

The Best Candidates

by

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FADE IN ON:

EXT. NASA AIRFIELD #2 - DAY

A huge CROWD surrounds a ship. Excitement in the air.

The ship sits on a platform, nose pointed at the sky. Its metallic, with bubbles and folded rings.

A long ramp leads to the cockpit - one hundred feet above the ground.

In the distance: rubble hints at a ruined terrain. Earth's days are numbered - so it seems.

INT. PREP DOCK #15

A grubby locker room. Everything's lo-tech in here.

BECKY RIVERA (30s, Latina) perches on a bench in underwear. Athletic figure, defined muscles. Wet hair.

She watches a flat-screen monitor on the wall:

The Niven fills the background shot - an excited REPORTER in the center of the vid frame.

REPORTER

Finally, the day has come! Behind me is the *Niven 2063* - a ship fated to make history. In just thirty minutes, the *Niven* will launch. Its destination: Enceladus, a habitable moon of Saturn - and the best option for colonization; once second to Mars, now first. Ever since the 2053 generator blast.

Becky SIGHS and stands up. She leaves the locker, barely dressed. And walks through institutionally gray halls.

INT. HALLS

More monitors babble at Becky, every step. Each tuned to the same channel. Same announcer, as well:

REPORTER

It's been over a year since the *Niven's* expedition was announced. Now five hundred crew members begin to board. The biggest adventure in history. With the fate of humanity in store!

Becky flicks moisture from her hair. And enters the...

INT. DISINFECTANT ROOM

She steps onto a circular platform, mounted to a thin rubber tread.

She raises her arms, stands with feet spread wide apart. Robotic arms extrude; spray her down.

Becky takes a breath, closes her eyes. The platform gently rotates. Every inch of her skin gets exposed.

BECKY (V.O.)

"Over a year?" I guess so. Though it seems far shorter than that. Objectively, it's been three hundred and seventy two days since I was approached by my commander, and given my Sophie's Choice. Say goodbye to my family and friends. But become a hero in some distant world - and secure humanity's survival. No matter what political craziness happens here.

The treadmill starts to roll. Bringing Becky along as well. More robot arms drop down, inject vaccines.

Becky wrinkles her face, but she's a real trooper. Not one second does she flinch.

The "assembly line tread" runs her through an INFRARED FIELD, disinfecting even more of her skin.

Becky reaches the other end of the room. The tread stops.

A cart of folded uniforms waits for her on one side.

Becky chooses the top jumpsuit.

She climbs into the legs, ZIPS it up. Closed, a NASA LOGO shines close to her heart. Which is pounding - judging from the look on Becky's face.

BECKY (V.O.)

Of course, I was a candidate. After all, I graduated Cal Tech in Astrophysics, and went straight to the US Air Force. I've been training for this all my life.

Becky steps into the halls again.

INT. HALLS

She grabs gear from hooks and bags on the wall.

A helmet. Gloves. A protein bar. She quickly tucks the snack away.

A SECOND ASTRONAUT walks by, helmet on and faceplate closed. Their nameplate reads: Robinson.

Becky eyes her co-worker and smiles. The two walk side by side in silence. Their boots TAP hard against the floor.

BECKY (V.O.)

But who else to choose? What's natural selection for colonists - the bearers of humanity? Bravery and physical fitness? Of course. Diversity? Important as well.

A MALE TECHNICIAN strolls by with a rolling cart.

Guiding a translucent refrigeration slab. The cabinet's huge - ten feet wide, fifteen feet long. Hundreds of grids score the surface - each just an inch across.

BECKY (V.O.)

There there's the issue of populating the new world. Which threw a monkey wrench into the works.

A closer look at the refrigeration unit reveals: a myriad of FROZEN VIALS inside.

BECKY (V.O.)

Science has never perfected outside incubation of embryos. The pro-lifers were against it. And even if it wasn't a factor, there was no way to build up the tech in time. So natural wombs became crucial real estate. One per occupant. 100% of us had to be female. With frozen sperm on the side.

The technician loads the refrigeration unit into a wall.

The cargo shoots towards the Niven. Visible through a window, just outside.

The man waves to Becky, walks away.

"Robinson" removes their helmet, revealing:

ANGELA ROBINSON (30s) a petite blonde - blazing intelligence in her eyes.

BECKY

(to Robinson)

I was wondering when you were going to take that off. You know we don't need that until launch.

ROBINSON

I was testing it out.

(grins)

Don't you think it looks cool?

Becky smiles, but keeps walking. A de-helmeted Angela keeps pace at her side.

BECKY (V.O.)

Who would've figured women to be the 'chosen ones'? Then again, we're hardier, with higher pain thresholds than male counterparts. Even if some of us don't have equivalent strength, that's what low gravity and robots are for. The important thing is, we're evolutionarily designed to bring forth new generations. Men? When it comes to colonizing brave new worlds, they're only needed for one thing...

Becky and Angela step through an airlock.

INT. RAMP

Onto the ramp connecting Niven's hull.

They walk along quietly. Gaze out the windows in awe.

The Niven's thirty feet away. The crowd: one hundred feet below. Monitors babble here, as well.

REPORTER

Look! The final Astronauts are crossing over. The loading stage nearly complete!

Angela and Becky share a grin and wave down to the crowd. They keep walking. Niven's airlock nears.

BECKY (V.O.)

Funny: the first man - I mean politician - who brought the issue up, missed the point completely. Republican Congressman Louie Gohmert of the Lone Star State of Texas. A "gentleman" who argued that certain "segments" of the population should be omitted from just such a trip.

You know - people of a certain persuasion. Yet, once it became clear that women were the go-to candidates, it's our emotional welfare that came next. Sure: newborn colonists would be a mix of male and female.. But the adult pioneers would all be double-X chromosome. And space can be quite lonely. Us heros have certain needs.

INT. NIVEN'S ENTRANCE HALL

Angela and Becky step inside. A CHEER rises behind them, echoes from the crowd below.

In front of them: a CROWD OF FEMALE COLONISTS. Most already ensconsed in STATIS PODS.

Others focus on typing in environmental preferences for their pod - in various stages of undress.

BECKY (V.O.)

In the blink of an eye, heterosexual orientation became a liability. And lesbians became the candidates of choice. IE, colonists who wouldn't be emotionally tortured by loneliness. Which, in the end, worked out well. Fortunately, Angela had majored in Molecular Biology. A win-win for NASA. And me.

Becky turns to Angela. The two hold hands.

BECKY

You ready?

ANGELA

As much as I'm going to be.

Becky kisses Angela on the cheek. Chaste and sweet.

BECKY

Thank Goddess I have you here with me.

SIRENS CLANG. Astronauts scramble for their pods. Becky and Angela separate - temporarily.

EXT. NASA AIRFIELD #2 - LATER

The Niven soars into the air. Light glints off its hull. The reporter fights to be heard above the crowd.

REPORTER

And there you are, folks - the first flight to Enceladus. Manned by brave women who will move humanity towards the stars... now and for eternity!

FINAL FADE OUT: