Blast Off!

Joy G.

“5, 4, 3, 2, 1, ding-a-ling! 5, 4—”

I groan and fling my skinny arm across my bedside table, slamming my hand onto my space-themed alarm clock. The glowing numbers blink 4:00 a.m, far too bright and far too smug for this hour. The noise cuts off, leaving a ringing in my ears and a fog swirling in my head. I am *not* a morning person. Not even close.

Footsteps thump down the hallway, growing louder, faster—uh oh.

“Luke! You’re meant to be ready by now! We have to be at the space station in twenty minutes!”

My sister bursts into my room like a tiny purple hurricane. Jasmine stands over my bed, hands planted on her hips, her infamous scowl aimed directly at my soul. She’s my twin—my *bossy* twin. We share the same jet-black hair, storm-blue eyes, and pale skin. Mum always says our eyes have a starry twinkle in them, like there’s a whole galaxy waiting to be explored inside each of us.

And today, that galaxy finally feels within reach.

Ever since we were little, Jasmine and I dreamt of exploring space. I still remember our sixth birthday, when we unwrapped a book about astronauts and immediately made a pinky promise: neither of us would ever go to space without the other. Now, somehow, impossibly, NASA was sending us on a real mission. A journey aboard the brand-new rocket, the *Voidrunner*, to explore a second galaxy they’d discovered—the Luma Vortex. It would take years to reach, but the team at NASA would guide our course from Earth.

I drag myself out of bed and stumble downstairs. The kitchen is a blur of movement. Mum, eyes half-closed with exhaustion, rushes around stuffing snacks into two duffel bags—one purple, one dark blue. Jasmine is obsessed with purple. She even refused to wear a space suit unless it was purple.

Noah, our two-year-old brother, sits in his highchair, banging a wooden spoon like he’s conducting an orchestra only he can hear. His hair is the same colour as ours, a fluffy cloud perched on his head, but his eyes don’t have that starry twinkle. He’s too little to understand space. Too little to understand that we’re leaving.

Mum pulls me into a tight hug. “Are you sure you want to do this?” Her voice wobbles. Her eyes practically scream, *it’s not too late to back out.*

“Mum,” I sigh, “Jaz and I have been training for years. We’re ready.” I lift my duffel bag—and nearly dislocate my shoulder. “What did you put in here? A hippo made of dumbbells?”

“Just a few bits and pieces,” she says innocently.

Soon we're in the minivan, speeding toward NASA. I glance back at the house, expecting to see Noah waving from the balcony—but he's gone. Probably back inside.

At the station, everything blurs: Mum's final hug, the Suit Technicians helping us into our gear, Jasmine's purple suit gleaming like a neon star. We climb into the Voidrunner, hearts pounding like an over excited drum banging around on the inside.

"Taking off in 5, 4, 3, 2, 1… LIFT-OFF!"

The rocket roars. My stomach drops. Space swallows us whole.

Then—rustling.

A beep.

"Extra weight detected."

A tiny voice behind us: "Lukey? Jazzy?"

Floating there, in a miniature space suit, is Noah.

I stare at him in disbelief.

"Well," I say, "this trip certainly just got a whole lot longer!"