

Kids
in
the
space



Kids In The Space

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Independent publication First edition, 2026

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Kids In The Space began its journey in 2019, before the world as we knew it was forever changed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Long before a single note was recorded, a story was born — because to translate a vision into music, that vision first had to exist on paper.

It was not until late 2022 that this book was finally able to take shape, and that would not have been possible without the extraordinary talent of Karol Rodriguez, whose gift for storytelling turned a collection of ideas into something alive. Despite this being her first written work, Karol demonstrated a remarkable ability to capture the essence of every concept, every emotion, and every image this project demanded. Her contribution is, without question, one of the pillars upon which K.I.T.S. stands.

Kids In The Space is, at its heart, a Dantesque story — dark, visceral, and deeply human. A narrative that speaks for itself, yet reveals its fullest dimensions when experienced alongside the album that bears the same name. Together, they are not two separate works, but one single universe.

It is my most sincere hope that this story reaches every person who has ever found meaning in music. That it is read, felt, and carried with them long after the last page is turned. ZE.

PROLOGUE

“Thomi, it’s not TV time anymore, please turn it off and go to bed. That’s an order!” said my mother, trying to snatch the remote control from me.

At that moment, my father, who was sitting beside me, keeping me company while we watched one of my favorite movies, decided to step into the space between my mother and me.

“Let him stay up a bit longer, it’s not that late and he’s on vacation. We’re the ones who should go to bed,” he told my mother in a calm voice.

“You make my rules worthless. Thomi is my son too,” my mother replied.

Without warning, she turned around and snatched the remote from my hands in a matter of seconds.

My father noticed, watched in silence, then lunged to take it back before she could hide it away.

“I already told you — let him stay. We’re going to bed,” my father said.

He grabbed my mother by the arm and steered her away, struggling against all the force she put up to resist his grip.

“Thomi is a child — you can’t let him do whatever he wants!”

That was the last thing my mother said before they went upstairs and locked themselves in their room.

I was able to press play on the movie I had been watching. *Interstellar* — it will always be one of my favorite films. As time passed, I could hear my parents shouting at each other from somewhere upstairs. I couldn’t quite make out what it was about — I had started the argument, but then I heard things about work, a new friend of my mother’s, and everything this new city had brought into all our lives.

Everything has been changing for me. My mother has been more irritable than usual, but my father has been there beside me, present and understanding through everything happening in my life.

The night passed normally. I finished the movie and went to my room to sleep. From a distance, I could see my parents’ room still had the light on, and a noise that was slowly dying down — each time I got closer to say goodnight. But I drifted away instead and followed the hallway to my room.

One of my safest places is these four walls, where I can spend the whole day and not even notice the time. Up top hangs the solar system I built myself — each planet, every detail dangling from the wall, reminding me of the effort I put in for my art exhibition.

I want to close my eyes and rest, to make each day pass faster. I don't like this city. The people are so different; everything feels so far away. "No, you can't do this to us. Thomy still needs us," I hear my father's voice from far away.

"It won't be permanent. I have to go. You'll take care of him," my mother said quickly.

The front door slammed shut. I heard nothing more. It didn't feel real. I got up, rearranged my pillow, and went back to sleep.

The next morning, everything seemed normal. From my room I could see my whole solar system model and, next to it, Messier 31 — a galaxy I had considered my favorite since the day my father explained what galaxies were during a Nat Geo documentary.

Today was the day to take my artwork in again. We were in the finals, and my planetarium model had made the top five. The grand prize was a tour of NASA's facilities — a visit to the John F. Kennedy Space Center would be one of my greatest challenges.

At breakfast, everything was as usual. My father had made my favorite pancakes.

"Thomi, we leave in 10 minutes. Please take everything with you and don't leave anything behind," said my father from across the table. With breakfast finished and my planetarium ready, I left my room

with all my school things. My father was waiting for me inside the car.

The drive to school takes five minutes. Today everything was very quiet — it was strange that my father didn't ask me anything about school, and that even seeing me carry the planetarium, he said nothing. I thought he was about to break the silence.

“Thomi, I have to take care of something for work before I come pick you up. Wait fifteen minutes after the final bell,” my father told me in a farewell tone.

“Okay. Today's the final for the art project,” I said, hoping he'd wish me luck, but the traffic noise didn't leave us time.

“Yes, yes, go on,” my father said, slightly tense.

I grabbed all my things and slammed the door. My father didn't react. The flow of traffic resumed its course.

At the school entrance I saw a poster for the contest to go to NASA. What had happened with my father faded into the background. Seeing my planetarium there reminded me of everything I could achieve through hard work — one of my dreams.

My day went normally. The first three hours were the usual theory classes. After recess, the NASA contest drew ever closer.

Fear was building inside me. The desperate urge to win was going to undo me before the contest even started.

We were all ready. The five finalists stood with their NASA-themed works. And I was there among them. Most of the others were in higher grades — people I don't think I'd ever seen before.

Each person came up to present their piece. We weren't given time to explain how we made it, what it meant, or what we wanted to show. Time flew past, and then the moment arrived to announce the winner.

“We thank all the participants and hope you'll continue entering our future contests. Congratulations, Max!” announced one of the event organizers.

After that, the school day passed normally. I kept waiting for my father, but he was taking far longer than expected. After more than three hours of waiting, I decided to walk home with my artwork. The journey wasn't as long as I had thought.

From a distance I could see that the lights in my house were off — all signs pointing to my parents not being home. When I walked through the door, I could make out my father's silhouette in the living room, sitting down, a beer in hand, and on the floor, shards of a shattered picture frame.

“What the hell is that thing you’re dragging in?” he said abruptly, cutting across my path to my room. I couldn’t find any words.

“Get out of the way — or better yet, make yourself useful and bring me a beer right now,” he said gruffly.

He shoved me aside toward the kitchen, and before I realized what was happening, the force of it was so sudden that my artwork began to fall apart, piece by piece.

“I’m going,” I said, heading to the kitchen. I took the first beer I found. There was no bottle opener, so I grabbed one of the knives so he could open it.

Seconds later I was back in the living room. My father was still agitated, now on his feet, carefully inspecting the model — or what was left of it — slowly pulling pieces off.

With my hands full, I stepped into the space between my father and the model. It happened in an instant. And then, suddenly, my father standing before me began to slowly fade away. I kept registering what was happening around me.

A spray of blood covered me completely. I still didn’t understand what had happened. The blood was slowly spreading across the floor. There was no time for anything — not even a goodbye.

INTRODUCTION

Year 2030. I've just woken up in a psychiatric institution. I traveled for years through space, believing I had reached my destination — Messier 31 — my greatest dream. But here I am, locked in a room like some damned psychopath. I thought I traveled with a girl... yes, that girl. She was the most beautiful woman my eyes had ever seen. Her skin was so fair it burned with the slightest touch of sunlight; her eyes were as blue as the sky; and her hair was darker than a polar night. Maybe she was the love of my life.

I have almost no memory of that journey. I try to remember who I am and what I'm doing here. I think my name is Thomas, but I'm not sure even that is true. The doctors inject me with benzodiazepines every day. The stress, the anxiety, and the depression make life here more exhausting. They say I need a cure for my madness — but I don't know what they're talking about. They call me schizophrenic, but I am well. I am not some sick bastard.

I've managed to make a few friends here: Adam, Nick, Martin, Abel. None of them know why they're here. Adam is a highly respected mechanical engineer. Nick is an artistic architect. Martin is a ruthless businessman, and Abel used to design software for video games.

In here I can't tell day from night. I'm in a padded room where they strap me down for hours so I can sleep. The nurses don't talk to me much. When I ask them who I am and how long I've been here, they just nod and smile. I don't know what kind of sick game this is.

The days simply pass and begin turning into weeks, and I still don't know what's happening here. I try to take things calmly, take my medication, not talk to many people — which leaves me feeling an immense emptiness.

Each week I have sessions with my therapist, a very cordial man. Dr. Andreu is the only psychiatrist who manages to understand me. He has helped me slowly remember the things I lived through. During his sessions I find peace and calm; talking with him is something truly refreshing.

One night I had a panic attack. I remember I couldn't stop screaming. My body collapsed. I cried like a two-year-old. I felt a knot in my throat, a void inside me I didn't know how to fill. My mind felt so fragile. I asked myself: "How do you let your emotions drive you into a corner? How do you let them close in on you and strip you bare?" The nurses entered my room and sedated me completely. When I woke up I found myself isolated, immobile — completely restrained. Then someone came through the door. It was Dr. Andreu.

"Dr. Andreu. What has happened to me?" I asked.

"Don't you remember what you did days ago?" he asked, his face incredulous.

"Days?" I replied, even more disbelieving.

“Yes, days. We’ve had to keep you sedated for six days. You’ve been having nervous episodes, some hallucinations and delusions,” he said calmly, trying to normalize the situation.

“What sort of delusions?” I asked, surprised.

“You kept mentioning NGC 224, or talking about M-31. You were also reciting some coordinates — they started with 41°, or something like that...” he said, completely puzzled but composed.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about, Dr. Andreu. It felt like only a few hours had passed. I don’t know what you mean.”

This is a story of a boy who wanted to be an astronaut. The boy became a man, and his music took him to travel through space.

CHAPTER 1

Seven years earlier...

Every day has been the same for me. The monotony makes getting out of bed in the morning feel pointless — from school to home, and home to school. That’s how I spend the days that are supposed to be the happiest of my life, but they aren’t. My refuge is my room, with all my things, with my whole world.

At six in the morning, my alarm starts going off. After spending almost twenty minutes watching the sunrise and wondering what might exist beyond, I get up, put on my favorite playlist, and go to shower.

For some time now, things haven’t been the same. After my father’s death, our whole family fell apart. That night, nothing made sense again. My mother only comes to the city on special occasions so she won’t leave me alone — otherwise, we each have our own separate lives.

“Thomi, breakfast is ready. I left your monthly allowance in the kitchen. I’m heading out,” my mom calls from the doorway before walking away.

After getting ready, I grab my allowance and say goodbye to Mom. She reminds me how important I am to her, tries to coax out some

news from my life to know how I'm doing, and realizes I've been stable for a long time — more than two years since she last received a notification about a relapse.

Today, like every other day, I put the allowance in my piggy bank, continuing to build toward my future — leaving this place, flying as far away as in *Interstellar*, a film I watched a good while back.

The walk to school is long, but it has given me space to look for ideas, to imagine life somewhere far from here, where I can be free and alone. Nobody knows all the plans I have to go out and discover space — and stay adrift in it forever.

School is about fifteen minutes from my house. Going to prep school doesn't feel worth it to me. None of the important subjects interest me; nothing fills me up or holds my attention. Nothing except the astronomy club — one of the refuges I found to disconnect from my life.

“Hi, Thomi,” said Ari, pointing to the seat she had saved for me.

“Hi, Ari,” I replied, walking over and sitting beside her.

“Mr. Andreu said he'd be a little late today,” Ari said, referring to the person in charge of our private astronomy sessions.

Ari is the only person at school who decided to speak to me on her

noun initiative. We met when I sat the entrance test for the astronomy group. She had already been there two years when I arrived at this school, after moving cities. Later, since both of us showed such strong interest, a filter was applied and only the two of us ended up in a new section with Mr. Andreu.

With him, things were different. He liked to hold classes outside, spending the afternoon sitting on the grass looking at the sky, spotting shapes. We almost always got together on specific days to observe the constellations.

I remember the day I was able to see Messier 31. I was the happiest person in the world. Nobody understood the enormous rush of emotion I felt in that moment. Everyone around me seemed so indifferent that I just wanted them gone — wanted them to leave me alone so I could quietly enjoy the majesty of the universe.

I felt such an incredible bond with that galaxy that from that day on I see Messier 31 at every turn. I left the observatory and could see it in the sky, revealing itself to me.

That day I went over to the house next door, where Adam lived — a classmate of mine. After getting ahead on some homework, we went out onto his terrace, and I kept seeing the same thing.

“It’s very strange to see Messier 31 with the naked eye, especially at this hour. Do you think something is happening in space?” I asked Adam, pointing at the sky, hoping he could see what I was seeing.

“Do you mean the sun? Because that’s the only thing I can see...” he answered, a little confused.

“No, the sun is much higher up. I’m talking about what’s right in front of us — it’s Messier 31,” I said, still pointing so he could see it.

“No, I don’t know what you’re talking about,” he said, following the direction of my hand, but his expression told me he was more disoriented than ever and couldn’t see what I was seeing.

After that, Adam stopped walking to school with me and stopped speaking to me altogether. Months went by, and I came to realize that... I was the only one who could see it. Nobody else could appreciate it the way I did. I never asked anyone again if they could see what I saw.

Adam had been my only friend, and by his reaction when I told him I could see the galaxy, I could only conclude that he thought I was disoriented or “crazy” for asking, and so he pulled away from me entirely.

Coming back to my reality: on the last day of class before vacation, I was in Mr. Andreu’s class, drawing my spacecraft piece by piece — with what felt like a thousand drafts, worn-down pencils, and torn-out pages.

The first thing I had to do was choose a name that would be emblematic. I wrote “Mercury” at the top of the page, and from there

I began sketching out, piece by piece, what my spacecraft would look like. That entire class was devoted to the main blueprints of what would be my future.

“Thomy, what are you doing? I’ve seen you focused on that notebook all day,” said Ari, sitting down beside me, just as I managed to close the cover.

“I’m getting ahead on a project due tomorrow. It’s a drawing assignment,” I told Ari, slipping my notebook with all my sketches into my bag.

“Can I see what you’ve done? Are you drawing a planet?” Ari tried to peek at the pages sticking out.

“No, I’m trying to follow a template they gave us — something like antique gears. I’ll show you later. Do you want to go to our usual spot and eat there? What do you think?” I packed everything into my bag and waited for Ari’s answer.

“Yes, let’s go... We won’t be seeing each other as much now,” Ari replied, downcast.

“Summer always makes things complicated. Let’s get out of here,” I said, and we headed for the door to go to the central park.

For more than four hours we talked about life, waited for the day to grow dark so we could look at the stars and discuss space. I wanted to

tell her all my plans — to tell her about Mercury, about my journey through space, about Messier 31 that accompanied me every day. But... everything seems simple in my mind and so complicated in the minds of others.

“It would be wonderful to see the stars up close — to go out into space and witness everything we once imagined, orbiting the earth. That would be a true dream,” said Ari, gazing at the Great Bear, one of the constellations we almost always watched.

“It’s the dream of many people — to see how magnificent space is with your own eyes. With all the technological advances we see today, it wouldn’t be so strange if someday we set off for Mars,” I replied.

“We’d have to save up a whole lifetime to go. So what were you actually drawing in class?” Ari asked again.

“Nothing important. It was just an art assignment. But in that notebook I also have some drawings of my favorite planets, you know...” I answered, trying to dodge the subject again.

After more star-gazing, we each went home. I said goodbye to Ari knowing I might not see her again — but with a feeling that she might come with me someday.

Summer had begun, and the only thing I wanted was to devote one hundred percent of my time to my spacecraft. During my classes I had been making sketches to get a rough sense of what “Mercury” would look like.

That's what I decided to call it — after googling names of well-known spacecraft, strange planets, northern lights, galaxies, constellations, stars, and everything space-related, I settled on Mercury. Its meaning carries great weight for me.

Online I found what would be the perfect prototype for my spacecraft: it would need everything necessary to survive in space. A space shuttle — important for protecting the ship from the heat generated when crossing atmospheric barriers, and for withstanding the extreme temperatures found on the different planets of the solar system.

An orbital maneuvering system would be needed to enter and exit orbit. To launch a rocket into space, I would need two tanks: the first with liquid fuel, and the second with liquid oxidizer — together they would produce an explosion to propel the spacecraft into the sky.

And at that point I came across Newton's Third Law, which states that for every action there is a reaction of equal magnitude but in the opposite direction. For this reason, a cylindrical chamber would be needed to direct the force downward so the rocket could launch vertically.

From the outset I knew it wouldn't be easy. The entire construction process would take a great deal of time, but with some plans already drawn up, it wouldn't be so complicated — or at least, that's what I thought at the time, not yet knowing the effort it would take to fulfill my dream.

With all that information, and with the crew module that would allow me to pilot the ship — adding all the necessary controls for proper operation, including gravity, fuel, directional, and storage systems — the design was taking shape.

Finally, the service module, important for performing maneuvers in space, monitoring vital signs, and carrying consumables such as water, oxygen, nitrogen, and other provisions.

I was always finding materials I could use. My neighbor Abel was a mechanical engineer who had worked at NASA — he dedicated his whole life to researching missions, materials, and other elements. From childhood I watched him leave in his uniform and marveled at his work. Now he spends his days experimenting and discarding his failed attempts.

My room filled up more and more with everything I brought in. With many tin cans, countless sleepless nights, and weeks without rest, I was able to finish my spacecraft with Abel's help — guided by what my mind was revealing to me and by the sketches I created each night. During the process I decided to add something extra: I wanted Ari to accompany me from afar but be there with me in some indirect way. So I built her a space inside my ship.

All my effort bore the fruit needed to set off through space, to orbit the earth, to see the constellations, and to be free. In less than two days I will be able to fulfill my dream with my spacecraft — I'll be able to leave my room, but this time for another world.

The days pass slowly. From a distance I've been able to hear Ari softly knocking at my front door, wanting to know I'm all right.

"Thomi, are you in there?" Ari says, standing outside my house.

Since the last day of school, when vacation started, I hadn't seen Ari. I know she's the only person in the world to whom I would tell everything about my journey, my dreams, and about Messier 31.

But... I don't want her to think I'm crazy, and pull away from me — though we're already drifting apart, and will be further apart than ever. She will, indirectly, be my anchor to the earth.

Back to reality: with Ari's voice in the background, I chose not to answer, so her visits to my door wouldn't become a habit. I watched her walk away from a distance, but held onto the hope of seeing her again.

Down in the basement, I inspected my spacecraft. It was impressive — with the whole structure I had always hoped to build one day. Looking at every blueprint, every important component, I felt that this ship, however small it might be, could become my home for a long time.

I also managed to pull from the basement some items I used to use for camping. I had to make a few modifications so that neither heat nor cold could get in directly, incorporating a barrier similar to the one I used on the spacecraft.

I have a list of everything I need for the journey — survival kits I learned to use during a school vacation course. I already have some knowledge of the elements a person needs to live on another planet. Movies give people a basic understanding of astronauts and space travel. Googling opens up new things, along with different cases of successful off-orbit navigation: the cabins used to leave the earth, the timelines, the oxygen levels, and much more that any enthusiast could learn.

During my first tour of NASA, I realized that place absorbed me — that I should have been there long ago, when my victory was stolen. At NASA I felt like I was on another world, another planet, in solitude, silence, freedom, and the happiness of leaving behind, once and for all, this country that holds no good memories for me.

Now, with a few things already in place, only one thing comes to mind: the line from the movie *Gravity* that I keep in my most-starred notes.

“What’s the thing you like most about space?” says Matt Kowalski.

“The silence. I could get used to it,” replies Dr. Ryan Stone.

One of the scenes I have recalled many times over the years, no matter how long ago I first saw the film. It always comes back, and it gives me that peace I need to leave here.

Another world is waiting for me. Andromeda will be one of my safest places. Every night I have spoken to my future, losing myself in the lights, feeling the happiness and freedom of being at home, of being happy outside these four walls. But... in that future, Ari is also there, though many times I have doubted it.

After many months everything is ready. The dates align with what I planned from day one of this dream, each one pushing the possible launch date a little further away.

I remember that one of the first spacecraft to orbit Jupiter was NASA's Galileo, launched in 1989 — taking approximately six hundred days just to fly past and more than six years to enter orbit.

With the engines I have and the calculations I've been doing all this time, I believe I would spend less time in orbit — I hope to take less than half that, with all the new technology I've managed to acquire, which can guarantee more kilometers per minute than was possible years ago.

I want to reach NGC 224, plunge into it, and see with my own eyes the features of the whole galaxy: the spiral structure, the globular clusters grouping huge numbers of stars, the interstellar material, the planetary nebulae, the supernova remnants, and the galactic nucleus.

With everything clear and each item crossed off my list — which I decided to call “Astral Journey” — I count every item I have and every item I'm still missing. My suit I found in a vintage shop; supposedly

it belonged to an astronaut — I asked for it as a Christmas gift a year ago. I had to make some adjustments, but it truly is an astronaut suit, more formally known as an extravehicular suit, which protects against heat, cold, radiation, and the complete absence of atmospheric pressure in space.

The suit has everything I wanted and everything I need to survive: a visor helmet that fits onto the suit, including evacuation systems, gloves, mountable sleeves, and most importantly, the life-support system that guarantees my safety should any crisis arise. Also essential are the batteries to recharge the suit's systems — something I factored in, obtaining some that don't need recharging.

With everything ready, I review it all one more time. The journey from Earth to space can take around ninety minutes at ten thousand kilometers per hour to orbit the earth. I expect to take less than the standard time — my ship is built to reach higher speeds, which would get me to Messier 31 faster.

After a sleepless night knowing that in less than eight hours my long-awaited journey will begin — in the small hours of December 31st, the day my life takes a different and definitive course, the day I can finally fulfill all my dreams and see with my own eyes how magnificent space is, and how inexplicable my life up there will be, far from my troubles and restlessness.

I keep looking around me and I still can't believe it! I can't believe it! At last I'll be in another world, beside the planets I love so much.

I leave a few notes so as not to arouse suspicion, and keep arranging each thing, each object, each lever.

With everything ready and less than an hour to go, I'm in my garden looking at the sky, drinking what my body needs to prepare itself and endure everything this journey will bring along the way.

With my favorite music playing in the background, I walk through my entire house. There I can see how galaxies are forming and coming to life — a sign telling me it was time to leave, time to go, that space was calling me to fly and enter it.

Inside my spacecraft everything necessary is already in place — every item on my list is there. Breathing deeply, I step into the spacecraft, leaving everything behind: memories and Ari, a world with too few good people.

Seated in my chair, I arrange all the controls. With my hand on the console, I set the direction to launch and leave the earth. With the coordinates entered, I press the button and confirm takeoff.

After a while, I'm propelled by the full force of the pressure — experiencing firsthand everything I've seen in the movies, leaving behind everything I once loved, guided only by what will always make me happy. I don't know if this is my undoing, but I wanted to try. From the start I could see the stars accompanying me, and my favorite planets in the universe drawing ever closer.

CHAPTER 2

Ninety-five minutes — that was the total time it took me to reach space. The thrust, the propellers, and sheer determination were the ingredients that made my departure — somewhat improvised as it was — feel so perfect.

My body thrown backward, adrenaline coursing through my veins, my mind blank and focused — all of it made this moment something singular. A current ran through my entire body.

Once in orbit, I realized how quickly the time had passed and that my calculations had come out better than in any movie. Seeing everything from afar, feeling the silence and solitude — this was the place I had always wanted to be. I headed toward Messier 31, very slowly, leaving everything aside, following Thomi — who for so long had been hidden, not speaking, not smiling, not feeling.

From here, in space, I can see from a distance everything that was my life: an empty planet, with empty, incomplete, and broken people. Shattered families, alcohol and drugs. Only a handful of people managed to fill me and earn a place in my heart and my memories.

“Thomi, don’t leave me,” Ari said very softly — a memory of all the small moments I’d lived with her.

In the midst of this, I realize Ari isn't with me. I tried to find her and understand how I could hear her — how, being so far away without her, I heard her speak and address me alone.

In the middle of nowhere, I came to understand it was simply my mind playing tricks on me, trying to pull me back to the past, to a place where unhappiness was part of my days.

The memory of that night makes every person, every city, and every space feel like it's pulling me back, wanting to keep me forever within my four walls.

Time in space has been very relative. I don't know exactly how much longer it will take to reach my destination, nor how long I've been traveling through space. From here I can observe many planets, many galaxies, many shooting stars passing alongside my ship.

Everything is exactly as I dreamed it from the window of my house — all the things I used to see when I woke up on the roof, things I never imagined I would actually witness.

I'll turn my attention to reviewing the ship's controls. I hear some strange noises that put me on edge. I hope I don't get stranded in space without reaching one of my destinations.

“BOOM!” A noise from the control panel pulls my thoughts back to the ship. A red light begins to make itself known and flickers slowly.

9In a matter of seconds, adjusting a few buttons and trying to fix the fault showing on the panel, I managed to sort everything out and the red light began to fade.

I can see Messier 31 getting closer. By my calculations, landing could take place in less than an hour — but I don't know if I have that much time to hold on, to keep going.

Before me, I can see how magnificent everything is from the outside: stars everywhere; Cepheids whose brightness could blind me at any moment, their brilliant light a thousand times greater and deeper than the sun.

“Messier 31 — a galaxy located 2.5 million light-years away, similar to our Milky Way,” I recall in my mind the phrase with which Mr. Andreu described this galaxy, as I sink deeper into a world that is familiar to me, though I've only known it from the distance of web pages, movies, and Google searches.

From a distance you can see the galaxy's halo — an envelope believed to be made of gas that surrounds Andromeda and the Milky Way. An envelope that pulls very slowly, gently enough to draw me out of my thoughts, leaving my gaze fixed, gradually losing the thread of my direction.

Without warning, a noise breaks me from that trance, and my ship begins to be slowly drawn toward the halo encircling the two galaxies — an unsafe maneuver that will put me off course, carrying me

further away, pulled by a force that was not in my plans.

Slowly I see more and more of what surrounds the galaxies up close. The miniature things I saw from far away are becoming monumental, making my ship and me nothing more than a grain of sand in the dark expanse of space.

It happened in a matter of seconds: without warning, the ship's controls began to flicker. The pull of the halo had been so powerful that a part of the ship — not a critical one — was blasted off into space, flung faster than a shooting star.

The sheer scale of it all means my thoughts are no longer what they usually are. All my dreams and ideals about space begin to crumble slowly.

Fear is beginning to take hold of me. My hands start to tremble very slightly, and my eyes are closing from the brightness radiating from the stars.

My mind begins to build different scenarios — one in which staying here is not a choice but rather the moment, the force, and everything that has happened conspire to make getting out of here impossible.

The globular cluster is nothing like it appears in the movies. The grandeur and majesty of that entire collection of stars orbiting a galactic nucleus is beyond real.

Everything I've seen throughout this journey has been beyond real — that is the only word that could adequately describe everything I am seeing and feeling. My air supply, which was nearly exhausted at liftoff, has now normalized, and I feel much calmer. Everything I planned and the tools I used to build my ship are still working perfectly. The non-essential ones are the ones that have been showing failures throughout the journey.

The food I ordered from Amazon, and all the recipe recommendations I found for “Space Food,” have worked to keep me nourished along the way. The food containers are small, but their contents are enough to feed me once a day and keep me full, without any hunger crises.

The supplies I brought on the ship are precisely measured — I believe that with them I could last more than a year eating in space, and even longer.

As a child I never imagined I would be where I am now — seeing space with my own eyes, navigating the galaxy in search of Messier 31. Since movies, video games, and my scale model, a bitter taste had lingered. The contest I didn't win, my favorite model that was destroyed, and everything it caused made my dreams feel distant and unreal. But only inside my four walls was I able to idealize, recreate, and believe that everything could come true exactly as I wanted.

“Thomi, get out of there and go now,” this phrase is the only thing I

remember from that day. After that, we had to move again to another place, another school, and even a new family.

My mother never forgave me, and I — I just fought for what I wanted so badly. My memories are beginning to take shape. No one would believe I'm here, not even Ari, not Mr. Andreu, and certainly not Adam, nor Nick, nor Abel.

Back to my reality: the ship's seat is pressing against me more and more. I had built some armrests to rest my hands during sleep without accidentally touching any controls. But the force they're now exerting has been much greater — I managed to free myself as best I could, and the marks on my wrists are beginning to show; the pain from the pressure is making itself felt.

Looking carefully at my wrists, out of nowhere I begin to sense a reflection — something that could block my path. Out of nowhere, a shadow — a figure I can't make out — is approaching slowly.

I can't understand what's happening, or what this object is at fewer than three hundred meters away. I could describe it as a cluster of stars forming together, but this time the arc shape is gone — I might say it has a human shape, but it doesn't.

From a distance I can make out something like a head — circular — and beneath it, something like a spine, with more than six parts connected to it.

In the midst of this, I decide to change course. I don't know what to expect if I get closer to that figure I see in the distance. I suddenly change the controls and decide to turn around, not wanting to come face to face with it. As best I could, I managed to maneuver and make a clean turn — so smooth it didn't knock me off balance, nor any of the objects stored behind me in the ship.

That figure — which I still can't describe, so magnificent and dark as it is — continued on its way, but this time at a slower speed than when it was approaching the ship.

Without realizing it, darkness took over all of space. Only a few stars still glimmered, and something black I could see deep in the distance, at the very limits of space.

After the figure passed through, in a matter of seconds everything lit up and the usual colors returned. The fear that had taken hold of me slowly disappeared.

What I just experienced, I never expected it — not in movies, not in books — nothing like this has ever been described. I don't know if it's a person, some specter, some shadow, but I only know it is powerful enough to darken all of space as it passes.

I don't know what other effects it carries, but it could have the strength to destroy any object or even a planet that crosses its path.

Out here I can't tell day from night. I don't know exactly how long I've been off the planet — I could estimate around six days, judging by the intervals when I've felt heavy or drowsy, wanting to rest and close my eyes.

Lately when I close my eyes, I only remember things from the past. I've heard screams, I've heard my name many times called in different voices. I've only managed to identify Ari's voice once, and another time what I think could be Mr. Andreu's.

These lapses reduce my sleep time instantly. Hearing those voices wakes me up and makes closing my eyes again feel like an almost impossible mission.

Everything has been new for me. It's incredible to think that there was a time when I prepared myself mentally — watching all my favorite space movies, reading and googling everything related to space, the universe, stars, planets, celestial bodies, and more — believing all of it would ready me for these moments.

Mr. Andreu's classes are losing their meaning. The theory and the examples pale in comparison to everything I've seen so far — starting with that figure and the light radiating from the stars, which makes looking at them a near-impossible task, capable of blinding me if I stare for more than five minutes.

Fatigue is slowly overtaking me. The weight of my eyelids is becoming real; by my calculations, I've probably gone more than two days

without sleep. My body feels heavier by the minute, my hands no longer have the strength they once had.

The assisted control is activated, following the route to Messier 31, with an estimated arrival of more than two days. Then, with my hands resting on the seat, my eyes lose focus and everything goes dark. In my thoughts, space keeps growing darker, until I can no longer tell what is passing through my mind. From far away I can see how, out of nowhere, the strange figure that had passed before reappears and quickly approaches the place where I am.

Sitting alone, with no way out, I find myself trapped within four black walls, unable to leave.

“NOO, YOU CAN’T!” A voice I don’t recognize tries to say something.

In my mind everything unfolds very slowly, and I can’t understand what is happening around me. The strange figure is right in front of me with barely a meter and a half between us.

Suddenly, flashes of light begin bursting from nowhere, making me curl up on the floor, hands wrapped around my legs, drawing myself in tighter and tighter.

“NOO, YOU CAN’T BE HERE — THIS SPACE IS NOT YOURS!” the strange figure says to me.

Everything begins to make more sense. My heart tries to leap from my chest, and my heartbeats grow faster and faster. I wanted to stand up and run. My first instinct was to press myself tighter against the wall, close my eyes, and scream.

I return to reality. My eyes snap open and I look around, surveying everything — nothing is dark anymore. The strange figure is gone. Everything I saw was part of my imagination — one of those dreams that makes closing my eyes again feel impossible.

But... the fear stays with me. Knowing that figure could one day speak and address me the way it did in the dream means my peace is gone, my eyes don't want to close anymore, and my path could become complicated — I could lose it.

From far away I can see all of space: shooting stars, clusters, halos, the Milky Way, Messier 31, and something with a shape and color so imposing it could be a black hole.

I reconnect with what I've wanted, remembering why I'm here. My dreams regain their meaning and take hold of me, pushing aside what could be the worst nightmare of my life — though nothing compared to what happened more than ten years ago.

Out of nowhere, the same strange noise that I'd heard before returns, this time even louder, pulling me away from all my thoughts and directing me straight to the control panel.

“BOOM!” The red light begins to flicker again, and this time it won’t stop. It seems that one of the ship’s turbines is losing all power.

In the middle of the maneuver, the control panel indicates I should change course to one that is longer but requires less power from the ship. This would allow me to reach my safe place — the one I’ve been pursuing for a while — without any more problems like those I’ve encountered along the way.

I don’t know if it’s the right choice. I would arrive in more than four days; the original route was set for less than two, with no complications — though it did pass through a meteor shower, nothing out of the ordinary.

But the noise kept going, and the alert showing failures in less than five hundred meters meant my course had to change. Following the panel’s recommendations, I took the longer but safer path.

Suddenly the panel returned to its normal state. The noise faded away slowly and then disappeared altogether; the same happened with the flickering red light. The new route brought everything back to its natural state, and peace returned to me.

This path brought the Milky Way closer — to me it’s like a river of stars that could leave anyone dumbstruck. It has a spiral shape and is believed to contain more than a hundred billion stars.

-“According to many studies, it is believed that within the Milky Way there is a black hole called ‘Sagittarius A’, which weighs more than four million times the mass of the Sun,” I recalled a quote from Mr. Andreu in a group class. Something that in these moments I was in the process of confirming, seeing from a distance part of what could be the black hole residing within this galaxy.

Still, everything feels unreal — something I could never have described before, something that used to exist only in classroom lessons and scientific research about space, the cosmos, and what was believed to exist beyond our ecosystem, beyond our Earth.

The journey has been slower than normal, passing through a river of stars that continues on its way without pause: cosmic dust, shooting stars — the unreal keeps making perfect sense. Getting lost in this space would be more than a dream to me. My life on Earth had no meaning: alone, without feelings, without a family, excluded from people. None of that was a life for me.

Space has become my safe home. Day by day I will decide if it’s worth going back to Earth.

“Thomi, come with me, follow my path,” I hear Ari’s voice in space. Out of nowhere, a path begins to come into view. Something in me senses that Ari is in space — something impossible.

Nothing makes sense. My course stays the same. Ignoring everything I hear — which to me is just a game of my own mind — Ari’s voice has been my companion on this journey. My imagination wants her to be here with me, nothing more.

“Thomi, don’t leave me.” That voice begins to feel real, more real than any of the others before it. Suddenly I sense that Ari is somewhere in the distance, in one of the halos. I feel that the shadow I see is the one speaking to me — that shadow could be her.

My course stays the same, with a stop at the halos — something that wouldn’t alter my path but would let me see Ari again. That person I left behind on Earth is now here.

CHAPTER 3

Dear Thomi,

Since you left, nothing has been the same. This last summer has been the most boring of all. The days pass more slowly; the stars and the clouds hold no shapes. The only thing that motivates me is going back to school, attending classes together, and being outside with Mr. Andreu.

I don't understand why you haven't answered the messages I've left since last week. I've come to your house and no one responds. All I can hear from far away is your doorbell echoing through the walls — telling me the house is more and more empty, without life, without anyone inside to let me in.

The bedroom window, which was always open waiting for the sunset, watching the planets through your telescope, has been closed for more than a week now — no light and no one inside.

All the notes you left on the desk and the drawing are the only things I have, reminding me of the plans we had to go to space — an endless place, somewhere the two of us could be happy.

Space movies don't make any sense anymore. It's very strange to watch them alone, when the two of us used to be together looking out at the infinity of space, the stars, and everything we could do without being on this dull earth.

I hope that wherever you are, you are well. I want to see you soon, and I hope we go back to classes with Mr. Andreu. I saw him two days ago. He asked about you, and whether we could have some kind of class — but I didn't know what to say, because in those moments, just like now, you don't answer my messages, calls, or voicemails.

Sincerely yours,
Ari.

Dear Thomi,

Things here on Earth have been difficult. Since that vacation when you stopped talking to me, stopped answering me, and stopped going to Mr. Andreu's classes, everything has been very slow. Nothing makes any sense to me. I thought coming back to school would be the moment we'd see each other again, but it's been almost two days and there's no sign of you. The teachers seem indifferent to your absence.

Mr. Andreu doesn't come to school as often as he used to. The group classes have been postponed until you return, because to him, a class with only me would be pointless — though honestly it wouldn't make much sense without you either. After leaving class I went to your house. Everything has been very slow.

Since I saw you drawing what looked like a spacecraft prototype, I've decided to get more involved — searching for everything related to

ships and working more closely with someone from NASA.

From a distance I could see Block A near your house. I decided to go that way. I decided, once again, to go looking for you — to find you, to see you again, and to make things the way they used to be.

Your street is like all the others: large two-story houses with spacious front yards. A gate more than two meters tall that gives an air of grandeur. What makes your house different is that it's the only one with an unkempt lawn — overgrown, with dead plants and everything in disarray.

I walked my eyes around the house again, finding the same sight as always: a solitary house with closed windows.

I saw no sign that would tell me otherwise.

I went up and rang the bell. After a minute it was normal that no one responded. Thomi, I was hoping you would come out through that door.

Suddenly, a tall woman with fair skin and chestnut hair opened the door and stepped outside. I don't know who she is — I suppose she could be your mother.

“Hello, do you need something?” the woman asked me in an inquiring tone.

“Good morning. I’m Ari. I’m looking for Thomi — we both study at the same school,” I replied. The woman slowly averted her gaze and looked somewhere else, as if she were lost.

“Hello, Ari. Thomi isn’t here. He’ll be back in about a month,” the woman replied, slightly uncomfortable, slowly closing the door. I thanked her, turned around, and left.

Through all of this I noticed that woman looked sad, exhausted — so much so that she seemed disheveled and somewhat drawn. Her vacant look made me sense something wasn’t right.

What I do know is that I don’t know what has happened to you or if you’re all right, but from all of this, I have no clear answer.

Sincerely yours,
Ari.

Dear Thomi,

I’m on my way to see you. The days have been difficult for me, and I’ve decided to set out and go looking for you. I managed to find all your notes and speak to the person who was able to help you — Abel. A prototype — something that seemed unreal — was the only thing that could save me. Without you the world would have no meaning. I knew your return wouldn’t be so soon from the time I went back to

your house and the emptiness felt the same. But... this time nobody came to the door.

From that moment I began my search, with those small clues that could help me — help me understand what had happened to you, why you disappeared so quickly, and why the woman I saw that day looked so worn, as if her face reflected some recent loss or regret.

With your notes everything made sense. I understood everything that had happened that night when you were just a child. I understood that your world was never going to be this one, and your time here had long been running out.

Following the same route I decided to leave from your backyard — all of this thanks to the movies, the research, and everything you had been carefully recording in order to build that journey.

You wrote about me as if you had wanted to tell me. It reminds me of that day when you were drawing something — you looked so focused that all I wanted was to see what you were doing. The dedication and concentration you had was unlike anything I'd ever seen in you. Discovering what that was so I could understand you and talk to you was all I wanted.

“Thomi, what are you doing? I've seen you focused on that notebook all day,” I said, approaching him and asking about his notebook.

“I’m getting ahead on a project due tomorrow. It’s a drawing assignment,” he answered, quickly hiding everything he had on his desk and closing the notebook first.

“Can I see what you’ve done? Are you drawing a planet?” I asked him again.

That day you didn’t show me anything, and you didn’t give me time to ask anything either. I could only see the fear in your eyes. But something happened that you didn’t know about. A page slipped out of your notebook — something that could have been a spacecraft. I could see the different crossed-out names I suppose you were trying for the ship. In the end the only one I could decipher was “Mercury.”

That memory helped me understand a great many things. Everything began to make sense — so much so that I am writing this letter on board what could be a prototype of “Mercury,” a test vessel that the former NASA worker had built by watching everything you were doing with yours.

From here I can feel the fear of liftoff, of that thrust that would take me away from this earth, that would bring me closer to you.

We’ll see each other sooner than you think.

Sincerely yours,

Ari.

Dear Thomi,

Time in space has been very relative. Nothing has meant as much to me as this. I don't know exactly how much time has passed since I left through that backyard and left everything behind.

As you know, keeping track of time is not something I do — but everything has passed so quickly. It's been better than anything I had planned before. The colors, the stars, space, the planets, and the shooting stars make everything feel meaningful.

I remember how much I loved Mr. Andreu's classes — going outside to look at all the stars, sitting on the grass and finding shapes in the sky in as little time as possible.

With you everything was new; I learned more and more. In those classes I understood what it was you wanted, or which place might be where I'd find you.

“Do you know how to find the Andromeda galaxy?” you asked me once while looking at the sky.

My answer at the time was no — I didn't know how to see that galaxy. I remember that day you taught me how to find it and how you had seen it many times.

“It's not as complicated as it sounds. The best time to find it is

between one and two in the morning; it's almost always located to the north," you said.

Looking at the sky together, you gave me tips and random facts I found fascinating.

"The best part is that you can't see it with the naked eye from the city. You need to go somewhere away from the noise and the people — somewhere like the countryside," you said.

You recalled that your perfect plan was to go nearly every weekend to a nearby farm where you could always see it. You talked about a triangle of stars.

"If you want to orient yourself as a beginner, find the Summer Triangle — Messier 31 is very nearby. That's one of the tricks people recommend," you told me, and you also talked about going there together one day.

That day I understood you would be there. The gleam in your eyes made it clear it was something you truly wanted — something that, at the time, I couldn't fully grasp would become one of your happy places, that it was a dream.

That's why I knew the route I needed to take was toward that place. That's why, in this moment, I'm watching from a distance what could be the Milky Way — what would be a point near the place where I might find you.

Sincerely yours,
Ari.

Dear Thomi,

The journey has been very complicated. I hoped to see you at the end of my path, but everything has become difficult. A figure I cannot describe caused something strange to happen to my ship — the controls started going haywire, the functions began to change, and some components started to break down.

Drifting through these places, I was able to see everything you had written in the notebook: the lunar clusters, the halos, and other elements that make up all of space.

Having lost all sense of time, I don't know how long I've been searching for you. I had hoped you would be drifting through space, that you'd be very close by or on the same route as me. But all my attempts have failed.

I thought fear would take hold of me, but at this point I haven't felt it. It stayed behind, down below, with everything I left there.

I got close to what could be the Milky Way. The black hole is so imposing that the ship felt drawn toward it, and my breathing shot up to a thousand at that moment.

With all my strength I forced a break from the course I was on, and this caused all the controls to spin out of control without my realizing it.

From a distance I could see the halos that surround it. That became one of the closest and safest points I could reach in that moment. I find myself here, in this place, with no sense of where I am. I believe it's a halo.

The provisional ship no longer exists. The journey here caused it to fail, and in a matter of seconds it exploded, leaving me with nothing to get out of here.

Sincerely yours,
Ari.

Dear Thomi,

I still can't tell day from night — perhaps such a thing doesn't exist here and I'm only now realizing it. I feel like I did during that one summer, cut off from everything, within four walls where the passing of my days was nothing more than a change in date.

I thought I saw you in the distance, when something that looked like a spacecraft went drifting through space. It passed so quickly that I

tried to call out to you, but in a space like this it's impossible for something like that to be heard.

The shooting stars have been my favorites. Seeing them up close, all the time, has been so astonishing that I'm still learning every time a star races past me.

I don't feel unsettled. But my wrists show some traces of the damage done to me throughout the journey, and especially from the final impact.

You know, this time hasn't felt so long. Seeing everything from here, waiting for the moment you might pass by and see me, makes my eyes never want to close.

Sincerely yours,

Ari.

I think I won't need to keep writing all these letters. Deep inside I feel that someone else is with me, that company is slowly drawing near.

In my mind all I want is for Thomi to be here with me, to be on his way. From here I try to call out to him, to tell him I'm here, that he can come, that we can be together in a happy place.

I keep fixing my gaze on what could be a horizon, which is growing clearer and clearer with what I believe is a black hole at its center — imposing, breaking with everything that makes up space, pulling so strongly that my gaze stays lost in it.

Suddenly, something is moving toward me. From a distance I still can't make out what it is, but it's most likely heading straight here.

Everything happened so fast that I can't explain what's unfolding before me. I don't know if my mind is playing tricks on me, but to me it looks like a ship — a ship where Thomi might be.

My pleas would be answered if everything I feel is true — if that object drawing closer is “Mercury.”

It was in a matter of seconds that I confirmed it was indeed a ship landing near me.

My eyes closed at once, and I didn't know what might come out of there. All I wished for was that Thomi would be the one to step out and come toward me.

What felt to me like more than ten minutes passed, and no one came out. No one. Until, at a certain moment, a hatch opened — and I saw him. My eyes met his and yes, I knew.

Neither of us could understand what was happening, why we were there, or how he, from such a distance, could have heard me.

“I found you,” Thomi said when we were less than a meter apart.

“You found me,” I answered.

Everything was so unreal that neither of us knew what was happening. So much so that Thomi, with his hands, began to run them all over my face and through my hair — making sure I was real, that I wasn't just another one of his mind's games.

“I can't believe this. I can't believe you're here,” Thomi said, gazing intently at everything around us.

The two of us drew closer and closer.

“You're the same as ever. Your skin is still as white as snow — I still can't believe it,” Thomi said, astonished by everything he was seeing. I was there with him, in that space away from everything that could hurt us both, finally happy in that place.

Thomi still couldn't take in everything that was happening.

At that moment I was able to hand him all the letters I had managed to write while he was gone, while I had stayed behind on Earth missing him. I told him about the prototype, how I had managed to get here, and how now that I was here, I had no way to get around — because everything I had was burned up in the failures.

We sat on the halo taking in everything around us, began remembering our games, and looked for the possible shapes in the stars from there — this time without needing to see them from the grass and the sky.

Everything was very new. Company had returned to me; my calm and my safe place were here.

Thomi told me everything he had been through and what his final destination was — which was also mine. I wanted to be with him and to know more about the immensity of it all.

So much so that, after a time, we decided to leave. But this time in “Mercury.” The space was very tight, but we could go together to Messier 31 and stay there for a good long while.

From here I could appreciate the Milky Way up close, all the planets and celestial bodies that make up what is space — life in another place, the unreality I saw in movies.

The coordinates were already set in the console, and together we readied ourselves to enjoy a journey that would have one single destination, with one single ending for the two of us. An unreal ending. A dreamed-of ending.

CHAPTER 4

The two of us in Andromeda — who could believe it. My impulse had taken me to the halos, and I never expected that she, my Ari, would be there. One of my greatest treasures is now here with me, in my happy place. The one thing that bound me to the earth, that I had lamented leaving behind so much, is here with me now.

The journey was something I never imagined, despite all the dangers and all the failures. Everything worked out perfectly. Ari was able to rest the whole way, and her blue eyes began to shine again seconds before our final landing.

The look of surprise and wonder on her face as she takes in everything around her is like something out of a fairy tale — like when she used to watch all the documentaries that Mr. Andreu would play in our classes.

Together we unloaded the objects I had been careful to store and protect so that we could enjoy them and make proper use of them. We were both still so dumbfounded that silence became part of us — but it wasn't uncomfortable, nor was it new. It was the silence of pure admiration.

“Come, we can look at everything we want,” I said to Ari.

“Yes, this is so much better than the movies,” Ari said, watching everything passing close to us.

Here we could stay for a long time. All my provisions that I had once thought would be more than enough will now be just right, to spend a good stretch of time here — and even more so now that I will have someone to share them with.

Everything was unreal — space and her, here together, was more than a dream for me. It was something I thought I could never make possible. With her I feel such peace; she always listens and makes my hardest moments more bearable.

“We could stay here for a long time,” Ari said, fixing her eyes on mine.

“Do you know that time here is very relative?” I asked Ari.

“Relative or not, I love being here. I didn’t know how much I would,” Ari said, settling into what would serve as a makeshift tent where we could rest.

I think time here has passed very slowly, always finding a different topic to talk about, looking at the possible places we could explore while here, watching the horizon in the distance — somewhere we would have to go one day — and also making out what we believed to be the Milky Way far away.

Afterward, with Ari sleeping in my arms, I was able to feel that peace I had needed so badly — that peace I had longed for so many years.

“Thomi, come back to us,” I heard a voice from a distance, accompanied by what felt like a stabbing in my head.

Closing my eyes I was able to return to my reality and pull myself together from what had happened. To me it was just one of those nightmares I’d had days before — those memories invading my mind that are never capable of leaving me in peace, of letting me continue with what would be my new life.

A life without prejudice. A life free from a discriminatory society. A new and renewed life, where I could be happy, where I wouldn’t feel those judgmental stares again.

“When were you going to tell me?” Ari said, looking at the ship.

“Tell you what?” I said, trying to make sense of her question.

“All of this — your journey, the ship, and Messier 31,” Ari asked again, and I understood what she meant.

“Before summer I was going to tell you, but I couldn’t find the right words to explain all of this to you. And no, I’m not crazy,” I answered Ari — what to me was my truth.

“No, you’re not. This goes far beyond reality,” Ari said.

The two of us stayed there longer, taking in all the panorama before us — the grandeur of every single thing we saw, and how small we could become if something were to happen to us here.

It was in a matter of seconds that a strange noise put us on alert, a noise suggesting that Andromeda was starting to split apart, slowly drifting.

“What’s happening?” Ari asked me, a little frightened.

I wouldn’t know what to tell her, because even though I had been in space longer than she had, I couldn’t identify anything about what was happening around us.

“I don’t know. I suppose it’s something that happens here,” I answered Ari, hoping that answer would give her some calm.

After a time, the noise faded away and we returned to appreciating everything in front of us.

I tried to ask her about my mother, but after everything I had read, I came to understand that she had left again — as she always does whenever I have a relapse, only coming back when they decide to discharge me.

Once again the noise and the force pull us back to our senses and put us on edge, because this time we don’t understand what’s happening — it has come so frequently. Could it be something bad?

We couldn’t see anything different, nothing out of the ordinary in space — though in those moments nothing was ordinary for us.

From a distance I could see that galaxy that had looked like a speck in space slowly drawing closer to us. I still can't understand anything.

“Do you see that point in the distance? Do you feel like we're moving toward it?” I asked Ari, pointing at that galaxy far away.

A silence fell between us while Ari looked carefully at the place I had pointed out.

“Yes, I feel like it's coming toward us. I think I passed through that place,” Ari answered, confirming one of my theories.

In a matter of seconds, what had seemed so far away was drawing ever closer.

“I think that's the Milky Way — that point that used to look so distant,” Ari said, sharing one of her theories.

To me that didn't make sense — galaxies don't move so quickly, much less generate such abrupt noises and movements.

The noise kept up, now accompanied by a force and a movement that could, at the slightest careless moment, make everything come crashing down.

I kept getting lost in my thoughts, trying to connect everything — nothing fit with what was happening. I couldn't recall anything.

Wait — at some point I had read a possible theory about the two galaxies merging and becoming one. Could this be what was happening here?

In that moment everything was spinning. Ari seemed so lost that she didn't know exactly what was going on.

That point in the distance is indeed the Milky Way, and it keeps its course aimed directly at Andromeda. If this is true, we're talking about an absolute force — a force capable of annihilating us.

Everything was spinning out of control. Neither of us knew what to do. All I wanted was for Ari to be safe — nothing else.

Without a second thought, I grabbed Ari by the arms and led her to the ship. Two people couldn't both get in there — the thrust of the propellers would be lost and neither of us would get out of here. Ari still didn't understand until I buckled her into my seat, and then she started to take in everything around her.

"Thomi, don't leave me," Ari said, pleading.

"This is my dream, not yours. I don't want to lead you to your doom," I told Ari, putting her life before my own.

"I don't want you to go. Come back with me, don't leave me," Ari's plea continued.

Everything was thrown off balance. Without warning, the force was so enormous that we were both hurled outward.

I tried to get to my feet, and as I watched all those stars appearing around me — all those distant objects drawing ever nearer — there was no time for anything. Everything was starting to come apart.

Without a moment's hesitation, I hit the ship's emergency exit button and left immediately, giving my ship to Ari so she could save herself.

The last thing I saw was her look of disappointment before she departed — that look that broke me, the look that said she wanted me to go with her.

I watched her leave. I watched her go from my side again. I lost her once more.

An abrupt noise shatters my thoughts and brings me back to reality. Without a ship, I have no alternative.

Surveying the whole panorama again, the Milky Way is less than two meters away. The force and the movement make my legs give out and I lose all the strength keeping me upright.

Close to where I fell I could see the prototype ship Ari had arrived in. With every last bit of strength I had, I managed to get inside, trying to figure out how to make it work, how to get out and stay with Ari.

The noise in my head was pressing hard. My dizziness came back, taking away more of the stability I no longer had.

“Thomi, come back to us. Try,” the voice returned to my mind again — the same voice that kept alerting me.

I managed to return to myself. Ari’s ship console came into focus and I managed to lift off in an improper fashion, but avoiding that merger which would have ended thousands of lives.

Orbiting — everything spun out of control. The ship doesn’t have enough fuel, much less a few key controls needed to navigate through nothing.

From a distance I could see how those two galaxies, once separated, successfully completed the full process of their merger.

Out of nowhere, an echo invaded all of space. This echo made the ship I was in descend rapidly, causing the engines not to respond well. Sparks were flying from the ship’s nose. A possible fire would be the worst-case scenario.

Everything was spiraling out of control. The emptiness in my chest felt as though my life no longer had any meaning, as if that ship were no longer functioning.

I kept seeing more and more sparks, opening the way for a potential fire that, in this case, I would have no way to put out. Then the nose

of the ship began to catch fire.

I couldn't understand any of it. The flame was starting to light up everything in its path. The smell of burning was making it hard to breathe. The noise pulled me from all my lapses and made me see that inside this ship the fuel had spilled.

I didn't know exactly what to do. My breathing was failing. I was losing strength and the flame kept spreading. I felt something wasn't right — something could happen here.

It was in a matter of seconds that I saw everything in flames. Not knowing what to do, I closed my eyes to forget about it, to see nothing. But it was a waste of time. The flares would make everything explode in an instant.

“BOOM!” — this was the only sound I heard at the end.

Is this the end? Maybe not...

Listen to the album that brought this story to life.



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