

When Mistakes Are Made

by Ivan Reyes

The blue light from the blue painted ceilings and walls lent the room a feeling of emptiness and tension and the light from the floor was red as it bounced off the red tile, three men were standing talking. One with glasses and a bald head, with a bent triangle of light reflecting from his scalp and two men in suits, one with a salt and pepper flat top that looked dignified and lent him an aura of obsolete wisdom. The other man wearing a suit was weak willed and tugged at his mustache in discomfort and it expressed his displeasure most clearly. The room was busy, at least ten men, maybe fourteen, climbing stairs and entering the room and walking by the room without regarding what was in the room because there were pressing matters that demanded their attention with greater alarm, leaving the room without saying hello or goodbye to anyone, men with slow steady bodies that did much more than the average person did in a lifetime, toiling. Outside the day was warm.

Inside the building it was cold.

Carver said: "We should go through with it."

Henderson rubbed his mustache and looked at Trent.

Trent said: "I can't imagine a worse idea."

"Well it's not your job to think of another idea. So there's that."

Henderson leered at Trent.

Trent turned around. "Put it through the committee. It needs to be reconsidered."

"That's not protocol," Carver said.

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"He's right," said Henderson and he placed his hand over his mouth to resume his placid and thoughtful pose he had before.

"This is insane! These are not normal circumstances," Trent said.
"Fuck the protocol."

The room fell to silence though nothing stopped its clockwork like happenings.

"I can't agree with that," said Carver. And he lit a cigarette. "Besides --"

Trent interjected. Henderson's blue eyes widened and revealed that they were indeed moist. "How did we even get here?" Trent said.

"Well, you know, it was put through the committee--" started Carver but Trent interjected once more, this time with more ferocity.

"By who?!"

"The fellow in your department. Mike Holt."

"His proposition was to increase the number of overseers during propulsion testing."

"Well that's how it started," Carver stated. He looked at Trent with boyish inquisitiveness.

Henderson was far away and wondering what he would be having for dinner. His feet ached. He rubbed his hand through his hair and looked at the red tile and could swear he almost felt something important swim by inside of his subconscious, but six months of twelve hour days seven days a week left him without the energy to properly capture it and so it swam by and swam away and he

watched it as an animal might observe a magnificent shooting star, and he looked at Trent.

"Don't you see --" Trent said and was interrupted by Carver.

"Trent, you're a good scientist, but it's all gone through. Everyone is on board. It's a go. We are going to do this, why fight it is all I'm asking, your energies would be put to better use on the next project. Nobody is asking you to do this. You're driving yourself mad," Carver laughed. Henderson laughed. Trent felt a chill run through his back.

After a pregnant pause Trent said, "You can stop this."

"Maybe," Carver said, and he made some quick calculations in his mind, "but probably not. The legality of it all would be enough for the committee to be afraid of that road, and for good reason. All the test subjects are adult, healthy, and willing, with no history of mental aberration. It is insane," said Carver with a pointed gaze at Trent that transmitted his sincerity through the air, his blue eyes were swords that comforted Trent as much as they angered him, for their inability to waver, "but it is happening," finished Carver and the statement was an obvious period and like that the subject was closed for him at least and no further thought was required as far as he was concerned. He reflected thoughtfully on the pity he felt for Trent, which was genuine and pure as he could muster, and he felt a disappointment that was familiar to himself.

"How about lunch," said Henderson.

"Sure," said Trent.

"It's settled," said Carver.

While they were having lunch the tv screen in the cafe showed the rocket pierce the thin blue tarp that was the sky and enter the

lawless space that held no promise of return or victory. Carver felt disgust as he chewed the bacon of his club sandwich and suddenly realized he was a small man in a big world. The cafe was small but had good food. The food was ordered daily by the owner and head chef, he was a passionate man who resembled Elvis Presley in his later years, because of his obnoxiously large sideburns and his predilection towards pastel colors in his outfits. He also looked at the tv with a detachment he sensed was dangerous and the sensation scared him so he ran into the kitchen and felt ashamed alone in the hot room and trembled. People outside paused their itineraries and surveyed the skies looking for the rockets and hundreds of thousands of people around the earth simultaneously wept. The black and white rockets were silent in the discomfort of space. Trent slammed his fist like a chunk of concrete on the table and screamed, "Damn." Henderson had tuna in his mouth and he choked on it and it flew out of his mouth as his body rejected the piece of fish and it sprayed all over the table. He took a sip of water. "How could I," Carver thought to himself.

"We let this happen," screamed Trent at his two colleagues and Henderson rubbed his forehead regretfully but imposed by realities larger than he was, Carver stared at him seeking answers.

"Look," snapped Carver, "what could we do about it," he stuttered flailing for words he could feel but not touch, "goddamnit."

When Carver was a boy he killed his neighbor, a boy of seven. It was a game of tag and he pushed him off of a high embankment and the boy fell and never got up again. Carver began to weep because unbeknownst to him the guilt from that day was finally and finally breaking the walls he had built around it. Henderson put his arm around him but Carver threatened him so he pulled his arm back again. As a boy, Trent dreamt of being an astronaut, he read books upon books about space exploration and about the stars and about everything that connected everything. He wept because instead of

being a part of it he had tainted it with the wickedness that people carry around with them, their fear, and their ineptitude, and their rage, and their cluelessness: he sent that to be mixed with the purity and faultless forces that created the cosmos. He felt ashamed. Henderson was hungry. He continued to chew on his tuna.

In space the rocket hurled itself towards nothingness, carrying eleven hundred US citizens. They all volunteered for this, who knows why. Down below on earth, people wondered if they had debts, or maybe regrets, or maybe something else motivated them, something deep and evil. There were cameras watching them until the oxygen generators ran out of power and then the Government in affiliation with the National and Societal Space Administration cut the cameras. The footage showed placid and content individuals, some sat some stood.

