

## Lost in a Dream– by Erin Burnley

Outer space: The physical universe beyond the earth’s atmosphere

Unfortunately, the dictionary doesn’t quite capture the complex and mysterious features of outer space. Ever since my class studied it in the third grade, my dream has been to go to outer space. So naturally, as I drove to see my mother ten years later, the report on the radio interested me ... “any man or woman over the age of 18 could apply for a one-way trip to Mars ...”. On that cold December night, I felt my dream creep slowly into perspective.

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As I pull into the parking lot of River View Nursing Home, I wondered if I should tell my mother about the news on the radio. I decided not to ... my mother’s Alzheimer’s would likely prevent her from remembering my childhood dream anyway.

I climbed the stairs leading to my mother’s apartment, hoping she’ll still remember who I am and that Dad passed away last year.

My mother hesitates after opening the door, but then smiles and exclaims, “Emma!”

“Mom,” I respond and pull her into a hug. She steps back to look me over. I have no idea why as nothing has changed since the last time I saw her. I still have long auburn hair and green eyes. I’m still fairly short and on the skinny side.

We spend a few hours together before I leave.

The moment I get home, I check online about the requirements for the trip to Mars. I meet all of them – the dream comes closer. My hand hovers over the submit button for the entry form. What will my mother think of this? I know that I will be afraid to tell her, but a voice in my head tells me I don’t have to. One day my mother will wake up and she won’t remember that she has a daughter. She won’t even realize I’m gone. I click the submit button.

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Month later, my phone rings. I put down the textbook I am reading.

“Hello?”

A voice on the other end of the phone replies, “Hello. This phone call is in reply to the application form you submitted for the trip to Mars. We would like to interview you as you have made it onto the list of the top 50 most eligible applicants. Do you have a few minutes?”

“Certainly!”

“What convinced you to sign up? After all, it is a one-way trip. There won’t be enough fuel in the spaceship to bring you back to Earth. Are you sure you are willing to do this?” the voice asks.

“I” ... my voice trails off. Why do I want to go? Space has always fascinated me, but something stops me from saying it. There has to be something else that convinced me to go. With dread, I stumble upon the truth. It’s my mother. These last couple of months have been really hard for me. Since my father died, I’m the only one who can take care of my mother. Her Alzheimer’s has gotten a lot worse. I’m so afraid of losing her. I suppose outer space isn’t what interested me. It was the thought of leaving all my problems far behind and never coming back to them again. I realize that I’m just trying to escape my reality and that my childhood dream was just an excuse, a cover up. I realize I’m being selfish and that not only does my mother need me, but I need my mother. This trip isn’t for me.

“I’m sorry. Could you please remove my name from the list of applicants?” I reply finally.

I hang up the phone and head for the nursing home.