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ONE SEAT LEFT

Dialogues / Sci-Fi / 3-4 min
Cast 2 Male x1 Any x1

A failing orbital station has eleven hours of air and one suit for the last shuttle down. Hale has flown that shuttle for fourteen years. Quinn built the casing that bought them the eleven hours. The committee has sent Quinn to talk to him.

CHARACTERS

HALE - late 40s, shuttle pilot. Certain, physical, has already decided how this goes

QUINN - mid 20s, any gender, structural engineer. Careful, unshowy, carrying news nobody else would carry

SETTING

A cramped airlock antechamber on a failing orbital station, under red standby lights.

A cramped airlock antechamber. Red standby lights. A single pressure suit hangs on the rack. HALE stands beside it, arms folded.

QUINN enters, a datapad under one arm.

HALE

They sent you.

QUINN

They sent me.

HALE

To talk me out of it.

QUINN

To talk. That's all the brief said.

HALE

Fourteen years I've flown that shuttle.
You've done the sim. Twice.

QUINN

Three times.

HALE

Three. Good. Then you know the re-entry window on a cold burn is nine seconds. You ever felt nine seconds, Quinn? In your teeth?

QUINN

No.

HALE

Then sit down, and let's not waste the air.

Quinn does not sit.

QUINN

The reactor casing on Deck Two. You know what that is?

HALE

It's a reactor casing.

QUINN

It's my reactor casing. I redesigned it after the last inspection. It's the only reason we have eleven hours instead of four.

HALE

And I'm grateful. I'll say so at the memorial.

QUINN

Whose memorial?

Beat.

HALE

Look. This isn't personal. The shuttle needs a pilot. That's the whole equation.

QUINN

The shuttle needs a pilot for forty minutes. The colony needs an engineer for forty years.

HALE

The colony has engineers.

QUINN

Not with the casing specs. They're in here.

Quinn taps the side of their own head.

HALE

So write them down. You have eleven hours.

QUINN

I have ten and a half. I spent the first half hour arguing with the committee.

HALE

About what?

QUINN

About who was gonna tell you.

Hale unfolds his arms.

HALE

Tell me what?

QUINN

They've decided, Hale. They decided an hour ago. The brief said "talk" because nobody wanted to write the other word.

HALE

Which word?

QUINN

Inform.

Silence. The red light cycles.

HALE

They picked you.

QUINN

They picked the casing. I just come with it.

HALE

And the nine seconds?

QUINN

Auto-burn. You wrote the routine. It's a good routine.

HALE

It's a good routine with a hand on it.

QUINN

I know.

Hale looks at the suit. Then at Quinn. Then at the suit.

HALE

You'll wanna take in the shoulders. It's cut for me.

QUINN

Hale.

HALE

And the left glove seal is soft. Tape it before you go out. There's tape in the locker. Second shelf.

QUINN

I didn't come here to take it from you.

HALE

No. You came here to take it. The "from you" part is just where it was.

Quinn takes the suit down. It is heavier than they expected.

QUINN

Is there anything you want me to tell them? Down there.

HALE

(beat)

Tell them the burn was clean. Whatever happens. Tell them it was clean.

QUINN

It will be.

HALE

Nine seconds. In your teeth. Then it's over and you're falling like everyone else.

Quinn nods. Goes to the locker for the tape. Hale sits down on the bench, in the place Quinn would not take.

END OF SCRIPT