could bring the whole ship down. I jump into action on Paul's computer, doing everything I can and hitting every button until, Bam! I fixed it! Everyone cheers while I unsuccessfully try to hide my childlike joy. We are about to land the first manned spacecraft destined for Mars. We aren't doing this for us, we are doing it for the greater good of not just the USA, but the world. As the spacecraft

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lands on the dusty red planet, pride grows within me. As Christy walks on the red dust she says, “The great beyond has never looked so great!” She starts to set up camp as the relief Mission Control team arrives. We all shake hands as they congratulate us. When I walk out of the building, I see my phone light up. It’s a text from Christy that states; “How about that? I just walked on Mars! It pains me to know that I’m the one who will be mentioned in the history books, and not you, who saved the ship and motivated me to take back the spacecraft. Ps: Noah's okay.” I smile, knowing what she said was most likely true. I’ll get lost in history in a month or two, but I don't care. I will be remembered in her heart as the hero who helped save NASA’s mission to Mars.