

Contact Lost

By

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INT. HARMONY NODE, INTERNATIONAL SPACE STATION - 2:30 AM,  
EST.

A SPORK spins lazily in zero gravity, across the confined  
area, loaded with aluminum MECHANICS and surfaces.

INSTRUMENTS float here and there.

SHIPLA, a thirties Indian-American in a NASA FLIGHT SUIT,  
stares longingly out a bay window, into space.

The spork hits her on the side of the head. She turns,  
annoyed.

SHIPLA

Hey!

Smiling across from her is SAGIV, an Israeli in his forties.

SAGIV

Mission control is getting ready,  
Mehra. Just six hours until we can  
eat something that hasn't been  
freeze-dried.

SHIPLA

And you celebrate by throwing  
utensils at me?

She shakes her head sarcastically as she turns back to the  
window.

He floats toward her, shrugging.

SAGIV

I just tossed it away. Not my fault  
there's no gravity.

He pulls up beside her, and looks out

The earth curves below them.

SAGIV (cont'd)

Trying to see your house?

She continues to look out.

SHIPLA

No, there's a DAM coming up.

Sagiv looks concerned.

(CONTINUED)

SAGIV

There's debris coming? Why didn't  
you tell me?

SHIPLA

Murphy's got it under control.  
Chill for a bit, you might like the  
sights.

He seems to calm down.

Suddenly, Shipla's eyes light up. She points.

SHIPLA (cont'd)

There!

In front of them, the atmosphere lights up in a hundred  
small green flames as a shower of rocks pound off its  
invisible surface.

SHIPLA (cont'd)

My first meteor shower...

Outside, a booster rocket fires on the ISS, pushes it up and  
to the side. Although it is far away from the shower, it  
moves further.

Hundreds of rocks disintegrating in a second.

It looks amazing.

SAGIV

I'll admit it's worth the look.

SHIPLA

Just imagine, your greatest moment  
being your last.

Sagiv looks at her.

SAGIV

A blaze of glory?

She nods, still looking at the shower.

SHIPLA

Literally.

He shakes his head a little.

SHIPLA (cont'd)

You don't need an orbiter, Mehra.  
Your head is already in the clouds.

He floats away, leaving her to stare as he talks over his shoulder.

SAGIV  
Pre-flight checks in one hour, my  
friend.

She continues to look out, as the shower passes underneath, past her view of the SPACE ORBITER attached to the node.

Along the side of the black and white space shuttle:

an AMERICAN FLAG

and the name; CONSTITUTION.

The wings are sleek, the leading edges black.

In the middle of the left wing,

barely perceptible, and only four inches wide;

a HOLE.

EXT. SHIPLA'S PATIO, DALLAS - DAY.

A suburban patio.

In a red sun-dress, she is spun around by a YOUNG INDIAN MAN in sportswear.

SHIPLA  
Arun, i'm not some kid!

She LAUGHS as he deposits her on the sun-chair.

He drops down beside her, a little OUT OF BREATH.

ARUN  
I'm trying to be strong and manly,  
Mrs Cosmonaut.

She shakes her head.

SHIPLA  
Cosmonauts are Russian.

He shrugs.

ARUN  
Why? Where do they have to be?

She rolls her eyes.

(CONTINUED)

SHIPLA

If the only advantage to being in space is to be away from your horrible jokes, i'll be thankful.

A smile breaks on his face, but as fast as it came, it is gone.

ARUN

I'll miss you every second.

She turns to him, reaching her hand to his face.

SHIPLA

I'll be back before you know it.

He gives a dry laugh.

ARUN

In six months! I don't think so.

She drops her eyes, nothing to say.

He looks at her, then reaches into his pocket.

ARUN (cont'd)

I want you to bring something with you.

He produces a SMALL ROCK.

She takes it into her hand, giving him a questioning look.

ARUN (cont'd)

It's like moon rock, but in reverse.

She smirks.

SHIPLA

Earth-rock?

He nods.

ARUN

Now you have something to remind you of home.

She smiles as she looks at it.

ARUN (cont'd)

Nothing special. It's from our garden, but i picked it especially.

She looks at him, a little sorrowful.

SHIPLA

I can't...

He puts his hand over the rock and her hand, interrupting.

ARUN

...just hide it in your underwear,  
or something.

They LAUGH.

EXT. SPACE ORBITER CONSTITUTION - 8:15 AM, EST.

The orbiter is attached to the ISS upside down.

DOCKING PORTS on its underside slowly DETACH.

It floats backwards, over the INDIAN OCEAN.

INT. SPACE ORBITER CONSTITUTION - 8:15 AM, EST.

In an ORANGE RE-ENTRY SUIT, Shipla fiddles with her earth-rock as she tries to arrange her gloves.

She sits at the back of the cockpit as Sagiv, and MURPHY, an IRISH-AMERICAN SUBURBANITE in his forties, CLICK switches and TYPE on laptops.

SAGIV

Capsule Communicator, STS.

CAPCOM (V.O.)

Go for CAPCOM.

SAGIV

Confirmation we are go for de-orbit  
burn.

Some COMMUNICATOR STATIC.

CAPCOM (V.O.)

Flight director confirms a go for  
burn. That is a go for de-orbit  
burn.

Sagiv turns to the others.

(CONTINUED)

SAGIV  
You two ready?

Shipla is still fiddling.

SHIPLA  
I haven't got my gloves on yet,  
Sagiv.

Sagiv turns back.

SAGIV  
You'll be fine.

He hovers his finger over a RUBBERED BUTTON.

SAGIV  
Copy your last capcom. Initiating.

EXT. SPACE ORBITER CONSTITUTION - 8:16 AM, EST.

The thrusters BLAST red and orange as the orbiter slows in relation to the earth.

In the hole, small metallic debris swirls around.

EXT. LBJ SPACE CENTER, HOUSTON, TX - EARLY MORNING.

A small group of spectators is gathered, replete with loungers, coolers and binoculars.

Arun looks up into the pre-dawn sky.

In his arms, A SMALL SLEEPING CHILD.

EXT. SPACE ORBITER CONSTITUTION - 8:44 AM, EST.

The orbiter is completing a maneuver to right itself in direction to its travel over the PACIFIC OCEAN.

The underside begins to glow as it moves in a nose up position.

The hole begins to redden.

INT. SPACE ORBITER CONSTITUTION - 8:44 AM, EST.

Sagiv is looking serious.

SAGIV

Alright, we are at Entry Interface.

Shipla grips the rock.

SAGIV (cont'd)

Please check your suit pressure integrity and get those visors down.

Murphy turns slightly.

MURPHY

Ship, you still haven't even got your gloves on!

She turns to him.

SHIPLA

OK, OK, but i want to keep my visor up. The hull is starting to glow.

Sure enough, a dim plasma glow is beginning to the side of Sagiv.

SAGIV

OK, but just check that SPI like i said.

She fiddles with her helmet this time.

EXT. SACRAMENTO, CA - DAWN.

Beside a car and a roadsign that says WELCOME TO SACRAMENTO, two observers look up into the brightening sky.

A small trail is beginning.

EXT. SPACE ORBITER CONSTITUTION- 8:55 AM, EST.

The edges of the hole are beginning to erode in the intense heat.

INT. SPACE ORBITER CONSTITUTION - 8:55 AM, EST.

Outside, the glow of yellow and orange is fierce.

SHIPLA

Wow, it's really going now.

MURPHY

Yep, and do you feel that?

SAGIV

Yeah, we're getting some Gs.

Behind the Pyrex of her helmet, Shipla smiles.

SHIPLA

Well hello, gravity. I missed you.

They LAUGH.

EXT. SPACE ORBITER CONSTITUTION- 8:55 AM, EST.

The edges of the hole suddenly crack open, spraying a little debris out.

INT. MISSION CONTROL, HOUSTON - 8:56 AM, EST

The room is a mass of computer desks and engineers in shirts and ties.

At one desk: MAINTENANCE, MECHANICAL ARM, AND CREW SYSTEMS OFFICER.

Suddenly, the screen in front of the engineer begins to flash a warning sign, and he brings his hand to his communicator.

MMACS

Flight, Max.

The FLIGHT DIRECTOR, a tall, besuited man, stands in front of a HUGE SCREEN, covered in TELEMETRY and ORBITAL FLIGHT PATHS. He turns at the page.

FLIGHT DIRECTOR

Go ahead, Max.

MMACS

FYI, i just lost four separate temperature transducers on the left side of the vehicle. Hydraulic

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MMACS (cont'd)  
return temperatures. Two of them in  
system one, and one each in two and  
three.

FLIGHT DIRECTOR  
Four hyd return temps?

MMACS  
To the left inboard and left  
outboard elevon.

The director walks toward the engineer.

EXT. LBJ SPACE CENTER, HOUSTON, TX - 8:56 AM, EST

The crowd are starting to move a little in the early  
sunlight as a speakerphone SQUAWKS.

COMMENTATOR (V.O.)  
Constitution continuing in a right  
bank, the wings angled 43 degrees.  
Speed, 15,000 miles an hour.  
Altitude, 43 miles.

Arun has the now awake child in his arms, bouncing her  
lightly.

COMMENTATOR (V.O.)  
2,090 miles to touchdown at the  
Kennedy Space Center.

He looks down at the kid.

ARUN  
Mommy will fly over us soon!

COMMENTATOR (V.O.)  
Targeted for runway three-three at  
Kennedy at present. Crossing over  
the continental United States.

An OLDER INDIAN WOMAN approaches, takes the bouncing smiling  
child into her arms, smiles at Arun, who turns back to the  
sky.

COMMENTATOR (V.O.) (cont'd)  
Now crossing over Southern Nevada,  
to the north of Las Vegas.

EXT. HOOVER DAM, NEVADA/ARIZONA BORDER - 8:57 AM, EST.

Observers gather on the walkway as the sky is brightening.

The trail in the sky begins to widen slightly, then suddenly, a BRIGHT FLASH.

OBSERVER

Woah, that can't be good.

INT. MISSION CONTROL, HOUSTON - 8:57 AM, EST

The director is standing over the engineer, looking at his screen.

FLIGHT DIRECTOR

Any commonality with previous issues? You're telling me you lost all of them at exactly the same time?

MMACS

No, within a few seconds of each other.

FLIGHT DIRECTOR

OK, where are those, where is that instrumentation located?

MMACS

On the aft part of the left wing. And no, there is no commonality.

He looks over his shoulder at the director.

MMACS

This has never happened before, sir.

The director stares at him.

EXT. SPACE ORBITER CONSTITUTION- 8:58 AM, EST.

The rising sun beams over the curve of the earth.

Debris is flying off the wing, disintegrating almost immediately.

INT. SPACE ORBITER CONSTITUTION - 8:58 AM, EST.

Despite some vibrations ROCKING the cabin, the crew don't seem to notice anything amiss.

MURPHY

It's dragging to the right a touch.

Sagiv gives a nonchalant look.

SAGIV

Perfectly normal. Nothing you can't handle, flyboy.

Murphy smirks.

MURPHY

You alright back there, Ship?

Shipla is gripping her rock even tighter. Her head bowed into her lap, her visor down.

SHIPLA

I don't like the part when it gets rocky.

MURPHY

Jesus, Ship. You're the flight engineer!

She grips harder.

The sunlight rebounds off her helmet.

SHIPLA

Just shut up and get us home.

EXT. LBJ SPACE CENTER, HOUSTON, TX - 8:59 AM, EST

The crowd are mostly standing now, all looking at the sky.

COMMENTATOR (V.O.)

Constitution's course continuing across Arizona near the four corners area of the United States.

The older woman hovering nearby with the child, Arun looks up, expectant.

COMMENTATOR (V.O.) (cont'd)

A quick skip over New Mexico, and she'll be over the top of us, on her way to Florida, any second.

The beginnings of a WHOOP escape the crowd.

INT. SPACE ORBITER CONSTITUTION - 9:00 AM, EST.

Murphy grabs the controls.

MURPHY  
 Alright, executing roll reversal to  
 dissipate speed.

EXT. SPACE ORBITER CONSTITUTION - CONTINUOUS.

The orbiter rolls to the left.

Suddenly, the wing is completely on fire, and beginning to disintegrate.

INT. MISSION CONTROL, HOUSTON - CONTINUOUS.

Sagiv's voice BOOMS over the intercom.

SAGIV (V.O.)  
 Uh, Houston...

As Sagiv's voice is GARBLED, the MMACS engineer looks extremely worried.

MMACS  
 Flight, we just lost tire pressure  
 on the left outboard and left  
 inboard, both tires.

The flight director is back to front and center. He stares at the telemetry screen as he presses the communicator to his ear.

FLIGHT DIRECTOR  
 Constitution, we did not copy your  
 last. Max, copy on the tire  
 pressure.

INT. SPACE ORBITER CONSTITUTION - CONTINUOUS.

A flight alarm SHRIEKS in a constant cycle. Murphy pulls at the controls.

MURPHY  
 I'm losing her!

Sagiv FLICKS random switches and SHOUTS over the noise.

(CONTINUED)

SAGIV  
Houston, come in Houston!

EXT. SPACE ORBITER CONSTITUTION - CONTINUOUS.

The ship is awash in flame and rolling from side to side.

INT. SPACE ORBITER CONSTITUTION - CONTINUOUS.

Shipla grips the rock, scrunches her eyes. The alarm BLARES.

SAGIV  
Capcom, we are experiencing violent  
control degradation. Please advise!

EXT. LBJ SPACE CENTER, HOUSTON, TX - CONTINUOUS.

A trail begins in the distance.

COMMENTATOR (V.O.)  
Here she comes!

A rousing CHEER goes up from the crowd.

His eyes filled with wonder, Arun WHISPERS to himself:

ARUN  
Here she comes.

INT. MISSION CONTROL, HOUSTON - CONTINUOUS.

The flight director is getting frantic.

FLIGHT DIRECTOR  
Constitution, we did not copy your  
last. Come in Constitution!

The engineers look at the telemetry screen as the silence  
washes over them.

EXT. SPACE ORBITER CONSTITUTION - CONTINUOUS.

The ship is totally aflame now, and begins a spin to its  
right,

slow at first, then gaining speed exponentially.

INT. SPACE ORBITER CONSTITUTION - CONTINUOUS.

Shipla opens her hand to look at the rock. The noise seems WASHED OUT as she stares at it.

Suddenly, the cockpit is filled with light and flame as the orbiter falls apart.

Shipla is flung into the air amid the debris, the rock flying out of her hand.

EXT. LBJ SPACE CENTER, HOUSTON, TX - CONTINUOUS.

The crowd look up at the widening trail in the sky.

An AUDIBLE EXPLOSION, and the trail turns into a puff of smoke and fire.

As one, the crowd CRIES OUT in shock.

Arun's child begins to BAWL.

He raises his hands to the sky, as if to hold the orbiter up.

A SMALL CRY escapes him.

ARUN

Shipla!

EXT. UPPER ATMOSPHERE - CONTINUOUS.

Shipla skips across the atmosphere, the rock inches from her outstretched hand, her eyes focused on nothing else.

Her suit begins to glow and burn.

She stretches further, debris flying past her, burning on re-entry.

Her hand closes around the rock.

As she turns into an orange ball of flame, she holds it to her face, resolute.

EXT. LBJ SPACE CENTER, HOUSTON, TX - CONTINUOUS.

Arun looks up in despair.

The disintegrating orbiter skips across the sky in a red ball.

It looks amazing.

EXT. UPPER ATMOSPHERE - CONTINUOUS.

Shipla reverberates as light and flame surround her,  
then,  
nothing.

FADE OUT.

Well, i knew i wanted to do something about the ISS, most likely about a crime. "What if a Russian assaulted an American in the Japanese module?", I thought. Turns out it's pretty simple; the home nation of the perpetrator has jurisdiction. So i moved on to the Columbia disaster, was enthralled, and wrote something based on it. The original idea about the ISS was because i was playing Crysis 2, and it mentions Tunguska near the end, so i started looking into meteorites, then stumbled onto the ISS, so i wove in a meteorite motif. I spent a lot of time researching a lot of stuff. Likelihood is, i'm way off on the realism (such as the Flight Commander not knowing a Debris Avoidance Maneuver was coming up, or why a relative might be at Houston, instead of where the orbiter would land; a thousand miles away in Florida), but a lot of what you've read are from transcripts of the Columbia disaster.