

# Elliot

If silence had a sound Elliot was wrapped up in it. Hyper sleep was akin to being pressurised in a tube of saline solution. Sound was suppressed by the liquid that flooded her and by the fourteen-millimetre thick celazole polymer that acted as an insulator as well as a protective membrane to the subject in hyper sleep. Slowly drifting into the land of consciousness Elliot was becoming aware of the weightlessness of hyper sleep and the claustrophobic feeling of the thick nutrient layered saline solution that has kept her alive in her state of hibernation for the last nine years. On the outskirts of sleep Elliot lay in her pod hidden from the vessel that had become her world by the lime green essence that suspended her cell division, but not her dreams.

Dreams in hyper sleep seemed so real as time changes and moments in the waking world can span years, the dream became the reality that the mind and body were missing. Elliot's dream was always the same; she was running, the only difference being whether she was been chased or she was chasing. Her subconscious whispered words she would usually mutter in her sleep, but couldn't due to the induced hibernation of the hyper sleep pod. *So close . . . nearly there . . . keep going . . .*

*Running through a water colour of bright green, so much so that it feels as if it is swallowing her whole. Her feet landing heavily on crunching ground beneath her feet; her arms stretched out in front of her pushing, grabbing and pulling herself through a thousand wooden pillars stretching out. The darkness beyond reaches up to the sky fighting to block out the light made from a million little green shields stemming from the pillars that float on the wind and beg for the light that's left between quick and fleeting shards of warmth breaking through. Behind this entanglement of pillars and shields Elliot runs. With every step forward she fights as her face is scratched from the resisting sharp reaching arms twisting out from the pillars. Her soft blue excavation suit's forearm tears revealing a deep red line across her arm that runs as a stream would down to her fingers. "Keep going," she hears herself say. Then she feels it for the first time, the feeling she has been waiting for, for as long as she has had these dreams. A warmth. Not from the light above, but from . . . Something else. "I can feel it now, it's so close," With a renewed sense of desire and a need to keep moving, Elliot continues to throw herself forward through the maze with only her blind compulsion as a compass. Suddenly the whole world shakes and Elliot is thrown into a pillar, sliding to its base. She tries to right herself and pulls her body back onto its feet, but she can't steady her mind. The pillars blur, fading in and out of each other; the roof becomes a mesh of greens with their colours all blurring into one. The world shakes again, this time with a tremor that fractures some of the pillars, snapping, breaking and falling to the ground around Elliot. The third and final tremor hits so hard Elliot is thrown up into the air and just as her stomach tightens as she reaches the peak of her jolt from the ground she feels an unnatural pull from the above. . .*

The thick nutrient rich saline solution slid from Elliot's face as her pod drained around her. The limelight that lit the pod gradually turned yellow without the solution to distort its colour and as the last of it disappeared into the base of the hyper sleep pod Elliot's eyelids flickered, fighting their way to opening and seeing the reality she would find herself released into. Each attempt to move her arms or legs ended with a muscle twitching and foot slipping in the pod. The hyper sleep suit she wore didn't help her try to grip or brace herself against the polymer shell that kept her enclosed. Through the illuminated yellow smear of a door a shadows push against the glass. Even in the limited vision Elliot had she cracked open her eyelids she can see that the figure on the other side of the polymer is leaning up against it, watching her, waiting.

The hyper sleep pod hissed from the outside and then the same noise came from inside as some gas was released into air. Immediately Elliot began to feel like she was waking up and that most of her motor functions were coming back in quick succession along with a conscious stream of thought. *Hyper sleep protocol, long slow breaths, minimal muscle aggravation.* Full sentences weren't being formed; Elliot knew it would take a while for her to adjust and begin the integration program. The shadow on the other side of the polymer was moving from side to side, disappearing for a few seconds at a time then reappearing. The shadow had become a focus for Elliot as she waited for her body to adjust and catch up with her mind as it started to function with increasing levels with second that went by. Annoyance came over her when the shadow disappeared for longer than a few seconds at a time and her frustration grew with the lonely intervals. A louder hissing noise filled the pod and grew in its intensity. Elliot could feel the gas and pressure. *Presumably oxygen* she thought, been blown onto her face. It would have felt refreshing and pleasant if it had not been accompanied by the penetrating sound that sounded like it was coming from inside of her head and reminded her of an air lock siren.

Before she could get used to the hissing that invaded her slow transition back to reality it stopped suddenly and with it the polymer panel that her shadowed acquaintance was starring through began to move. It ascended into a part of the mechanical pod that Elliot could not see and for the first time she could see the shadow without any distortion of her view. Breathing heavily she forced her eyes open and found it was a struggle to keep them there.

Trying to form words and actually managing to speak to the man that stood in front of her was more than she could manage. Helping her make the contact she so desperately wanted to make the man came towards her pod wearing the familiar blue bio-suit that had been moulded to his physical

definition showing a thin and somewhat drawn man. "You're doing fine. Just take a minute and keep breathing those deep breaths," he said with a kind voice complementing his face, he was obviously some kind of medical officer who had spent his life treating people and developing that all too familiar bedside manner and subconscious facial expression conveying empathy. "Take my hand Andrea," he held his own out to Elliot just outside of the pod, encouraging her to try and take those first few steps out of her hyper sleep enclosure and into the medical bay. She leant forward using her elbows to lever herself towards the man in front of her. Finding some strength she reached out with one hand using her other to support her weight. This was quite a challenge after not using her muscles for such a long period of time. She forced herself to speak to the medical man, but could only manage one word and it felt like she had finished off a fair few bottles of wine and couldn't find the clarity she needed so badly. "Catch . . ." was all she could manage before she leant forward and tried to step out of the pod and take hold of the mans hand.

Holding her half in and out of her Hyper sleep pod the man looked into her eyes, *Is this guy checking me out while I'm half naked and covered in goo?*

"Well your pupil dilation and reaction time seem normal," the man said helping Elliot out of the pod and half walking half carrying her over to an examination table. She felt a pang of embarrassment at thinking her first contact was with a man pushing his luck. She sat on the cold steel table waiting for her consciousness to fully catch up with the situation helping her to interact with other crew members. It only took a few minutes of the man telling her to take deep breaths and fill her lungs to push the optimum amounts of oxygen to her brain before she was able to communicate and find out what the ships condition and mission time were.

"What's your name?" Elliot asked with sandpaper and fire in her throat.

"The name's Voss, here drink this," he said passing her a cup of water. "So Andrea, you make the big money, ecologist and genetic engineer. Impressive."

"Elliot."

"What?"

"Call me Elliot, not Andrea," she said with her voice getting clearer with each sip of water. She took another look at Voss before answering his obvious lead in for her to talk about her work.

"Sounds more impressive than it is," she coughed.

"I don't know, sounds more impressive than the glorified baby sitter," he said as he played with a selection of instruments across the examination bay before turning around with a syringe. Her look asked the question he answered. "Don't worry I just need a post Hyper sleep sample to make sure you're doses were right in the pod."

Elliot held out her left arm for Voss to take his sample and like any trained medical professional he told her his little white lie. "Now you may feel a slight scratch," he said as he pierced her skin with the needle, forcing a short sharp breath from Elliot.

"So Voss, do you mind if I ask you a few questions?"

"Not at all," replied Voss obviously pleased to be discussing anything with anyone other than Neil.

"How many cycles have you been awake for?"

"I'm on a double rotation, so I'm asleep more than I'm awake, but I'm awake more than the rest of the crew, except for Neil. Who should be on his way up to introduce himself. In fact I'll get him up here, sometimes he's not quite with us," Voss says as he leans over to a holo-pad and searches his way through its interface to call Neil.

"Neil?" asks Elliot.

"Yeah, Neil's one of our engineers, although he prefers to be called a handyman," Voss explains as he tries to hide a smile and his private joke. "He's a little bit strange, but then again who isn't." He continued now stifling a yawn.

Elliot watched Voss as he moved to another holo-pad with her blood sample and had it scanned so he could look through it at a cellular level, something she was not unfamiliar with considering her career advancements. He looked tired and as if he were running on automatic with his finger tips swiping at the different charts and visual models of Elliot's blood allowing the holographic lights to respond.

"It all seems pretty good from over here. How about I get you something a bit warmer to wear and I show you to your quarters?" He asked as a rhetorical question, already up from the holo-pad and fishing out a bio-suit from the storage cupboard opposite the examination table. Specifically designed for the female crew members and their physical needs, the bio-suit passes froths hands to Elliot's. "You've worn these suits before I take it."

"The company doesn't like us wearing anything else in the lab. Do you mind turning around so I can put this on."

"Of course," Voss said turning quickly to face the floor giving his eyes a rest from the onslaught of the lights. "The company has issued every crew member with a bio-suit now, medical crew or not, they think that all crew members should benefit from the gravity suppressors."

"Ok, what do you think?" Elliot asked, her voice much smoother and like Voss had imagined it would be.

"Perfect," said Voss looking at the shape of the bio-suit on her body. "I mean a perfect fit," a look of shock fell on his tired face as he met her eyes and realised what he said could easily be taken in the wrong way. "I meant

that the bio-suits are amazing . . . on both men and women . . . because it doesn't matter."

Elliot allowed Voss to talk himself into an embarrassed state before giving him the escape he needed. "Shall we go on the tour?" She asked thinking to herself that she liked Voss, he seemed honest and harmless enough.

We walked around the arteries of the ship for an hour and visiting various areas including the hyper sleep chamber with a cargo of crew members, the cargo bay and the crews kitchen. Voss was leading Elliot into yet another florescent lit corridor, where he shielded his eyes as subtly as he could, as they made their way towards the crews quarters.

"I hope you don't mind me asking, but when were you put into storage?" Voss asked.

"As soon as I got the job, the company told me that they had got their crew together with one or two exceptions and that they wanted to put me into storage to make sure I was in optimum condition for the mission," Elliot said without much emotion, it all seemed like so long ago, even though it was the last time that she was conscious.

"The last recruitments for the mission were thirty odd years ago, some of your family and friends might still be alive."

"Maybe, but if I wanted to think about my past family and friends I wouldn't have signed up for a one way ticket would I?" Elliot said as she saw that Voss was having trouble with the brightness of the lights. "Computer, lights at fifty percent," the lights dimmed immediately to half their brightness and Voss smiled in response to her act of kindness.

"No I guess not. Sorry, I shouldn't have asked."

"It's Ok, I can only imagine what it's been like pulling yourself through multiple sessions in the hyper sleep pod and having only one or two other people to interact with."

"Yeah, not easy," he blurted out with a harrumph of a laugh as they turned the corner into the crews quarters to find Neil leaning up against a curved bulkhead with a glass of water.

Neil looked as if he had been running whilst wearing his engineering rig with beads of sweat on his forehead and neck. Elliot looked at him and thought he might have a cold or similar infection, even though such illness' are incredibly rare in space. She introduced herself before he noticed that she was looking at him a little too keenly and judging his health by his fevered appearance.

"Neil, my name is Elliot. Pleased to meet you," she held out her hand and Neil extended his in the engineering rig. They shook and made eye contact. She thought that Voss looked tired, but there was something different about Neil. He didn't just look tired, there was something else going on and it was

having a mental effect as well as a physical effect, she could see it in his eyes.

“Welcome back to the world of the living Elliot. And when I say world of the living I strictly mean you, me and him,” Neil said pointing at Voss.

“Charming as always Neil. How about we grab a drink and you can shout me that extra shot?” Voss said half testing to see if Neil would stand by his deal and half wanting to move Elliot on and hope Neil didn’t come across too strange. *Deep space does strange things to a man*, Elliot thought.

Before Voss could direct Neil and Elliot further into the crews quarters to grab a drink and explore Elliot’s new quarters the computers voice was heard throughout the whole ship alerting the conscious crew to its status and impending automatic actions. “ALERT. GALILEO PROTOCOL ‘DUTY ORIENTATION’ ACTIVATED.”

“Computer what’s going on?” Asked Voss looking up at the ceiling panels of the corridor as he always does when talking to the ship.

“All inactive essential crew members are to be revived to full consciousness with immediate effect,” replied the computer in her consistently feminine voice.

“Yes, but why are you reviving *all* essential crew members?” Asked Voss with a panicked level of irritation in his voice whilst Elliot and Neil stood looking to him for answers in this bizarre turn of events.

“The ship Galileo has sourced a potential target and needs essential crew members to analyse and evaluate the level of sustainability.”

“What does that even mean?” Blurted Neil in his impatience.

“It means that the Galileo might have completed its mission.” Replied Voss elated and in awe at the revelation that the three of them held between them. Within a heartbeat the entire ships florescent lighting system came on, as it is programmed to do in an emergency. “Wait, computer how many crew members are being revived?”

“Eight essential crew members are being revived in the Galileo protocol ‘Duty Orientation,’” replied the computer.

“Isn’t that a lot of crew members to revive in one go?” Asked Elliot.

“You could say that,” Voss said to Elliot before addressing the computer again with growing concern. “Computer, when are you initiating the revivals and what will the time delay be between each revival?”

“Revivals initiated thirty six seconds ago Adrian Voss and there will be no delay between each revival as stated in the Galileo protocol ‘Duty Orientation.’”

“So that means...” Neil trailed off.

“Now,” Elliot said with concern and a hand on Voss’ shoulder for support.