

# A Close Call.

a story by

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The arch of the moon loomed in the front port. The ship was accelerating all the time, and was now, way beyond saving. "The gravitational pull of the moon is so strong that even if the engines were working, I don't think they would not be able to pull us away. Damn bad luck Sharna, just damn bad luck." Sharna turned to face Galan, the look on his face said something different. "You think it was sabotage, don't you." She said. He looked blank for a few seconds and then nodded. "But who?" She asked. "Tryan." He answered sharply. "He has always hated me." Sharna was taken aback at this, she knew Tryan quite well and couldn't picture him doing something like this. "He might hate you, but why would he want to kill me?" She asked, her face starting to show fear. "Beats me." Galan replied.

He looked at her and tried to smile. He had had to work very hard to get Sharna to come on this trip. She was none too keen to say the least. Well what woman would want to be cooped up with a man for two years on a survey mission. Not much glamour in it, and the pay was pitiful too. So why had she come? This was something that Sharna had asked herself many times over the last few months. Maybe it was to get away from that creep Creelan who had been following her around for a while. She detested him. Then there was the revenue people. They'd been after her for over a year about that windfall she had received from her late husband. Her mind was a mess, but none of that mattered now. The ship was doomed and they had no way off it, so they were doomed too.

The engines had failed ten thousand miles out. Galan hadn't been able to find out why, they just stopped. The crazy thing is, they only came near this moon because it looked nice, it wasn't on their schedule at all. Galan had commented on how nice it looked when they were over a million miles out and asked her if she wanted to go in closer. Sharna was glad of the diversion and had agreed, and now, here they were, out of control and being pulled in to their deaths. "Well, at least we'll die in a pretty place," He said, trying to lighten the mood. "It could have been that dump we visited last month. I really would not want to be seen dead there." Sharna grinned. She knew just what he meant, it had been a horrible place, all sand, and dark cold sand at that. The thought of it gave her a shiver down her back.

"So how long do you figure we've got?" She asked. "Hard to say, with no control I don't know what speed we're doing. Could be a couple of hours, perhaps more." Somehow, this cheered her up a little. "Say, I'm hungry, I think I'll eat that cake we've been saving. No need to worry about my figure now..." Galan laughed. In all honesty, he hadn't noticed her figure, but now it had been brought to his attention, he realised she did have one. The baggy clothes had kept it well hidden. Probably deliberate, and he didn't blame her. It must be tough being a woman in space. Still, Sharna could give as good as she got, so maybe he had her figured wrong.

He followed her through to the galley. When he got there she had the cake opened and was tucking into it with a fork. "Want some?" She asked when he came in. Galan nodded and went to get himself a fork. "Mmm, it's good." He said after the first taste. Neither of them said much after that until the cake was gone. "Leave the dishes," he said jokingly, "I'll wash them tomorrow!" Again she laughed. "You're OK Galan," she said, "we should try dyeing more often." He smiled. She didn't often speak to him in this friendly manner, so he appreciated it when it came.

With the cake gone, thoughts turned back to the dilemma they were in. "Are you sure there is nothing we can do about this?" She asked again. Galan silently scratched his head in thought. "There must be something, think man. I don't want to die yet, I'm too young." She decided to mentally go through all the scenarios she could think of to see if an idea would come. She went to her bunk and lay down, hoping it would help her to think. When she'd been there for a few minutes, she realized how quiet it was. The constant engine noise was such a part of every day life, that she had gotten used to it. Didn't miss it till it was gone. But it was gone, that was the problem. Many a night she had lain awake wishing the noise would go away, and now that it had, she really wished it would come back again.

Galan was in the cockpit, playing with nonfunctional controls. The moon was really getting bigger now, wouldn't be long. His thoughts went into over drive, trying desperately to think of a way to save the ship. He had been back to look at the engines already. He hadn't seen anything amiss, but then, he was a pilot, not an engineer. He thought he might go back again just in case he'd missed something. It wasn't likely, but it was worth a try.

On his way aft, he passed Shuna's bunk. She was laying motionless except for her mouth quietly whispering a prayer. Galan was not a religious man, and so hadn't thought of praying. "It couldn't hurt," he smiled to himself, and began to put a few words together and send them to the Almighty.

The trip to the engine room was just as disappointing the second time. He was just about to leave when he heard an alarm sounding up front. He jumped down through the hatch and ran forward. When he got there, Shuna was already there staring at the display module. A bright red light was flashing in sync with the nasty noise. Galan hit a switch and the noise went away. "What is it?" Shuna asked with panic rising in her voice. "Proximity alarm," he answered. Shuna looked out of the port. "We're close," she said, "but not that close surely." Galan agreed. "It must be something else, perhaps a meteor."

He had just finished saying this when there was an almighty bang at the rear of the ship. The ship shook from the force of it and Galan made a dive for the secondary display panel. "What is it?" Sharna half screamed. "I'm checking to see if we are venting atmosphere. If the air leaks out we're done for." There was a short silence after this, then Sharna began to laugh. "Done for!" She squealed, and tears began to roll down her cheeks. Her laughter was infectious, and Galan soon caught it. For a few moments they were both helpless. Sharna actually slid down the control panel to a sitting position on the floor. Galan kicked the panel nearest him and feigned a sore

foot, hoping around as he did so.

There was another bang at the rear of the ship, only this one had a different sound to the first. "Hit again?" Sharna asked beginning to settle down. Galan's face straightened, "I don't think so, that sounded like an engine back fire." Sharna's face straightened also. Galan made a dive for the engine start button and hit it hard. All sort of noises came from the rear of the ship, and then, the engines started. "YES!" Galan shouted. "Quick, take your seat." Sharna dived into her seat and fastened the belt tight. Galan did likewise and took the controls. With the engines screaming, the ship swerved slowly away from the moon and was soon heading out of harms way, back out into space.

The moon, now in the rear port, was growing smaller. "That was a near thing," she said, touching his arm. "Yeah, I wonder what happened." "Perhaps we needed a kick start," she said with a chuckle. "Like the pipes when they get blocked," he said back. "Yeah, maybe God threw a rock at us to give the ship a kick in the pants." "It was a great shot if He did." Galan replied, "Perhaps there's more to this religion thing than I thought." "Yeah, maybe," Said Sharna.