

The Caterpillar and the Butterfly

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FADE IN:

INT. A PLANETARIUM - NIGHT

On a field trip, a group of elementary STUDENTS observe the Andromeda Galaxy. An ASTRONOMER fields their questions.

GIRL

This happened two million years ago?

ASTRONOMER

Precisely.

GIRL

If I had a twin on Andromeda they'd see Earth as it was two million years ago?

ASTRONOMER

If there were someone, yes.

GIRL

So they wouldn't know about us?

ASTRONOMER

We wouldn't exist yet to them.

GIRL

But we do exist...yet. If my twin were viewing Earth right now, how could we connect?

ASTRONOMER

(exasperation showing)

You couldn't.

GIRL

So whose reality is real, hers or mine?

The students look to the Astronomer who has no response.

EXT. A FIELD - DAY

A monarch butterfly suns itself on a flower. A breeze stirs and it takes flight. A cocoon sits in a jar on the ground.

INT. A GLIDER COCKPIT - DAY (U.S., A BIT INTO THE FUTURE)

CALE HAWKINS, 33, pilots a glider on a picture perfect day.

HOUSTON CONTROL (VO)

Four minutes until descent.

Cale notices a monarch butterfly flying beside her wing. She glances to her airspeed, 150 MPH, and altimeter, 15,000 feet.

CALE

Huh?

HOUSTON CONTROL (VO)

We didn't get that, please repeat.

CALE

Nothing, just noting the beautiful day.

HOUSTON CONTROL (VO)

Copy that. Three minutes to descent.

Cale glances out the window, the butterfly is gone. She looks behind, no trace of it.

She looks ahead. It's flying straight at her. She veers away as the butterfly almost grazes her cockpit glass. She cranes her neck to follow it.

CALE

What the—?

HOUSTON CONTROL (VO)

Commander? You just vectored off course.

CALE

A little turbulence.

HOUSTON CONTROL (VO)

We show no turbulence, perfect conditions.

CALE

You wanna trade places?

HOUSTON CONTROL (VO)

No matter, ninety seconds to descent.

Cale prepares for descent. The butterfly takes another pass at her. She pulls up and the glider performs a loop de loop.

TO NASA HOUSTON CONTROL

The MAIN CONTROLLER and THREE OTHERS peer at the radar screen.

MAIN CONTROLLER

These gliders can't do loop de loops.

(to Cale)

Commander, everything OK up there?

CALE (VO)

A bit more turbulence.

MAIN CONTROLLER
Begging your pardon, Commander, you
just did a loop de loop.

CALE (VO)
Like I said, a bit of turbulence.

The engineers exchange puzzled glances, shaking their heads.

INT. NASA HQ, AN AIRCRAFT HANGER - DAY

STU, 62, Mission Director, no nonsense, jaded, meets Cale.

STU
Had a little excitement I hear?

CALE
Nothing I couldn't handle.

STU
Well, we won't have those challenges
with the Martian atmosphere.

Stu turns to exit, then pauses.

STU
You mentioned a butterfly up there.

CALE
At fifteen thousand feet, Sir?
Must've been garbled transmission.

STU
Must've been.

Thoughtful, he watches her exit the hangar.

INT. NASA BEHAVIORAL ANALYSIS DEPARTMENT - DAY

DOCTOR SYLVI, 45, a serious woman, reviews Cale's
psychological test results.

SYLVI
Every test, letter perfect.

CALE
So I check out for Mars?

SYLVI
You have my clearance to proceed to
Lunar Colony for pre-launch prep.

Cale stands to exit. Sylvi looks over her glasses at Cale.

SYLVI
How are you doing?

CALE
You just said I'm better than perfect.

Sylvi closes the test file.

SYLVI
That's not what I'm talking about.

Cale looks away. Sylvi removes her glasses.

SYLVI
How long?

CALE
Three hundred seventy four days
and... about eight hours.

Sylvi notes her precision.

SYLVI
Nothing?

Cale shakes her head. Sylvi looks sad for her.

INT. BUTTERFLY HOUSE AT A ZOO - DAY

Beside the DOCENT, Cale observes the hundreds of butterflies.

CALE
What's a monarch's maximum altitude?

DOCENT
Functionally, a few thousand feet.
They've been sighted much higher
riding thermals.

CALE
How high?

DOCENT
One sighting at eleven thousand,
however they can't function due to
the cold. They'd likely die.

CALE
Top speed?

DOCENT
They have no speed. They float.

Cale nods as she beholds the beautiful butterflies.

INT. PRESTIGIOUS UNIVERSITY, LECTURE HALL - DAY

GRIFFIN, a dwarf of undetermined age, but old, lectures on astrophysics in a large hall packed with students.

Cale enters quietly and sits in the highest row in the back.

His back to the students, Griffin completes an elaborate formula on a blackboard.

GRIFFIN

From this one can postulate an energy faster than lightspeed.

From way in the back,

CALE

You've overlooked Bohm's interpretation.

The hall falls silent, students glance to each other. Slowly Griffin turns and squints in the direction of the challenge.

GRIFFIN

I don't see my questioner. Identify yourself and repeat your question.

Still not visible in the back,

CALE

It wasn't a question. If the observer is the observed, the speed of light is irrelevant.

Students shift nervously in their seats. A few gasp, some glance at Cale. Griffin squints, but still can't see Cale.

GRIFFIN

Leaving only the eternal present.
(consulting his watch)
Enough for today. Dismissed.

The hall empties, except for Cale who makes her way to the stage. Griffin eyes her, it's unclear if he's angry.

He turns, indifferent, to erase the blackboard, then turns with a smile. Cale bends to hug Griffin.

CALE

I missed you, Grif.

GRIFFIN

And I miss your temerity.

CALE

Will you come to the Lunar Colony
for the Mars Mission? I'd feel
better if you were.

GRIFFIN

They don't need an old horse like me.

Cale reaches to him.

CALE

I do, plus I have some pull.

GRIFFIN

I would hope so, Mars Mission
Commander. I'd like to think I
had some influence on you, but I
knew you were destined for the
stars without anyone's help.

CALE

So you'll come?

He nods thoughtfully.

INT. NASA BEHAVIORAL ANALYSIS DEPARTMENT - DAY

Stu, tense, consults Sylvi, looking serious.

STU

Who's our top replacement candidate?

Sylvi glances to him sideways, then hands him a file.

SYLVI

He's no longer employed by NASA.

Stu flips through the file, frowning, fidgeting.

STU

He's top?

SYLVI

He was when you fired him.

Stu closes the file, exhaling deep.

INT. HELICOPTER OVER SNOW-COVERED MOUNTAINS - DAY

Stu sits beside the PILOT, gazing upon a pristine mountain
slope. A snowboarder comes into view carving an elongated S.

Stu peers at the figure.

PILOT

Dropped him off just before picking you up. 'Spect I'll get a rescue call after dropping you off.

Stu looks to him, puzzled.

PILOT

No one comes down this side in one piece. Most get broken in some fashion.

STU

Why would—?

PILOT

No friggin' idea.

Just then a massive snow ledge breaks loose hurtling downward. Stu glances from the avalanche to the boarder noting the speed.

PILOT

Uh, oh. He's in big trouble.

The snow wall gains upon him. Instead of veering away he steers toward the avalanche center.

STU

What the—?

The pilot circles around to follow the drama.

PILOT

Interesting.

STU

What?

PILOT

An avalanche compresses the air in front of it, creating a reverse draft.

STU

Race cars and geese draft behind a leader. This pushes everything ahead of it?

The pilot nods. The boarder rides directly in front of the avalanche, just feet from the crushing mass of snow, yet pushed at a great speed beyond the reach of the snow wall.

They advance toward a cliff. The boarder has no place to go.

PILOT

Oh man. Well, he tried.

(taking the mike)

Bird one to central. Got an

avalanche on the back side with a snowboarder in its path.

Alert the rescue, uh, recovery team.

CENTRAL (VO)

Copy. Any hope for the boarder?

PILOT

Only if he's got wings.

CENTRAL

Roger. We'll send a recovery team.

The boarder nears the cliff and prepares to leap. The pilot pulls out a video camera.

STU

What's he thinking?

PILOT

No idea. Get it on video though.

The boarder launches off the cliff, hanging in a graceful arc. The snow wall tumbles over the cliff filling the depths and interestingly, losing speed.

The boarder uses his arms to balance and extend his lift. He's aims to land behind what's left of the avalanche.

STU

Is he going to—?

PILOT

I've never seen...never heard anything like it, but it appears so.

The boarder lands on the decelerating crest of the avalanche. He rides the back edge of the avalanche like a wave surfer.

PILOT

I'll be damned. That was friggin' beautiful. Are you gettin' this?

STU

Yeah. What was his name?

PILOT

Never caught his name.

The danger past, the snowboarder continues down the slope.

PILOT

One helluva lot of guts though.

Stu leans back in his seat eyes fixed on the receding figure.

STU

Yeah.

INT. SKI LODGE, THE BAR - DAY

Stu nurses a beer, eyes on the front door. It opens and a FIGURE enters, caked in snow head to foot, goggles frozen to his face, ice rims his mouth, gloves frozen stiff.

He removes his helmet shaking snow and ice to the floor.

A lodge EMPLOYEE walks up and points toward Stu at the bar. The figure glances over and squints, then saunters Stu's way.

He steps up to Stu and stops. Neither speaks until,

DAK

Since this isn't a social visit, I expect you need something from me.

STU

That was an incredible-

DAK

You saw?

STU

Came in by helicopter. Got it on video.

DAK

A little dicey for a moment, huh?

DAK HILL, 35, athletic, handsome, catches the BARTENDER'S eye for a drink. He smashes his glove on the bar to loosen the ice.

STU

You're still classified active duty.

Dak drops ice from his glove into his shot and takes a swig.

DAK

I'm no longer at NASA if you recall.

Stu takes a measured gulp of his drink.

STU

We're short a pilot for Mars.

Stu's words focus Dak's attention.

DAK

Because...?

STU
Because he broke his ankle.

DAK
Back-up team?

STU
Freak coincidence, both got
a virus. Can't risk sending
them on an extended mission.

Dak removes his jacket to settle in at the bar.

DAK
Interesting. Who's the Commander?

STU
(pause)
Hawkins.

DAK
Hawkins?

Dak downs his shot and motions for another.

DAK
She's only a Captain.

STU
Promoted.

DAK
(it's Dak's turn to pause)
That was my promotion, and my mission.

Stu searches his beer fruitlessly. Dak chuckles sardonically.

DAK
So you're asking me...

STU
I'm offering.

DAK
No, no. You're asking.

STU
Yes, I'm asking-

DAK
Mars mission, first team?

STU
(swallows hard)
I need you. The mission is at risk.

DAK
If I decline?

STU
The next launch window is in two
years. I lose my job, we lose our
lead on the Chinese and Russians.

DAK
And Cale loses the chance to
be the first human on Mars...
which was supposed to be my honor.

STU
This isn't easy for me.

DAK
I expect not, coming here all
humble-like. Doesn't become you.

Dak consults his tequila, dropping ice from his jacket into it.

DAK
What's Cale say?

STU
She doesn't know.

Dak doubles over laughing. He motions for a double round.

DAK
I'll need to consult with Señor Patron.

The bartender brings two shots. Dak slides one to Stu, then
raises his, waiting.

DAK
For old time's sake.

STU
We never had any old times.

DAK
That was our problem.

Stu hesitates, Dak directs a glare his way. Stu relents. Both
down the shot. Dak motions for more.

LATER

Both are drunk. Alcohol reveals Dak to be a man comfortable in his skin, gracefully inebriated. Stu fights the influence which accentuates his joyless existence.

Dak's easy-going male presence attracts admiring glances from the women patrons. Stu eyes Dak's leg.

STU

By the way, how's the leg?

Dak jumps like a pogo stick on one leg.

The bartender places a drink in front of Dak and motions to an ATTRACTIVE WOMAN at the end of the bar.

Dak signals her over, a graceful, confident woman.

DAK

Right kind of you, Miss.

ATTRACTIVE WOMAN

Looks like you two are having fun.

DAK

Fact is we hate each other's guts.

I'm getting ready to coldcock this
sombitch any minute.

Stu chuckles unbelieving. He looks to the woman.

STU

Do you know who this is?

ATTRACTIVE WOMAN

I'd like to know him better.

STU

Best astronaut in the world. Top rated,
great reflexes, highly intelligent.

DAK

(leaning toward her)

Guess what he does? Fires my ass.

Stu laughs giddily.

STU

Yeah, fired his ass.

She places a hand to Dak's forearm.

ATTRACTIVE WOMAN

For what?

DAK

Yeah, that's what I said, for what?

She slides even closer, Dak's too drunk to notice she's putting the moves on him, but Stu does.

STU

I should be turning in.

DAK

Whoa. Do I have the job?

STU

I'm not leaving 'til you say yes.

Dak smiles at her and winks as if they share a secret. He levels a right hand to Stu's eye knocking him unconscious.

ATTRACTIVE WOMAN

What was that for?

DAK

Gives us some old times to talk about.

The bartender leans over to glance at Stu on the floor.

BARTENDER

For Chrissakes.

Daks raises a reassuring hand.

DAK

Had a little too much to drink.
I'll take care of him.

ATTRACTIVE WOMAN

Looks like you could use some
taking care of yourself.

Dak finally notes her good looks and clues in on her intent

DAK

(eyes distant)

I'm spoken for.

ATTRACTRIVE WOMAN

I don't see anybody.

Dak stands to hoist Stu over his shoulder.

DAK

Would twere true.

Dak staggers off with Stu.

INT. NASA HQ, G-FORCE SIMULATOR - DAY

TWO SCIENTISTS, one THIN, one BALD, monitor the simulator. Dak enters in a spacesuit, helmet in hand.

THIN SCIENTIST
Just finishing up, be a few minutes.

The bald scientist speaks into an intercom.

BALD SCIENTIST
You've reached max G-force. We'll commence shut down.

CALE (VO)
I'm not done.

The thin scientist glances to the other.

BALD SCIENTIST
Sir?

CALE (VO)
How far to the NASA record?

BALD SCIENTIST
You're four percent below.

CALE (VO)
Let's do it.

The scientists close the com channel to consult.

THIN SCIENTIST
Waddy think?

BALD SCIENTIST
Vitals are stable.

THIN SCIENTIST
Whose record is she trying to break?

The bald one glances to Dak, who's expressionless.

DAK
Mine.

CALE (VO)
Don't have all day.

BALD SCIENTIST
Increasing to ninety seven percent

of record... ninety eight... ninety
nine...you OK, Sir?

CALE (VO)

Would you get to one hundred!

Her vitals on the dials begin to waver.

BALD SCIENTIST

Increasing to one hundred. You
now share the NASA G-force record.

The two scientists clap. Dak raises an eyebrow.

BALD SCIENTIST

Commencing shut down.

CALE (VO)

Not yet.

The scientists glance to each other, then exchange a whisper.

THIN SCIENTIST

Should we get clearance for this?

CALE (VO)

If you're having second thoughts, don't.

TO THE MONITOR PANEL

The bald one increases the G-force dial. It creeps to 101,
then 102. Cale's vital signs move from green to yellow edging
toward the red.

THIN SCIENTIST

We're into yellow, Sir.

Cale's voice labors as if speaking with a weight on her chest.

CALE (VO)

What... number?

Dak interrupts.

DAK

One oh six. You made your point.

CALE (VO)

(gritty)

Not... done... yet.

The two scientists exchange a glance, a hand hovers over the
dial. At 107 her vitals fluctuate into red and back to yellow.

BALD SCIENTIST
We're into unknown here, Sir.

CALE (VO)
Get to solid red, then shut it down.

Dak shakes his head.

THIN SCIENTIST
(whispering)
I think we should shut down now.

Dak steps forward to increase the dial for them. At 112 Cale's vitals touch red. The bald one commences shut down.

MOMENTS LATER

Cale steps from the simulator in pain, but she disguises it. Dak steps forward, she strides toward him. As she passes him, she makes a motion like dropping car keys into his hand.

CALE
All warmed up for you.

Dak continues on steely-eyed, without comment.

INT. NASA HQ, A LARGE HANGAR - DAY

Cale examines the exterior of the Mars Life Support Module (LSM). Dak enters, helmet in hand, woozy. She notes his entrance and moves behind the LSM.

Dak comes around the other side toward her.

DAK
Captain Hawkins, I presume?

Cale raises an eyebrow, annoyed.

CALE
Commander Hawkins.

Dak halts, Cale steps forward.

DAK
My apologies, wasn't aware of the promotion.

CALE
Understandable... Captain. You know Stu never cleared you with me.

DAK
As Mission Director he doesn't need to.

CALE
Would've been a nice courtesy.

DAK
Would you've agreed?

CALE
No.

Dak removes a glove, placing it in his helmet. He steps forward, so does Cale.

CALE
Well, maybe.

Dak reaches to his forehead, lingering dizziness.

CALE
How'd you do in there?

DAK
Broke the old record.

CALE
What about the new record?

He steps forward again.

DAK
Thought I'd let it stand.

Cale places a hand to the LSM.

CALE
I see.

He stops to notice the LSM, questioning.

CALE
The LSM. Our home on Mars.

He takes another step toward her.

DAK
Think it's big enough?

CALE
(eying him)
Looks fine to me.

He stops, removing the other glove, slowly, finger by finger.

DAK

Two bunks?

CALE

'Spect so.

DAK

Who gets top?

CALE

Rank.

She removes the hair tie to shake her raven mane. Dak inhales.

DAK

Gonna cut that for the mission?

Cale loosens the neck-high zipper of her suit, revealing the curve of her neck.

CALE

Wasn't planning on it.

DAK

Mission protocol is a buzz cut.

They're now three feet apart.

CALE

Really?

She steps up to Dak to run her hand through his sandy hair.

CALE

It'd be a shame to cut this.

Dak drops his helmet with a thud. Cale's hand slides to the back of his neck. He gently grabs a handful of her hair.

DAK

Likewise.

With a familiar urgency their lips find each other.

CALE

God I missed you.

DAK

Not more than I.

Unzippering each other they stumble into the LSM toward the bunk. They alternate between dominating the other, alpha male meets alpha female.

LATER

Exhausted they lie beside each other on the bunk looking to the one overhead.

DAK

Why don't we take that one out?

Cales laughs, then turns serious.

CALE

I haven't been with a man since you.

DAK

Me, either.

CALE

(flip)

What about a woman?

Dak becomes serious. He cups her face in his hand.

DAK

I haven't stopped thinking of you for one minute. And no, I haven't touched another woman.

CALE

The whole year?

DAK

It's been three hundred seventy eight days and-

CALE

ten hours,

DAK

since our last kiss...goodbye.

With a look, they realize how much each missed the other.

CALE

I'm sorry, Dak.

DAK

I'm sorry, too. It's nobody's fault.

CALE

I never stopped loving you.

DAK

I know, me too.

Cale kisses him vigorously.

CALE

Three months on Mars won't be enough
to make up for this lost year.

DAK

Is that Martian months or Earth?

CALE

Martian.

DAK

Well... that's five and a half
Earth months. Plus transit time.

Dak glances around the interior, serious again.

DAK

It'll be a start.

CALE

I'm hoping it's an eternity.

They pull each other close, to start round two.