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New Moon Rising

by Dan Judd

“T-minus 60 minutes to launch, would passengers make their way to the Marco Polo airlock via the #4 traveller.”

This was it, no backing out now, thought Thomas Calder. Well, he could but then he'd have to face a different reality. One featuring a lot of shouting, his recently ex-wife baying for his blood, releasing the hounds of her extended family and taking him for every last fiver he had left.

11am. The time the divorce papers had dropped on the doormat of their Battersea Power Station luxury flat. Such an archaic, pedestrian method of ending 10 years of married life. The legalities requiring the documents to be franked, dated and delivered by a third party. Both their futures tied up in the past.

His third marriage had begun with such optimism. His legal eagle mate Eddie trying to persuade him to take out a pre-nup.

“But she's the one, Ed. Trust me she'll be the one keeping me in the lap of luxury. A West End lead at the age of 25, the future's guaranteed!”

‘Guaranteed if she moved into anything but acting,’ he now mused.

23rd November 2026. Somehow, he never believed this day would ever come, even when, once accepted, he had begun the training required to take him to his new home. He'd grown up a kid in the 80s when the future was all so futuristic. Shiny, spectacular and mostly silver. Sitting in this waiting room it all seemed so, so mundane. The checking in with just a printout featuring a barcode and endless small print, carrying the same passport he'd used to do all that travelling that he, like millions of others, crammed in post the second pandemic.

No luggage, of course. That was all provided and already there. A new life pre-packed and devoid of any baggage. Antiseptic in its hopefulness. Only the choice of muzak; Fly Me To The Moon by that faded old crooner Chris Martin, reminded him that he wasn't going to Bermuda with the lads.

One night that's all he'd cheated on Myra. He knew she'd been seeing someone else, but work and the intense training schedule meant while she had plenty of opportunity he just didn't have the time to find out the who. Her name was Luna and she lived on the seventh floor of their block. Built high for happiness but forcing them by its measly square footage into a pit of despair. Luna was everything Myra wasn't. Optimistic, supportive and a beacon of hope. For that one night and the texts that followed. She'd do all she could to join him and it was a no-brainer for Thomas to transfer the money required.

T-minus ten minutes. He couldn't explain why he did these things. Throw a chunk of life away but in such a way he never had to have that difficult conversation. He just moved on. Drawing a line under another marriage. He'd stop at three, he thought. At least he'd spent all his capital buying his placement so she'd only get the flat He felt no guilt. She'd yawned whenever he spoke about his work as an agronomist.

Lift off. No amount of training could have prepared him for the rush to the head as the centrifugal force pushed down on him, making him feel small. And that was without looking at the view below.

It only took seconds, but they felt longer. He looked down at the disappearing Earth below him.

'What had he done?' he thought. The affairs, the divorce the money worries; all should have seemed so inconsequential. He was a mere speck. But here he was one of the first ordinary people taking that leap into the unknown. Conducting vital experiments to feed a dying world. He hoped he wouldn't be the last. Dreaming of a life with Luna, Thomas Calder missed the scaly hand clutching for dear life on the wing of the craft, preparing for a bloodier moon landing.