

**MOONWAKE**  
**The Lunar Frontier**  
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**(BONUS Internet CHAPTER)**

## **Chapter Twenty**

Setbacks were part of life at the colony but in order for Mike to live on such an unpredictable world, he needed to get past personal disappointments. His attitude in the next few months would determine his fitness for life off-Earth. Mike had lost his hopper and his confidence was badly shaken.

It was the last day of the school term. Because there was so much interest in the talent recital, two shows had been scheduled. The first show would start in an hour, so the participants were assembling in the cafeteria. Toni and Laura stretched and ran through parts of their routine. Some of the younger students stood nearby trying to copy their moves.

Parents hoping for seats up front had started arriving early and sat quietly visiting. The nervous performers talked in hushed whispers and Julie Wren tried to calm their anxiety by playing some music. Mike and George tested the stage lights and pitched in wherever they could, anxious for the show to get started.

Mr. Wren had organized a band called “The Lunatics” and was busy with last minute suggestions. Zack Backer, at seven and the youngest member of the band, took his participation very seriously. Jason Woods never could have imagined what a wonderful thing sending a set of drums would turn out to be.

Zack’s parents were inclined toward science, as was his sister Toni, but he didn’t have much interest in those pursuits. Now *he* was good at something and almost overnight was a happier, more confident little boy. Toni couldn’t believe the change. Instead of being the annoying little pest that she dreaded taking care of, he was a happy little brother who couldn’t wait to play his drums with the band. Toni told herself she’d have to thank Jason for *her* gift, inadvertent though it was.

A few minutes earlier George had “volunteered” to help move the acts onto the stage. Zack was at the piano, practicing a few cords Julie Wren had taught him. Looking around the room she saw most of the seats were taken, so she sent Zack over to tell George it was time.

Mike watched with affection, as the man who felt more at home fixing a complicated rocket engine than working in a talent recital, fixed little hair bows for Rick’s squirming young daughters. He’d felt awful this morning when George told him the readings from the orbiting lab had pinpointed Tracker II’s crash site. It had slammed into one of the mountain peaks of the Inner Rook ring of Orientale Basin. Mike knew the hopper was gone but hearing George talk about it forced him to think of the ship’s last seconds.

“George, I worked so hard on that ship,” he’d told him. “I can’t believe I’ll never see it again.”

“I know,” George had said. He too had experienced many disappointments in his life and understood how Mike felt.

"I try to do the right things but they always seem to go wrong. Maybe I'm not ready for all this."

"Ready for all what, Mike?" asked George.

"*You know*, living on the Moon," Mike said in disgust.

"You grabbed hold of life on the Moon with both hands," said George. "What's wrong with that? Sure you could have played it safe—never trying anything, never taking a chance, never dreaming. Somehow that doesn't strike me as the way you want to live your life."

"No," Mike agreed, "but I could have killed Toni and Laura."

"Life—*is* a risk," George said slowly. "I've thought a lot about our lunar colony and why we're here. It's people like us, people that accept the risks of moving off-Earth, who keep civilizations from stagnating Mike. We're part of the same dynamic that's kept things going since the beginning of time."

"What? So, we're leading the way?" Mike wanted to know.

"Yes, I believe that's what we're doing," George told him and put his hand on Mike's shoulder. "I really can't see myself anywhere else."

"Well, you're right for the part," Mike told George. "You're always there to fix things when I mess up."

"Up until now, that's true," George had to admit. "But someday, you'll probably have to save my hide and I know you'll be there for me."

"I guess I'm just feeling sorry for myself," Mike confessed.

"Well that's allowed," George assured him. "Just don't take too long Mike because I need you to help me with this talent show business."

"How did we get into this mess anyway?" Mike wanted to know.

"Simple," George replied, "*we* have no talent!"

Toni and Laura's music started. Mrs. Wren played their introduction as Toni followed Laura onto the stage.

"Break a leg," Mike loudly whispered.

"Thanks Mike." Laura was happy to see he was joking around again. "I probably will!"

Every eye was fixed on them as they executed their jazz-gymnastics program. It was a huge hit. They bowed and smiled, happy to see everyone on their feet clapping wildly. Toni gestured her thanks to Julie Wren for her accompaniment on the piano but Julie wasn't looking at the dancers. Instead, she sat wide-eyed, watching her son cross the stage, vaulting wildly before landing in a heap next to Toni and Laura. The girls looked at Mike sprawled on the stage and then looked at each other. It was impossible to contain their surprise and they collapsed in laughter beside him.

Mike decided one show was enough for him but luckily for the girls, his big moment was preserved forever. Later that night, after they'd watched him in action for the umpteenth time, they'd calmed down enough to talk about getting together on Earth.

"Oh Mike, what ever made you do that?" asked Toni, weak from laughter.

"Oh, I don't know," he said, pleased she found it so amusing. "Temporary insanity, I guess."

"Well, I think you're a good sport, Mike," Laura told him. "After next term, we'll have a great vacation together!"

"I wish the term was already over and I was going with you tomorrow," he said. "It won't be the same here without you."

"We'll stay in touch," Laura told him. "I'll send reports on how Toni's adjusting to Earth."

"I can't believe I'm going back after six years. I'm so excited," said Toni. "I can't wait to smell rain and feel the wind in my hair."

"What about the sound of thunder," Mike added, "and all those creepy crawly bugs?"

"Oh, yuck!" screamed Toni falling back in new gales of laughter.

"Hey, we better quiet down before we wake everyone up," Laura cautioned, seeing how late it had gotten.

"I gotta go," Mike said abruptly. "See you at launch time. Goodnight."

"What's with him?" Toni asked, put off by his abrupt departure.

"He's just not thrilled about staying behind," said Laura.

"I know," Toni said softly. "I'm not happy about it either." Though, right now she didn't know if she felt bad because Mike wasn't coming with them or because she was just getting cold feet about leaving home.

"We better get some sleep," Laura told her.

"I don't know if I can," said Toni. "My stomach's in knots and I'm not even weightless yet."

They did manage to fall asleep however and even overslept. Now there was a very good chance they would miss the launch and rushed to get ready. George went ahead with the others to get Bubba stowed onboard. They weren't far behind, dragging their carry-on bags into the lounge.

There was barely time to hug everyone goodbye before they were hustled inside the transport. As they snapped closed their seat harnesses, the launch sequence began.

"What's the rush?" complained Toni. "A few minutes couldn't possibly make such a big difference!"

"How strange Mike didn't come to say goodbye," Laura said. "I wonder what happened?"

"I guess he said goodbye last night!" Toni shot back, as the ship lifted off the pad. She closed her eyes, trying to hold back her tears.

"Hey! Toni look down there!" Laura yelled. "Look. *Look!* I think that's Mike out on the surface!"

Toni wiped her eyes. She looked into the viewer where Laura was pointing. A small figure next to a rover was waving at them. "He's at Shackleton Crater!" she said excitedly. "That's why he wasn't here to say goodbye."

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Mike hadn't slept after he left the girls. His mind kept going over what the next three months would be like without them. As morning came and time for their launch grew closer, he dreaded saying goodbye. He knew he'd make a fool of himself in front of everyone, so he decided to say goodbye from the surface.

He headed out in Tracker. He'd almost forgotten how good it felt to drive the rover. He started remembering how important building it had been to him. When he got to Shackleton Crater he felt renewed. He walked to the rim and looked back toward the base. It was almost time for launch and then, just like clockwork, their ship lifted off the lunar surface. He ran back to Tracker, wildly waving his arms as their spacecraft quickly cleared the pad and headed towards Earth. He finally stopped, realizing they probably couldn't see him.

But they had seen him, if only for a few seconds and Toni was smiling now, as she sat back in her seat, happy and planning their vacation together on Earth.