

HOLD ME DOWN

Written by

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HOLD ME DOWN

EXT. SPACE - NIGHT

GAL is a no-nonsense, "type A" woman - an astronaut superstar who spent her life thriving in STEM fields. She is an overachiever and demands perfection at all times from herself and others. She is highly competent, confident, and brilliant - an absolute badass. But this is all with an underlying vulnerability - an insecurity that keeps her seeking validation from external accomplishments and achievements. Despite her many accomplishments, she was often at odds with people around her who overlook her or dismiss her due to her sex/gender. Thus, she can take on a difficult personality (combative, blunt, and tactless) as a way of navigating these frustrations. She can be self-aggrandizing and in the process she can diminish those around her. She can be very close minded to anything she deems beneath her, especially the spiritualist, new age ideas that come from her mother.

Gal's MOTHER has a softness to her, but this softness is not sweet, silly, or simple and it is not without depth and knowledge. As a New Age mystic, she knows the world well and is deeply in touch with its pain. This upsets her and frustrates her - no one listens to her sage wisdom, least of all her daughter, Gal. She deeply loves Gal but also feels disconnected from her, exasperated by a tension that won't seem to lessen. Mother struggles with boundaries and appropriateness - she nags Gal and harps on what she sees as her daughter's over reliance on technology and science at the expense of a spiritual connection to the world around her.

GAL (V.O.)

(Confident and slightly  
bitter)

Earth: A blemish I'm ashamed to call home. Former home I guess, because I'm headed out and I'm never going back. Lift off was the best day of my life and nothing else comes close. My standing ovation as MIT's youngest valedictorian? Nope. Finding out I was selected as the top fellow at Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Lab? No big deal. It could have been the day I bagged a congressional service medal, but boy did my mother wreck that one. She always made everything about herself. She claimed she had a vision. Or was she upset that she didn't have a vision? It was confusing.

(MORE)

GAL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

But mid-ceremony she had a meltdown. She started crying about birds trapped in bottles, criminals in Singapore, and somehow I was to blame for the world going to shit.

MOTHER (V.O.)

(Calm, sensitive, all-knowing)

We don't get to pick what matters. The sky, the earth will tell us. They don't care about award ceremonies. I spent the whole week searching the sky for sacred knowledge for you. Even though I was exhausted, I kept looking and I found none. Nothing. The day of your ceremony, I heard some breaking news.

(Calm with a touch of sadness)

Cockatoos, dozens of them, found crammed into plastic water bottles. They were being smuggled out of Indonesia, these poor little things... I guess I could have kept it to myself, but I needed to show you the truth. I needed to save you.

(Perturbed, a bit sympathetic)

Later that night I found you drunk out of your mind, passed out face down in the yard, bugs crawling through your hair. A part of me wanted to leave you there, finally connected to the earth the way you ought to be, but I brought you in and put you to bed. When you woke, you had a clod of dirt in your mouth. You screamed and cried about the dirt, the microorganisms infecting your body.

GAL (V.O.)

(Confident, exasperated, and scornful)

Men are disgusting, especially these ball-scratching morons. Space has been a boy's club for decades. At first, they looked at me like I was an ant... but this ant became queen of the hill and I made everyone else my drones.

(MORE)

GAL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I don't waste my time talking to anyone around here. Technology is all I need. I'm here to do a job and I have to focus on my specimens. Up here, when it comes to nature, I'm in control.

GAL (V.O.)

(Boastful and terse)

Not only am I a space pioneer, but I make space pioneers. Tough plants that can survive the harsh growing conditions of Mars. We're talking extreme temperatures, non-existent atmosphere, powerful ultraviolet radiation, severe drought, and soil that lacks basically every mineral nutrient a plant would need. Still, my hybrids can't be beat. They're indestructible like weeds. My franken-plants have genetic diversity that tracks through several extremophile tomato varieties - one so ancient it was grown by the Incans on mountain tops. My lab is a work of art. I developed growth chambers equipped with autonomous nutrient supply with a top of the line calcined clay root mat. A man-made web of controlled-release fertilizers deliver water, nutrients and oxygen to the plant roots on autopilot.

(Boastful and terse)

I've got computerized cameras and over 200 sensors that are in constant interactive contact with the specimens, so water recovery and distribution, atmosphere content, salinity, moisture levels, and temperature are all automated. Light emitting diodes simulate time of day and the seasons. Crimson lights, magentas, yellows and blues, and the prettiest aqua-green lights make it look like Christmas everyday. And that's because of me.

MOTHER (V.O.)

(Proud, wistful, and profound)

Gal, you were such a special little girl. I remember when you first learned to sing.

(MORE)

## MOTHER (V.O.) (CONT'D)

It wasn't long after you started tying your shoes. I knew you had found something magical. You told me you dreamed it. You told me you heard sounds coming from above, from up in your dream sky. But when you tried to look up, you couldn't do it. You could only look down to the soft forest earth. So you sat, running your fingers through dream-world moss, breathing in pine needles warmed by the dream sun, and you just listened. The singing seemed to rain down on you, coating your skin until it glistened. And then you said you felt it seep in. When you woke up, you told me you could feel your voice box vibrating. I told you: Gal, I think you found yourself a spirit song. I told you: soon you'd be able to sing it out loud. That night, I heard you start to sing the song from your dream sky.

(Wistful still, but a bit more urgent and somber)

I should have told you to wait. To go out to the woods and try it in private until you were ready. It was just too risky. But I just let you do it. That night you had a nightmare and when you woke up, your song was gone. I think something stole that power from you, and after that you turned sour... you went dark. Years before all this, my father gave me an insurance policy just in case one of my girls got sick.

## GAL (V.O.)

(Exasperated and scornful)

For some reason I never made my mother happy. But you know what did? Grandpa's stupid plant. I still remember the awkward movement of her fingers working the plant apart. She talked about the richness of the black soil and I reminded her of the pollution, the toxicity, not to mention the bacteria. She tried to hand it to me like it was a mushy little baby.

(MORE)

GAL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

She held it out to me, gleaming  
with pride like an idiot, stained  
up to her elbows with inky smears.

MOTHER (V.O.)

(Warm, dreamy, nostalgic)  
There is something so wonderful  
about the passing and holding of a  
living thing, the intermingling of  
fingers, warm flesh, clammy root,  
earthy smells, and the vibrant,  
green bolt of leaf. Father told me  
that if something were to go wrong  
I should ask the plant for help,  
and gently bring it up from the  
soil to be cooked and eaten. He was  
sure it would work, but it didn't.

GAL (V.O.)

(Crestfallen, at times  
appalled)

When my mother died, the last thing  
I told her was that I had been  
selected to go to Mars. I'm so  
proud of you, I wanted her to say.  
I wanted her to cry and hold me and  
say she knew it, she always knew  
it. I wanted her to believe that I  
was going to save humanity. But of  
course she didn't. She turned to  
me, cold, icy eyes, and told me  
that I was a fool. This woman, who  
barely scraped together a high  
school diploma, had the nerve to  
think she knew better than me. She  
didn't understand science. It was  
always stories, rituals, visions.

MOTHER (V.O.)

(Disappointed at first,  
but with more eagerness  
and enthusiasm toward the  
latter half)

Gal, I failed you. Somewhere along  
the line I gave you too much space  
and you lost your way. When I found  
out where you were going, all I  
could think about was The Woman of  
the Sky.. I told you how much The  
Woman of the Sky loved the earth,  
how it nurtured her and she  
nurtured it. The whole point of the  
story was that she came down to us,  
she didn't fly away.

(MORE)

## MOTHER (V.O) (CONT'D)

She made the earth by coming down into it. Instead of going out into the upper world in a rocket, build a ship that'll take you to the lower world. Find what you've lost. Find your song. You're always looking outward instead of journeying inward. And then I told you about your grandfather's insurance policy, the plants in my garden.

## GAL

(Incredulous and annoyed)

Plants don't give help, plants are help. She actually believed that if something were to go wrong - she never specified what - I should ask the plant for help. I had to ask it, because apparently it had feelings and opinions! And then she said I needed to eat it fresh from the soil, filthy roots and all! I told her advice like that is how people get botulism. And then I took a shower to clean off not just the dirt but the bad ideas, the ignorance.

## MOTHER (V.O.)

(Unsettled, disturbed, anxious)

Gal, after the plant ritual didn't work, I tried to track down your song in a vision. But what I found in your dream realm wasn't normal. It was uninhabitable. It was artificially built, geometric, made of metals and plastics and wires and gizmos. I don't know, it was like some sort of... super spaceship. Everything was lifeless and depressing. And then, I felt something sinister, something hidden, something lurking in there. I think they were robots and they were watching me. Gal...I didn't like it there.

## GAL (V.O.)

(Confused, intrigued, and mystified)

They told me there was someone on the phone.

(MORE)

GAL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

They said it was my mother. My mother? On the phone? We are in outer space, halfway to Mars... she's dead. I followed the trail of blinking lights to the cockpit. And then I saw her, not on the phone and not like I remembered her... but sort of... everywhere. She was dispersed... disembodied... assimilated into the machine. She spoke to me:

MOTHER

(Mystical, a bit impatient)

I'm part of the universe now. It's taken me a long time to get back to you, to find you. I thought you'd come to me, but you're lost. Your feet are floating. You need to get back to the ground, back to the Earth.

GAL (V.O.)

(Confused, angry)

I'm speechless. What was this, malnutrition? Some sort of anxiety attack turned hallucination? And then I was mad, who was this vision, this piece of my subconscious to come in here and say I was wrong, to say I needed to go back?

MOTHER

(Mystical, a bit impatient and annoyed)

How can you be human without the Earth? These plants you've created, they're soulless. They can't even sing. They have no roots, just like you. Remember your song, Gal.

GAL (V.O.)

(Mystified, fascinated)

And suddenly, as her disappointment and her sorrow swept over me, my ears began to ring with this strangely familiar melody, and I felt myself begin to drift, the outer edge of my body vibrating, melting... the song consumed me and just like that, I am gone.