

CHALLENGER

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INT. CALTECH PHYSICS CLASSROOM - DAY

DR. RICHARD FEYNMAN, 69, teaches physics to an auditorium full of UNDERGRADS. Feynman's grey mane is unkempt. His clothes are rumpled and coffee-stained. But he commands the awe and respect of the entire room.

Feynman is dwarfed by towering blackboards behind him, all covered with his scrawling hand. He erases the equations and writes on the board "What I cannot create I cannot understand."

His voice is surprisingly coarse, still retaining its Brooklyn roots.

FEYNMAN

(his back still turned)

Grossbart, third row. What is the value of science?

The young SIMON GROSSBART, caught off guard, looks nervously around. His friends don't offer any assistance.

GROSSBART

Well, I guess to answer the questions of the universe.

Feynman turns around.

FEYNMAN

The universe been asking you a lot of questions lately?

Nervous titters. Feynman chooses a female student, ELAINE SACHS.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

Sachs, what can science teach us?

SACHS

I don't know... maybe to understand why we exist?

FEYNMAN

You should have stopped after "I don't know." THAT was the right answer. "Why" designates some sort of meaning to it all, like religion. But religion is a culture of faith, science is a culture of doubt. Embracing uncertainty, ladies and gentlemen, is what will make scientists of you all.

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Feynman sits on the edge of his desk. His students perk up, chewing on their pencils.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

Through the ages, people have tried to discover the meaning of life. If we take into account not only what the ancient philosophers knew, but all we know today on top of that, we still must admit that we do not know. But in admitting this, we open up a channel to freedom of thought. We are at the very beginning of time for the human race, we are humanity's impetuous youth. Our responsibility is to do what we can, learn what we can, and pass the solutions down. But if we pretend to know all the answers to life, we will be stunting our growth for centuries to come. We will doom humanity to the confines of our time's limited imagination. Great progress can only come from admitting ignorance. Doubt is not to be feared, but to be welcomed and discussed. We owe it to the future not to know.

Grossbart raises his hand. Feynman acknowledges him.

GROSSBART

So does this mean we'll pass this class by being really good at not knowing?

The laugh lines of Feynman's face deepen.

FEYNMAN

I seriously doubt it.

FADE TO BLACK.

TITLE: "CHALLENGER"

IN THE DARKNESS:

NEWSCASTER (V.O.)

T minus ten, nine, eight, seven, six, we have main engine start-- four, three, two, one, and lift off!

An unseen crowd ROARS its approval.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

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

Lift off of the twenty-fifth space
shuttle mission... and it has cleared the
tower...

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

SUPER: January 28, 1986.

Feynman watches the launch broadcast on television. He wears a robe and pink bunny slippers and works on a crossword puzzle.

Feynman's British wife, GWENETH, late forties and still pretty, serves him a plateful of eggs. He prods the eggs with his spoon and makes a face.

FEYNMAN

At last! The perfect selective medium for
my mold study.

GWENETH

Don't experiment with your food, Dick.

Feynman eats, and works on his crossword. Instead of words, however, he fills in PHYSICS EQUATIONS that overlap in the blank spaces.

CU: On TV, the SHUTTLE rises amidst fanfare. But only seconds after the Challenger's launch, it EXPLODES! The crowd's SCREAMS are heard behind the newscaster's panicked voice.

Feynman freezes, his spoon halfway to his mouth, eyes locked on the television. Gweneth, pale, puts her hand on his shoulder.

INT. NASA BOARD ROOM - DAY

A NASA board meeting. Men in suits sit around a table, looking as if they've been there several hours too long. BILL GRAHAM, the director of NASA, checks a list of names.

BILL GRAHAM

What about Aldrin, you think he'll do it?

EXECUTIVE

Buzz? He's in Hawaii with his family.
Look, we've already got Neil Armstrong,
Chuck Yeager, and Sally Ride. How many
celebrities do we need?

(CONTINUED)

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WILLIAM P. ROGERS, former Secretary of State during the Nixon administration, clears his throat. He is an older man with the authority to match his perfectly white hair.

ROGERS

As many as we can get. Having Buzz on board would instill confidence in our investigation. The press eats up anything he says. He's a hero, for Christ's sake.

BILL GRAHAM

I still want Feynman on this.

ROGERS

I don't think that's wise. Your Mr. Wizard is a loose cannon, a publicity hound.

This remark causes a mild stir around the table.

ROGERS (CONT'D)

Don't tell me you haven't heard the stories. He gets his kicks embarrassing public institutions, the Nobel Committee, the National Academy of Sciences, to name a few. That's exactly the kind of attention we want to avoid right now.

BILL GRAHAM

He's as legendary in the science world as any of your astronaut celebrities.

ROGERS

With all due respect, you chose me to head this committee because you knew I could get the job done. We lose this case, NASA loses its funding. The shuttle exploded, no one knows why, and my job is to clean up the mess.

BILL GRAHAM

No, your job is to find out what happened.

INT. CALTECH CLASSROOM - AFTERNOON

Grossbart stands tensely, facing the blackboard. Feynman stands beside him, with a stopwatch.

FEYNMAN

Ready, set, go!

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He STARTS THE CLOCK and he and Grossbart begin DASHING equations across the board. Chalk dust flies, the class roots them on. Who will finish the proof first?

Grossbart is good, but not good enough. Feynman FINISHES with a flourish and throws down the chalk.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

Q.E.D.! Now siddown, wise-ass.

Feynman grins, but suddenly his grin falters. He doubles over, and MOANS.

GROSSBART

Dr. Feynman? Are you okay?

FEYNMAN'S POV: The room is out of focus. Sounds are drawn out and distant, as underwater.

The episode leaves as quickly as it came on, and he sees the faces of his students peering down at him, concerned.

FEYNMAN

I'm okay, I'm fine.

His students continue to hover around him, uncertain.

STUDENT

Should we get someone?

Feynman sits up with great effort.

FEYNMAN

Naw, I'm okay. Let's call class early today, what do you say? I'll see you all next week.

INT. CALTECH BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

A MAN takes a leak at a urinal, as the bathroom door swings open. Feynman stumbles towards the toilet stall, in great abdominal pain.

He doesn't make it, and falls heavily against the wall, sliding down, holding his stomach.

FEYNMAN'S POV: He hears the man SHOUT for a doctor, and he blacks out.

EXT. CEMETERY - AFTERNOON

A large CROWD watches as a COFFIN, covered by an American flag, is carried by white-gloved MARINES towards an open grave. PHOTOGRAPHERS hover around the fringes.

A MINISTER intones funeral rights as the procession winds to a halt. RELATIVES hold each other, pale and proud in their mourning.

INT. HOSPITAL - MORNING

Feynman lies in a hospital bed. The television is on, blaring Brady Bunch reruns.

The room is filled with flowers, cards, and a giant pink teddy bear holding a "Get Well" sign. Feynman glowers at it.

FEYNMAN

Nurse!

He pushes the call button repeatedly.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

(bellowing)

NURSE! I'm dying, here!

A NURSE hurries in. She is buxom and blonde.

NURSE

What is it, hon? You in pain?

FEYNMAN

Agony! The crap on T.V. is killing me.

NURSE

Want me to change it? What happened to your remote?

FEYNMAN

(innocently)

I dropped it.

NURSE

Let me get that for you.

She BENDS DOWN next to Feynman's bed to pick it up, affording him a splendid view down her shirt. He grins, and then smiles angelically up at her as she hands it to him.

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FEYNMAN

Thank you sweetheart. Could you maybe fluff my pillow, too? It hurts to raise my arms.

She's about to do so when Gweneth enters.

GWENETH

I can do that for him, Nurse, don't trouble yourself.

The nurse leaves. Feynman scowls and whispers to her.

FEYNMAN

I'm bored out of my mind, here.

GWENETH

Oh Richard, when are you going to act your age?

FEYNMAN

You think I'm precocious now, wait til I hit seventy.

GWENETH

IF you hit seventy, the way you've been acting...

FEYNMAN

Ah, whaddaya say we sneak out of here and go skinny dipping, the way we used to...

GWENETH

You're in the hospital for a reason! Besides, it's January.

FEYNMAN

And this is California...Come on, Gwen, give me a hug. Smother me with that impressive British bosom of yours.

She cracks a smile. Seeing that he has his foot in the door, Feynman gives her puppy dog eyes until she relents and sits on the bed next to him. She cradles his head against her chest.

GWENETH

This is serious. Any one of these episodes could kill you.

FEYNMAN

So could the programming. Change the channel, will ya?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Gweneth changes the channels until Feynman stops her on the NEWS. It plays FOOTAGE from the explosion.

NEWSCASTER (V.O.)

Seven American astronauts perished last Tuesday when the Challenger space shuttle exploded only moments after its launch.

PICTURES of the seven astronauts appear on screen.

NEWSCASTER (CONT'D)

The cause of the explosion is still unknown. NASA officials inform us that they are putting together an investigative committee to uncover the error which led to this great tragedy.

FEYNMAN

Jesus. What a mess.

NEWSCASTER (V.O.)

President Reagan postponed his scheduled State of the Union address Tuesday night, and instead paid tribute to the dead and their families.

REAGAN

(offscreen)

"I have always had great faith in and respect for our space program, and what happened today does nothing to diminish it. We don't hide our space program, we don't keep secrets and cover things up. We do it all up front, and in public-- that's the way freedom is, and we wouldn't change it for a minute..."

Feynman uses the remote to TURN OFF the set.

FEYNMAN

They're all bunglers. They're going to bungle this thing, I can tell.

GWENETH

By the way, there's someone who wants to see you, Dick. One of your old students. I tried to send him away--

FEYNMAN

(excited)

Why'd you want to do that?! Go ahead, bring him in!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

She kisses his forehead, then rises to go.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

No wait!

He MUSSES UP his hair, puts on his reading glasses, and takes out a pad of paper covered in equations he's been working on.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

Okay now.

Gweneth rolls her eyes and leaves. She mutters under her breath.

GWENETH

Drama queen.

Feynman starts reading his work out loud, as if he's just been unraveling the mysteries of the universe. In walks Bill Graham, in official mode.

Feynman looks up, and groans. He tosses the pad away and takes off his glasses.

FEYNMAN

Oh Bill, it's just you! I thought maybe some more of my students had come.

BILL GRAHAM

(Laughing)

Some more of your female students, right, Dick?

FEYNMAN

What are you implying, sir?

They grasp arms, smiling.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

So how are you, Bill? How're the kids?

BILL GRAHAM

They're fine, thanks. How are you feeling?

FEYNMAN

Like someone took out my intestines and played jump rope with them, how do you think I'm feeling?

BILL GRAHAM

When did the doctors say you can go?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

FEYNMAN

Day after tomorrow. They're sick of seeing me every couple months. Not much they can do to help, anyway, terminal is terminal.

This comment, lightly spoken, makes Bill very uncomfortable. Feynman quickly changes the subject.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

Say, I'm sorry about the accident, Bill. Seven people. Man.

Bill gets his emotions under control.

BILL GRAHAM

...Yeah. Listen, Dick--

He sits gingerly down on the bed beside him.

BILL GRAHAM (CONT'D)

That's kind of what I came here to talk to you about. The boys over at NASA are putting together a committee--

FEYNMAN

Don't ask me.

BILL GRAHAM

We're looking for guys who can think on their feet, who can get their hands dirty.

FEYNMAN

I said don't ask me!

BILL GRAHAM

We want people who can solve this thing.

FEYNMAN

No, you want people whose names will back up what you want to say. You want me to guest star on your little committee, so you can look good, but meanwhile I'm the one up to my neck in bureaucrats and paperwork! No way man.

BILL GRAHAM

It would be a great honor--

FEYNMAN

It would ruin my life!

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BILL GRAHAM

I wouldn't ask if it wasn't important, if I could find anyone who could do as good a job. As a former student-- as a friend-- I'm asking you to do this for me.

FEYNMAN

Nice try, but I'm sort of like a super-Jew: impervious to guilt. When I was thirty years old I realized that a scientist can't weigh himself down worrying about responsibility and duty all the time, or nothing will get accomplished. Ethics are one thing, but guilt just hampers progress.

BILL GRAHAM

Dick, your country needs you.

At this moment, Gwen reenters the room discreetly.

GWENETH

(with emotion)

His family needs him, too.

Surprised, the two men take notice of her. She stands tall as a mother bear protecting her cub.

BILL GRAHAM

Mrs. Feynman--

GWENETH

He doesn't have the strength, can't you see that? His mind might be untouched, but his body is hooked up to tubes!

Feynman looks torn between embarrassment and concern for her.

FEYNMAN

Sweetheart, please--

Bill stands up, feeling uncomfortable.

BILL GRAHAM

This is obviously a bad time. Call me in a couple of days, maybe you'll change your mind.

GWENETH

He won't.

Feynman squeezes her hand, and summons a smile for Bill.

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FEYNMAN

She's right. Thanks anyway, kid. It was good to see you.

BILL GRAHAM

Take care.

He leaves. Gwen sits on the bed next to Feynman.

GWENETH

Please Dick. Please don't do this to us.

FEYNMAN

Don't worry about it.

But his mind seems elsewhere.

EXT. FEYNMAN HOUSE - FOLLOWING WEEK

A shaky Feynman is helped out of the car by Gwen.

Running from the door of the house to meet him is his daughter MICHELLE, a coltish 18 year old with long, curly hair. They embrace.

FEYNMAN

I've missed you. No one at the hospital could play a decent game of chess.

MICHELLE

Me too. ...Let me carry that for you.

She tries to pick up his suitcase from the hospital, but he won't let her, and insists on carrying it himself.

FEYNMAN

Oh no you don't.

MICHELLE

(exasperated)

Dad! When are you going to let me take care of you?!

FEYNMAN

When I can no longer checkmate you in ten moves.

INT. FEYNMAN HOME, STUDY- A FEW DAYS LATER

Feynman works on equations in his study. He is agitated, his mind clearly not on his work.

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We see that instead of framed diplomas, his office walls are covered with pencil drawings of nudes, charcoal rubbings of what appear to be Mayan hieroglyphics, and photographs taken of himself in exotic locations.

INT. FEYNMAN HOUSE, KITCHEN - SIMULTANEOUS

Gweneth, hair pulled into a bun, cooks dinner. The TV is on in the background, muted.

Gwen tastes the soup, and as she does so she catches sight of a photo of Christa McAuliffe on TV-- in front of a classroom of children, wearing her NASA-issue jumpsuit.

Close on McAuliffe's face, which glows with excitement and hope.

Disturbed, Gwen switches off the TV and goes back to the stove.

INT. STUDY

Unable to concentrate, Feynman pushes back his chair, and starts hitting his pencil against his desk, making a complicated beat.

His eyes wander around the room as the pencil's rhythm grows more and more intricate.

Then Feynman's eyes lock on one photo in particular: a black and white glossy of himself as a handsome young man, grinning under the Los Alamos desert sun. He stands in a group with other white-coated scientists. In the background behind them, a glint of what appears to be a metal tower.

Staring at the photo, his pencil's rhythm gains momentum, intensity, until suddenly the pencil BREAKS and snaps him out of his spell.

Feynman sighs, returns to his desk, and uses the broken stub to continue his work.

INT. KITCHEN - SIMULTANEOUS

Gwen sings softly to herself as she stirs the soup.

INT. STUDY - MOMENTS LATER

Feynman rips a page off his note pad and throws it away. He starts writing again, but stops when he hears the singing coming from the kitchen.

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FEYNMAN

Gwen! Could you cut that out, please?

She pokes her head in the door.

GWENETH

Dear?

FEYNMAN

Is this Carnegie Hall? How's a guy supposed to get any work done around here?

GWENETH

Grumpy lately, aren't we?

FEYNMAN

I'M NOT GRUMPY! I'm never grumpy.

She looks at him, eyebrow raised.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

So I'm a little grumpy. Where did I put my sad excuse for a pencil?

He looks around for it, tossing papers out of the way. Gweneth pulls a long pencil from her hair, where it was holding her bun in place. She hands it to him.

GWENETH

You've been thinking about this NASA committee.

FEYNMAN

I haven't said a word about Bill, or NASA, or--

GWENETH

But you've been thinking about it.

FEYNMAN

I don't want to be on his committee.

GWENETH

No. You don't.

He starts pacing, running his hands through his gray hair.

FEYNMAN

It'll eat up all of my time. I won't get to see my students, or my kids--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

GWENETH

Or me--

FEYNMAN

And my work will go right out the window...

GWENETH

Dick--

He refuses to look at her as he continues pacing.

GWENETH (CONT'D)

Darling, can you solve this?

FEYNMAN

(distracted)

What?

GWENETH

Can you figure out what went wrong with the shuttle?

FEYNMAN

I don't know, maybe. Maybe I can.

Gweneth looks like she's fighting with herself.

GWENETH

Do you think it's important?

FEYNMAN

It's always important to know the truth.

GWENETH

But will it-- save lives, do you think?

FEYNMAN

Possibly. Possibly.

Feynman stops pacing, and notices the bereft look on her face.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

(upset)

Ah, damn it to hell.

She pulls him into an embrace, her eyes creasing with worry. He holds her tight.

INT. FEYNMAN BEDROOM - THAT NIGHT

Feynman packs his suitcase. He holds up two ties-- one a sober navy, another adorned with a hula dancer. After a moment of deliberation, he folds the hula dancer tie into his bag.

It takes him a moment to see his daughter standing in the doorway. He holds his hands up, defensive.

FEYNMAN

I know-- don't say it.

MICHELLE

You're crazy. You've got a bad heart, bone cancer, stomach cancer, and one working kidney, yet you still think you're invincible.

FEYNMAN

I might be able to see something that those suits can't, Michelle.

MICHELLE

It's vanity, is what it is. You're sacrificing yourself so you can get your picture in the paper one last time.

FEYNMAN

That's not true!

Michelle comes towards him.

MICHELLE

Then stay home! The doctor says you have to rest, how come you're the only one who doesn't believe him?

FEYNMAN

Doctors don't know everything.

MICHELLE

Neither do you. The first thing you taught me was to question everything, and now I'm questioning your judgement. Is it worth it, Dad? Is it worth dying for?

He can't respond. Exasperated, she leaves the room.

INT. AIRPORT - EVENING

Feynman and Gweneth hurry through the airport to catch a plane. Feynman is rumpled as usual, and papers stick out of his briefcase.

They reach the gate and exchange quick HUGS and KISSES. Gweneth hands him several bottles of prescription meds from her purse.

GWENETH

Take the pink ones for your heart, and the white ones for pain. We have a deal, right?

FEYNMAN

Right. No kicking the bucket without your permission.

GWENETH

Remember to call Doctor Morton as soon as you're settled in. He wants to make sure that pain is really gone this time.

FEYNMAN

It is, I'm sure of it. I'm strong as a bull.

GWENETH

Don't worry about Michelle. She's upset, but she'll come round.

FEYNMAN

She deserves to hate me a little.

The departure announcement sounds over the PA system. Gwen throws her arms around him.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

Don't cry. Think how interesting this is going to be.

GWENETH

Not too interesting, I hope.

INT. PLANE - NIGHT

Feynman stares out the window at the tiny twinkling lights of a city below him. Everyone else on board is asleep. It is lonely and quiet.

He SIGHS, and takes out a book from his carry on bag. It is called "Dealing with Dying: Saying Goodbye.

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" He thumbs through it casually and makes a face. He tosses it back into his bag.

He takes out another book, this one about the NASA space program. He begins to read with interest.

BEGIN MONTAGE: FEYNMAN'S FIRST DAY IN WASHINGTON

-- Feynman steps out of the car in front of NASA's headquarters.

-- Feynman in NASA library checking out stacks of books on shuttle engineering.

-- Feynman hunched over charts in his hotel room. It is late at night, his bottles of pills ever present.

END MONTAGE.

INT. NATIONAL AIR AND SPACE MUSEUM - DAY

Feynman stands waist-high in a sea of happy SCHOOL KIDS. Strangely, he does not seem out of place among them.

Feynman stares up at the jet models and shuttles suspended from the ceiling above him, takes notes on different exhibits, and observes with a childlike wonder at the marvels man has made.

He walks down a corridor lined with PORTRAITS OF ASTRONAUTS, men and women who stare confidently back at him from behind glass. It is a very patriotic moment.

INT. RITZ-CARLETON HOTEL LOBBY - EVENING

Feynman returns decked out in a NASA cap and T-shirt. He carries a TOY SHUTTLE model in the crook of his arm, a souvenir.

The hotel is a posh affair. Feynman goes to the FRONT DESK.

CLERK

You have a message from your wife, Dr. Feynman, and a message from Chairman Rogers with directions for the meeting.

FEYNMAN

Oh good! I'm ready to do some intense brain work.

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CLERK

I must say, Sir, we here at the Carleton are honored to have the members of the Special Commission as our guests.

FEYNMAN

Don't feel too honored, kid, NASA's picking up the tab.

He takes his messages, then leans in conspiratorially.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

Say, when you order pay-per-view in the rooms here, does the movie title show up on the bill?

CLERK

(embarrassed)

Uh, no sir, we respect our guests privacy.

Feynman smiles and winks before he leaves.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NEXT MORNING

Feynman is asleep at his desk. Flight diagrams are pinned to the walls, and stacks of books cover his untouched bed.

The phone RINGS. He groggily wakes up and checks the time, then CURSES.

INT. GOVERNMENT OFFICE BUILDING HALLWAY - LATER

Feynman jogs past many numbered doors. He checks a slip of paper with the room number on it. He finally arrives, and opens the door triumphantly, interrupting the discussion.

Eleven somber MEN and WOMEN stare back at him. Included in the group are NEIL ARMSTRONG, CHUCK YEAGER, SALLY RIDE, and a handsome man wearing a general's uniform, GENERAL KUTYNA.

William Rogers stands next to an overhead projector, annoyed at the interruption.

FEYNMAN

Uh... Is this room 904?

ROGERS

Dr. Feynman, I presume?

FEYNMAN

Call me Dick, please. Hey, is that spread over there for us?

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CONTINUED:

Feynman edges his way to a side table where a continental breakfast is set up.

ROGERS

If you don't mind, Dr. Feynman, we were just discussing the parameters concerning our involvement with the press.

FEYNMAN

(with his mouth full of Danish)
Don't mind me. I slept through breakfast.

ROGERS

Yes, well. As I was saying, NASA strongly discourages any press interaction on an individual level, unless first approved by me. Handling the press is, of course, our key priority at this time. If you'd like to turn to page 32 in your handbooks, I've highlighted several contacts we're currently--

Feynman raises his hand.

FEYNMAN

Excuse me, but this being the first meeting and all, I thought we'd start working on what *happened* to the Challenger. You know, nuts and bolts kind of thing. I was expecting some technical boys to be here, you know, to brief us.

Rogers tries to keep his annoyance in check.

ROGERS

As I explained earlier, we will be overseeing a technical investigation as part of our assignment, yes, but we hold a responsibility to NASA and the American public to uphold the people's faith in the space program. The Challenger was a one in a million error, and will not be repeated. Now as I was saying--

FEYNMAN

How do we know it was one in a million?

ROGERS

(losing his cool)
I'm sorry?

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CONTINUED: (2)

FEYNMAN

Is there some sort of statistic that says
NASA's success rate is 99.9999 percent?

The committee members begin to exchange exasperated looks.
Only the General has a thoughtful look on his face, quietly
enjoying the confrontation.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

I've been doing some investigating on my
own these past couple days, and from what
I've heard, there were all sorts of
complications in shuttle flights in '84
and '85 that never got out to the public--

ROGERS

Mr. Feynman, I strongly believe that the
sort of side investigating you've been
doing is not only extraneous, but harmful
to what we're trying to accomplish in the
next few months. This needs to be a
carefully planned out, unified process.
I'm afraid I can't allow you to continue
to go off sleuthing by yourself.

FEYNMAN

But how's anybody supposed to figure
anything out if they can't go an get
their hands dirty?

ROGERS

I'm afraid you don't understand.

FEYNMAN

I'm afraid I'm beginning to.

EXT. BUILDING - LATER

Feynman exits the building after the meeting, visibly
disgruntled. He carries several large and unwieldy binders.
General Kutyna catches up to him.

KUTYNA

Hey, Feynman. Hey you!

FEYNMAN

Hey me, what?

KUTYNA

You missed the introductions. I'm Donald
Kutyna.

They shake hands. Feynman admires his uniform.

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FEYNMAN

Nice to meet ya, General. Which one of these monsters is yours?

He gestures to the line of LIMOUSINES at the curb. Chairman ROGERS disappears into one, dictating notes to his SECRETARY.

KUTYNA

A two star general doesn't get a limo in Washington. I take the subway.

Feynman laughs and puts his arm around him.

FEYNMAN

Kutyna, any general that takes the subway can't be all bad!

INT. DINER - LATER

Kutyna and Feynman eat greasy diner fare. Feynman heaves a contented SIGH and wipes his hands on his shirt.

FEYNMAN

Don't breathe a word of this to my wife. She's rather see me with a prostitute than a pastrami.

KUTYNA

I never stand between a man and his stomach.

Feynman dutifully swallows the pink and white pills Gwen gave him.

FEYNMAN

Yeah, well soon it will be back to bean sprouts for me. I'm getting out of here first thing tomorrow.

Kutyna looks unhappy at this news.

KUTYNA

You're leaving? Just like that?

FEYNMAN

Rogers doesn't want an investigation, he wants a circle jerk. I don't want to play a part in NASA's political agenda.

KUTYNA

But beneath all the PR and smoke and mirrors, it's a physics problem.

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CONTINUED:

FEYNMAN

Oh yeah? Then where are the calculations, the blueprints, the little ID cards with our pictures on them? Where's the fun?

Kutyna is silent. Feynman speaks more seriously.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

Listen General, my work at CalTech is very interesting. Much more so than this stuff. Plus I'm the only person who can finish it. Here, my credentials are just garnish for some report. I'm not necessary.

KUTYNA

Yes, you are. We need a free agent.

FEYNMAN

I don't follow.

KUTYNA

Everyone else on the board has ties to NASA or the government. Sally Ride has her job at Johnson Air Force Center, I'm the military's Shuttle Program Manager, Armstrong, you get the idea. You're the only one of us who can ruffle NASA's skirts and not pay the price.

Feynman doesn't look convinced. Kutyna hesitates, then leans in.

KUTYNA (CONT'D)

And I think something sneaky is going on. Being a General, I have access to all kinds of classified information. But my career is tied to NASA, and can be used against me. I cannot implicate myself, but I can help you with your investigation.

FEYNMAN

What do you mean, 'sneaky?'

KUTYNA

I believe NASA was under extraordinary pressure to launch without delay.

FEYNMAN

Well sure, I hear that their budget is on the line. Congress always wants to cut NASA funds.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

KUTYNA

It's more than that. I can't give you any hard evidence, but I've heard rumors that a satellite feed had been set up between the Challenger and the White House. Reagan was supposed to talk to the astronauts on their first night up in space-- during his State of the Union Address. Something that big would put NASA under enormous pressure to get the shuttle launched, even if it wasn't safe.

FEYNMAN

It's not much to go on.

KUTYNA

It's a place to start. The White House was leaning on NASA, NASA was leaning on the engineers. Now the question is, what went wrong with Challenger, and was there anything NASA could have done to prevent it?

FEYNMAN

(conceding)

...Okay. That's kind of interesting.

He offers Kutyna his hand.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

I'll poke my nose around a little. But I'm not promising anything.

They shake.

KUTYNA

Thanks. And I'll work on those picture ID's for you.

INT. NASA LABORATORY - THAT WEEKEND

Feynman walks through the white hallways, flashing his new VISITOR'S BADGE at everyone who passes, even janitors.

He walks into a briefing room, where HENRY, an engineer, stands up and shakes Feynman's hand.

FEYNMAN

I appreciate you taking your weekend to meet with me. I've got two days to become an expert on rocket science.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HENRY

I'll be briefing you about the Challenger's engine. Robert Boisjoly and Allan McDonald should be coming by later on to tell you about the boosters and the O-ring seals.

FEYNMAN

Be prepared Henry, because I'm going to grill you like a trout.

They sit down at the table and unroll BLUEPRINTS of the shuttle.

HENRY

Now I'm happy to help you, sir, but you should know that I'm just an engineer. You probably should be talking to the big guys upstairs, or the major contractors. We don't make decisions, we just put it together.

FEYNMAN

Then you're the only people I need to see.

INT. NASA LABORATORY - EVENING

The briefing has been going on for hours, the sky outside the windows is now black. Feynman's tie is loose, and the table littered with Styrofoam cups.

Henry is on the phone, looking upset.

HENRY

(into the phone)

Yes, I understand that, but we've been waiting for them for three hours... But last night they said--- they did. I see. No, I don't wish to leave another message. Thanks.

He hangs up.

FEYNMAN

Is something wrong?

HENRY

It's just that it's funny... Robert and Al were always complaining about how no one ever wanted to talk to us engineers, find out our side of things.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HENRY (CONT'D)

Then the one day someone actually comes
by who will listen, and they take off.

FEYNMAN

Do they live nearby?

HENRY

Yes, but-- it's past ten.

FEYNMAN

Good, so they'll be home.

He gets up and grabs his jacket, leaving behind a baffled
Henry.

EXT. SUBURBAN HOME - NIGHT

Henry and Feynman ring the doorbell and wait. Henry looks
nervous.

FEYNMAN

Funny how McDonald happened to go on
vacation the same day of his meeting with
me.

HENRY

Must be some sort of family emergency.
He's not a flaky man.

Feynman rings the doorbell again. A dog BARKS from deep
within the house, then is audibly MUFFLED.

FEYNMAN

What the--

He bangs on the door with his fist.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

Hellooooo!

No response.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

We're here to talk about the shuttle,
which you happened to BUILD and which
happened to EXPLODE!

No answer. The house is unnaturally quiet.

Feynman curses and kicks the door half-heartedly.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - MONDAY MORNING

The committee, including Feynman, sits watching LAWRENCE MULLOY, the officious project manager for Solid Rockets, try to explain the shuttle to them.

Mulloy seems to revel in the confusing lingo, despite the fact that nearly everyone in the audience looks lost.

MULLOY

And these are the Randolph type two zinc chromate asbestos-filled putty laid up in strips--

CHUCK YEAGER, sitting in the front row, raises his hand.

MULLOY (CONT'D)

Yes Mr. Yeager?

YEAGER

Son, I'm not a stupid man. I test flew all the prototypes that led to the shuttle technology. But this is all mumbo jumbo to me. Can't you speak plain English?!

The rest of the committee MURMURS in agreement. Feynman says nothing, scrutinizing Mulloy from beneath his bushy eyebrows.

Rogers clears his throat and steps in.

ROGERS

Mr. Yeager, no one really expects this committee to understand every aspect of the shuttle's construction. It's really just a gesture on NASA's behalf, to familiarize ourselves with the gist of the thing. I'm confident we can rely on NASA's own technical investigators to look into the nitty gritty stuff.

Feynman, like a heckler, speaks up from the back of the room.

FEYNMAN

But that sort of defeats the purpose of an 'independent' investigatory committee, doesn't it?

With open dislike, Rogers stares down Feynman.

ROGERS

This is not a primarily technical investigation.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROGERS (CONT'D)

We don't really expect to be able to figure out what went wrong with the shuttle.

This comment makes some of the committee members cast sidelong glances at each other.

FEYNMAN

(with attitude)

Maybe you don't, but I expect to. And I find that when you ask Nature a clear question, she gives you a clear answer.

ROGERS

(seething)

What I meant was, not all of us are Nobel Prize winners, Mr. Feynman. Most of us don't have the training necessary to pinpoint minute technological defects.

Feynman stands up and approaches the highly complicated shuttle diagram behind Mulloy.

FEYNMAN

Heck, I'm no engineer. I came here last Wednesday not knowing a tang from a clevis.

He gestures to specific spots on the diagram.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

But just doing a little homework, it's pretty obvious to see a pattern of recurring cracks in the turbine blades of the shuttle's engines, especially in quadrants A6 through F19. That could be our problem right there! There's also evidence of hydrogen-damaged fuel seals. Not to mention the flight programming had 250,000 lines of code running on obsolete hardware--

ROGERS

That's enough, Mr. Feynman! If you don't mind, we're in the middle of a lecture?

The committee stares at him as if he's showing off.

Feynman shrugs and returns to his chair. On his way he winks at Kutyna. Kutyna hides a smile.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - LATER THAT DAY

The lecture over, the committee gathers their things and gets ready to leave. Kutyna approaches Feynman, and speaks to him in a low voice.

KUTYNA

"It should be pretty obvious?!" What kind of homework have you been *doing*, Feynman? You've only been here five days!

FEYNMAN

Three, really. I spent Saturday at Marshall Space Flight Center in Alabama, and Sunday at the Johnson Center in Houston, talking to the engineers there.

He grins at Kutyna.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

How'd you spend your weekend, General?

The General slaps his back, laughing.

INT. FEYNMAN HOUSE - DAY

Gweneth Feynman washes the dishes. The house is sunny and lonely. She sighs, dries her hands and turns on the television.

CNN is doing a profile on NASA's investigative committee.

NEWSCASTER (V.O.)

--says William Rogers, head of the committee. In addition to Neil Armstrong and Chuck Yeager, Nobel Prize-winning physicist Richard Feynman was added to the list of investigator-generals last Friday.

Gweneth turns up the volume on the set, and CALLS UPSTAIRS to Michelle's room.

GWENETH

Michelle honey! Come quick! Your father's on TV!

A short MONTAGE of photographs and video clips underlie the NEWSCASTER'S VOICE-OVER.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NEWSCASTER (V.O.)

Dr. Feynman has been an established member of the scientific community for over forty years, working with names like Robert Oppenheimer, Enrico Fermi, and Albert Einstein. His work on the Manhattan Project contributed significantly to the creation of the atom bomb in 1945.

A SOUND BITE of Bill Graham in an interview.

BILL GRAHAM

Richard is the best man I can think of for the job. If he can't figure out what happened, no one can. I have the utmost faith in his abilities.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAY

Feynman watches the same program, but shuts it off in disgust. He looks antsy.

He picks up the phone, makes a call. A MALE VOICE picks up the on the other end.

FEYNMAN

Yeah, hi. What's the sum of the series $1 + (1/2)$ to the fourth power + $(1/3)$ to the fourth power and so on?

INT. LIVINGROOM, CALIFORNIA - SIMULTANEOUS

HANS BETHE, in his late 70's with a thick German accent, seems unsurprised by Feynman's call. We get the sense that this is a friendship that has spanned decades, that their minds are finely attuned to each other.

HANS BETHE

One point oh eight.

FEYNMAN (O.S.)

Come on, you're getting lazy in your retirement. It's pi to the fourth over ninety.

HANS BETHE

You didn't say how many decimal points you wanted. How's Washington?

INT. HOTEL ROOM - SIMULTANEOUS

Feynman looks lonely and out of place in his swanky hotel room.

FEYNMAN

Major drag, man. I'm itching to talk probabilities.

HANS BETHE (O.S.)

Alright.

FEYNMAN

I've got a list here of all the risk estimates, from sixteen different engineers. One guys says engine failure probability was one in two hundred. Another guy says it was one in ten million. I need to figure out how they're getting their figures, and come up with something resembling the truth. Ready to run some numbers?

HANS BETHE (O.S.)

Ja. Let me get my pipe.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Feynman's shirt is unbuttoned. The phone is lodged in the crick of his neck. He scribbles frantically, we get the sense that he's racing. His bed and floor are covered with pages of calculations. He tears off one sheet of paper, lets it fall to the floor, and continues without stopping.

FEYNMAN

(panting)

Point zero six six nine!

BETHE (O.S.)

Your integers aren't whole. It's six six eight.

FEYNMAN

No, that's wrong.

HANS BETHE (O.S.)

It's not.

FEYNMAN

And you still use a slide rule. This is the eighties, Bethe!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HANS BETHE (O.S.)

(calmly)

It still works, and this way I don't have to waste money on batteries.

FEYNMAN

(muttering)

Six six eight... For a Nobel Laureate, you sure are dumb.

HANS BETHE (O.S.)

Pot, kettle. Anyway, you have your answer, assuming the data is correct.

Feynman slumps to the floor.

FEYNMAN

You can't assume anything around here.

Feynman closes his eyes, exhausted, his facade dropping for a moment.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

...I've started thinking about the desert a lot lately.

INT. BETHE'S LIVINGROOM - SIMULTANEOUS

Hans takes off his glasses, rubs the red marks on his nose.

HANS BETHE

I've never stopped, really.

There is a long silence on the other end.

HANS BETHE (CONT'D)

We were too clever, weren't we?

EXT. WASHINGTON DC PARK - DAY

Bill Graham feeds the DUCKS in the pond from a brown paper bag. Rogers sits beside him, fuming.

BILL GRAHAM

So he got a head start, what's the big deal?

ROGERS

With all due respect, Bill, NASA's in trouble. Bringing in Feynman could turn into a major mistake.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Rogers fidgets as Bill watches two DUCKS fight over a crust of bread.

BILL GRAHAM

Maybe he'll find out it was some sort of random engine failure, or, I don't know--

ROGERS

Feynman's vigilante investigation is jeopardizing the integrity of the committee. Everything we do needs to be carefully documented and overseen, and here he goes running off to solve the thing by himself! Who knows who he's talking to?

BILL GRAHAM

I trust his judgement.

Rogers tone changes.

ROGERS

Bill, the White House gave me specific orders, and I intend to carry them out. My job is to make sure NASA emerges from this in one piece, and that the shuttle program continues. It's in both of our best interests to keep this committee in line.

After mulling this over, Bill stands up and empties the remaining crumbs into the pond.

BILL GRAHAM

Do what you have to do. But don't forget Chairman-- we're the good guys, here.

INT. NASA OFFICE BUILDING - EVENING

Feynman sits in the sterile office they have assigned to him, trying to do his work, sorting through numerous blueprints and files.

There are no pictures on the wall, and everything is the same shade of beige, from the desk to the carpet.

Feynman can't seem to concentrate, finally mimics plucking out his eyeballs.

CUT TO:

INT. SEEDY STRIP JOINT - LATER

Feynman sits at a table in a mostly empty strip joint, where a STRIPPER lazily twirls around a pole.

He barely glances at her, content to sip his soda and scribble equations onto the bar napkins. He has accumulated a small stack of equation-covered napkins.

He stops only to pop a couple of pills in his mouth, and keeps working.

A WAITRESS saunters by.

WAITRESS

Last call.

He stops writing and smiles at her.

FEYNMAN

Too bad. I've been getting a lot of work done. Places like this really clear out your head.

WAITRESS

Your head? I always thought it was something else.

She reaches over and GRABS the napkin pile of calculations, then uses it to SOAK UP a spill on his table. Feynman is too dismayed to stop her.

WAITRESS (CONT'D)

Good luck on your work.

INT. AIR AND SPACE MUSEUM - NIGHT

Feynman is at a formal NASA reception held in the museum. There is a JAZZ QUARTET and an ice sculpture shaped like the shuttle.

Feynman wears a brown velvet tuxedo straight out of the seventies.

He snags an hors d'oeuvre from a waiter's tray, looks at it skeptically, and tastes it. Grimacing, he puts it back on the tray while the waiter isn't looking.

Feynman sees Kutyna talking to a group of matronly ladies across the room, and waves his arms.

FEYNMAN

Hey General! Over here!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Kutyna, startled, looks around and sees him. He gives a little wave. Feynman joins him.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

Well, well, Kutyna, you don't look so shabby when you get cleaned up a little.

KUTYNA

Mrs. Cunningham, Mrs. Archley, may I introduce you to Dr. Richard Feynman, one of my fellow investigators.

Introductions are made, Feynman charms the two ladies, who titter like schoolgirls. General Kutyna pulls him aside.

KUTYNA (CONT'D)

Copilot to Pilot, comb your hair.

Feynman growls and runs his hands through his tangled mop.

FEYNMAN

Got a comb?

He does. Several men stare coldly at Feynman as he combs his hair.

The BARTENDER refills Kutyna's champagne glass, but turns away when he sees Feynman.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

Hey! Some service.

KUTYNA

In case you haven't noticed, you're starting to make a few enemies around here. It's a sign you're making progress. Excuse me.

With that, the General leaves to greet another official.

Feynman fidgets until he sees Bill Graham sitting with his WIFE. Feynman squeezes into the table beside them.

BILL GRAHAM

So Dick, I hear you're causing quite the stir among NASA these days.

FEYNMAN

Not nearly as much of one as I wanted. Why'd you put such a jackass in charge of this thing, anyway? Rogers keeps sending me "memos."

(in mocking voice)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

"Memo to Feynman: don't forget to number your pages." "Memo to Feynman: do not charge bar tab to NASA expense account."

Bill twirls his martini nervously around in its glass, embarrassed.

BILL GRAHAM

Oh, don't be too hard on William. He's a government man, born and bred. He's just watching out for us, that's all.

FEYNMAN

You know, that's the kind of protective "good ole boy" nonsense I've had to put up with since I got here. I thought this investigation was supposed to be objective. But every time I try to point out something that's all screwed up around here, people jump all over me.

BILL GRAHAM

It's just that we here at NASA are very proud of what we do. We're the last real pioneers, I guess--

FEYNMAN

Oh, don't start in on that patriotic crap. If you guys were launching cardboard tubes, you'd say the same thing.

People sitting nearby overhear; some WHISPER to each other. Feynman is oblivious.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

All I've encountered since I got here is this fear that someone's going to be blamed, and no one wants it to be them. So there's name-dropping and hinting, but no one will back it up. And the facts are all screwy. How can you hold an investigation this way?

BILL GRAHAM

I'm afraid you don't understand the complexity of our situation, Dick. This is a fragile time for NASA. If you remember, the last guy who held my post was removed for fraud, and now this accident...it doesn't look good.

FEYNMAN

That's cause things aren't good, Bill.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

BILL GRAHAM

Look, I admire what you are trying to do.
Just try not to bring down the entire
space program while you're at it.

EXT. SUBURBAN HOME - EVENING

Feynman stands on the front porch of a small brick home with
sun-faded plastic flamingos out front. He RINGS THE DOORBELL.
A tall, thin man answers the door.

FEYNMAN

Mr. McDonald?

The man says nothing.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

Allan McDonald, Director of the Space
Shuttle Rocket Motor Project?

After a moment, the man NODS.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

I'm investigator-general Richard Feynman.

MCDONALD

Oh yes, the reason I got a paid vacation
to the Keys.

FEYNMAN

Ah. I was wondering why you missed our
appointment the other day.

MCDONALD

(dryly)
I had to wash my hair.

FEYNMAN

It could use it. Look, can I come in?

MCDONALD

I'd prefer you didn't. I value my job.

FEYNMAN

Look, could you at least give me some
launch records, or just a name, anything,
it could be anonymous--

MCDONALD

There are no records of who made what
choice and why. No pre-launch memos. They
were all destroyed, and for good reason.
Good night.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He begins to shut the door, but Feynman lodges his foot in front of it.

FEYNMAN

You're scared, because you know something. Give me a clue and I'll leave you alone.

MCDONALD

This isn't "Murder She Wrote."

FEYNMAN

What made this launch fail? Why was the Challenger different??

McDonald pauses, and looks him in the eye, and delivers his clue.

MCDONALD

I'm sorry, but you're letting the heat out. It's too cold to stand here arguing with you.

He kicks Feynman's foot out from the door, and SLAMS the door in Feynman's face.

FEYNMAN

It's sixty fucking degrees, man!

INT. FEYNMAN'S HOTEL ROOM - LATE THAT NIGHT

Feynman enters his room, exhausted, his bow tie loose around his neck. He switches on the light and stops, surprised.

His room has been RANSACKED. His briefcase is open and papers are SCATTERED around. Most importantly, though, his work is missing.

FEYNMAN

You've gotta be kidding me.

INT. NASA OFFICES - NEXT DAY

Feynman has just told Rogers about the break in.

ROGERS

I understand your concern, Mr. Feynman, but how do you know it wasn't just a simple robbery?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FEYNMAN

I don't know many robbers who would leave my gold cufflinks on the dresser but take a folder full of differential equations.

ROGERS

I'm sorry for your inconvenience, Mr. Feynman, but what do you want me to do? You've already called the police, I presume?

FEYNMAN

(watching his reaction)

Yeah. They say it was a high class job. No fingerprints.

Rogers reaches for his phone book.

ROGERS

I can find you another hotel, if you'd like--

He starts flipping through the phone book. He says casually, almost as an afterthought:

ROGERS (CONT'D)

--but I think we'd all understand if you wanted to go home. A man of your age really should be at home with his family.

FEYNMAN

I can find my own hotel, thanks, and a man of my age can do whatever the hell he wants.

ROGERS

What do you want, Dr. Feynman?

FEYNMAN

What I want is to figure out why NASA is telling its engineers not to talk to us! Why employees are destroying their records before we can get to them. It's driving me crazy!

ROGERS

That's why I think you'd be a lot happier if you didn't have to deal with this mess.

Feynman observes the steely smile that Rogers offers him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

FEYNMAN

Are you kidding? I'd be bored stiff back home. I think I'll stick around.

Rogers' smile falters a little.

INT. MOTEL 6 LOBBY - DAY

Feynman checks into a motel, noticeably less ritzy than the ones he's been staying in.

CLERK

So should I bill it to NASA's account, Dr. Feynman?

FEYNMAN

No. No, I'm paying from now on.

He slaps some cash down on the desk.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

And is there any chance I can get both copies of the room key? I promise not to lock myself in a bathroom and start a fire.

INT. MEDIA CENTER - DAY

Feynman leans over the shoulder of a MEDIA TECHNICIAN as they watch the projected image of the Challenger launch, in extreme slow motion.

FEYNMAN

That frame, there.

The technician stops the video.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

Can you get us in closer?

There's something indistinct, near the shuttle's hull.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

I'm talking nose hairs, pal.

Even closer, til the frame is pixelated almost beyond recognition.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

Run it. Stop! Run it again.

A tiny PUFF OF SMOKE is there, barely visible, coming out the side of the shuttle.

INT. NASA BOARD ROOM - NEXT DAY

The committee has gathered to hear what Feynman has to say. He points to the TV SCREEN showing the launch footage.

FEYNMAN

So obviously, something was going wrong from within the shuttle a good fifteen seconds before the engines exploded.

ROGERS

Of course NASA was aware of the smoke, Mr. Feynman. But where there's smoke there's not always fire.

This statement leaves Feynman flabbergasted. Before he can speak, however, the door opens, admitting ARNOLD ALDRICH, a rotund, balding man.

ROGERS (CONT'D)

Perhaps our next speaker can clear up this issue for you, Feynman.

He stands up and shakes Aldrich's hand.

ROGERS (CONT'D)

Everyone, this is Mr. Arnold Aldrich, one of NASA's technical experts.

ALDRICH

Good afternoon.

Feynman accosts Aldrich with a firm handshake and pat on the back. Aldrich is startled by his familiarity.

FEYNMAN

Back me up on this, Arnie.

He rewinds the tape to show the PUFF OF SMOKE.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

I think the only thing that could cause this anomaly is if the O-rings were burning, right?

ALDRICH

Just what makes you think that the smoke is an anomaly, Dr. Feynman? We frequently see smoke upon launching a shuttle.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FEYNMAN

Look, I've got a report here from one of your engineers that says the O-rings on seven previous flights were badly burned.

ALDRICH

Only the primary O-rings, the secondary O-rings were undamaged on those flights.

FEYNMAN

Yes, but doesn't it worry you that the first level of O-rings were breached?

ALDRICH

Since a small amount of smoke is to be expected, and has been present in many previous flights with no dangerous consequence, it's not really indicative of shuttle malfunction.

This frustrates Feynman visibly.

FEYNMAN

The Challenger exploded! I'd call that a malfunction!

ROGERS

I think you should calm down, Dr. Feynman.

FEYNMAN

The design is somehow flawed. It has a weakness, and we can't let future shuttles fly with those o-rings if we know they don't work!

For the first time, Kutyna disagrees with Feynman.

KUTYNA

Well it appears that the *secondary* O-ring kept the fuel from leaking out. So in a sense, the overall O-ring design worked.

Feynman stares at him, aghast.

KUTYNA (CONT'D)

What? What did I say?

FEYNMAN

The O-rings weren't designed to become swiss-cheese during take off. The design did not work.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

(pause)
You're thinking like them.

KUTYNA

Like who?

FEYNMAN

Like them. This committee is a sham, it isn't an attempt to find the reason the shuttle exploded, it's an attempt to find a justification. How's anything supposed to change that way?

Upset, Feynman leaves the room, slamming the door behind him.

EXT. NATIONAL ZOO - MORNING

Feynman watches ROGER BOISJOLY, 55, pay for a ticket to the zoo. Boisjoly, a bald man, somewhat overweight man, wears a clothes which have seen better days.

INT. NATIONAL ZOO - MOMENTS LATER

Feynman follows Boisjoly a safe distance behind, into the MONKEY HOUSE.

IN THE MONKEY HOUSE

Boisjoly sits in a relatively quiet part of the monkey house, watching a family of CHIMPS grooming each other. Feynman sits down next to him.

FEYNMAN

You come here for the fresh air?

Boisjoly acknowledges him with a small nod.

BOISJOLY

That's the stench of humanity. Don't knock it.

FEYNMAN

I'm Dick Feynman.

BOISJOLY

You followed me?

Feynman nods.

FEYNMAN

I was hoping we could discuss the Challenger in a neutral environment. ...though this place smells like my first wife's cooking.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He pulls out a handkerchief and holds it to his nose.

BOISJOLY

Stick around long enough and you won't even notice the stink. Kind of like my job.

FEYNMAN

So why do you do it?

Boisjoly shrugs.

BOISJOLY

Because I like to make things fly.

They sit in silence for a moment.

BOISJOLY (CONT'D)

I come here a lot, these days.

He gestures to the CHIMPS, cavorting about on the ropes.

BOISJOLY (CONT'D)

I think it's good to remind myself that when it comes right down to it, we're all just apes pretending to be gods.

FEYNMAN

Look, I know you wanted to meet with me. Why didn't you follow through?

BOISJOLY

You know why.

FEYNMAN

(frustrated)

Well nevermind them, we're alone now! I'm not naming names to anyone, I just want to solve this thing and go home.

BOISJOLY

You're lucky that you can go home, and know that you're out of it. I can't say the same thing.

He gets up to leave.

FEYNMAN

Wait, if you could just tell me about the O-rings...

Boisjoly looks away..

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

BOISJOLY

The O-rings are the rubber seals that keep the joints between the shuttle's fuel pipes from leaking hydrogen gas. Thiokol rubber, my bread and butter, manufactures them for NASA.

FEYNMAN

I don't want a definition, Mr. Boisjoly. I want to know what went wrong up there. I want to stop it from happening again.

Boisjoly turns and stares at him, red-faced.

BOISJOLY

Us engineers, we knew the shuttle wasn't ready to launch! We fought tooth and nail to keep it grounded. But no one listened to us! No one!

FEYNMAN

Okay. No one's blaming you. But I need you to talk to me, give me details.

BOISJOLY

I've said too much already.

He tries to push past Feynman, out the door. Feynman grabs his sleeve.

FEYNMAN

Please. Please, no one will give me the time of day...

BOISJOLY

(reluctant)

All I can say, is that you should stop looking for clues up there--

He points skyward.

BOISJOLY (CONT'D)

--And start looking for what went wrong down here.

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Feynman sits alone in a family-style restaurant, missing his own family. He examines diagrams of the shuttle as he eats.

On the table is his TOY MODEL of the Challenger, which he uses as a visual aid. He compares his notes to the model.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He pauses to shake out his pills, and swallows them dry without looking at them.

FEYNMAN

(to himself)

A "grit blast?" What the heck is a grit blast?

Suddenly, Feynman feels a TUGGING at his pant leg. A THREE YEAR OLD GIRL from a nearby table stares longingly at his model shuttle.

She points to it. Feynman picks up the toy shuttle.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

You want this?

She nods.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D (CONT'D)

You can have it, but only if you promise not to be a politician when you grow up.

She stares at him blankly. He sighs and gives her the shuttle model.

EXT. MORTON THIOKOL PLANT, UTAH - NEXT DAY

Establishing shot of the lab and offices of Morton Thiokol Rubber, the company which supplies NASA's O-rings.

INT. THIOKOL RUBBER LABORATORY HALLWAY- SIMULTANEOUS

Feynman walks down the hallway, trying to appear inconspicuous. He passes a door marked Research and Development. He slips in.

LABORATORY

Feynman walks into the laboratory. The white-coated SCIENTISTS are so busy that at first he wanders unheeded through the room.

He notices a table covered in small black RUBBER SEGMENTS.

A young SCIENTIST, cowlicks aplenty, pops up behind him.

SCIENTIST

Pretty neat, huh?

FEYNMAN

(startled)

I'm sorry?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SCIENTIST

Didn't mean to sneak up on you there. You must be from the Senior Center tour group.

FEYNMAN

(wryly)
Um, yep, that's me.

They shake hands.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

What are these?

SCIENTIST

O-ring fuel seals, fresh sample batch, right out of the proverbial oven.

FEYNMAN

Can I touch?

SCIENTIST

Of course. What's great about this rubber is its resiliency.

FEYNMAN

Oh yeah? Why's that?

SCIENTIST

It can bounce back from a pressure source in milliseconds and prevent hardly any hydrogen gas from escaping. There's nothing else like it.

FEYNMAN

It's squishy.

SCIENTIST

It's a chemical masterpiece.

FEYNMAN

Do you mind if I take this?

SCIENTIST

Got grandkids? Take two!

INT. NASA BOARD ROOM - NIGHT

A committee meeting has just ended. People gather their papers and prepare to leave.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROGERS

Don't forget, our first big press conference is tomorrow. There will be representatives from every major newspaper, as well as a live video feed, so watch what you say, and... try to dress conservatively.

He stares pointedly at Feynman, who ignores him. Feynman seems dazed, off in his own world.

As people file out, Kutyna snags Feynman's sleeve.

KUTYNA

Listen, whatever you do, make sure you check six from now on. People are getting... edgy.

FEYNMAN

"Check six?"

KUTYNA

Six o'clock. Means watch your back. An Air Force term.

He mimes looking over his shoulder and rattling off a round on a machine gun. Feynman laughs, perhaps more than the situation calls for.

FEYNMAN

Check six. Got it.

KUTYNA

See you later for dinner?

FEYNMAN

You bet. I'm starving.

Feynman passes Rogers on his way out. Rogers sniffs.

ROGERS

What is that- that smell, Feynman? Is that marijuana?

FEYNMAN

You should try some, Chairman. Might help you relax.

He stifles his laughter as he leaves the outraged Rogers behind.

INT. KUTYNA'S HOUSE - LATER THAT NIGHT

Kutyna's KIDS chase each other around the kitchen as his WIFE brews them coffee. Kutyna and Feynman hunch over the kitchen table, comparing notes.

FEYNMAN

No no no, this is all wrong. The seals were impervious to altitude change. It had to have been something else.

KUTYNA

Still, I don't think we should rule out the possibility.

FEYNMAN

Damn it! We've been on this committee for a month and we still don't know anything! There's too many variables.

Kutyna's wife comes by and kisses him on the cheek.

WIFE

Donald dear, how about the two of you take a break for a little while? My head's starting to hurt just listening to you two.

Kutyna shrugs and looks at Feynman.

KUTYNA

I've got some old junk in the garage we can tinker around with.

Feynman's face lights up.

FEYNMAN

Neat!

INT. GARAGE - LATER

Kutyna and Feynman are up to their elbows in grease, working together under the HOOD of an OLD CAR.

KUTYNA

One...two...three!

They grunt and lift a heavy engine from the hood, and put it on the ground.

FEYNMAN

Oy! I'm old, man!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KUTYNA

This thing's been giving me trouble ever since the weather changed. It's a summer car, I guess.

FEYNMAN

Yeah, well, the valves in these things stiffen up in cold weather, just like my joints.

He suddenly freezes. Kutyna continues tinkering under the hood.

KUTYNA

You said it. My wife wants me to see some chiropractor--

He looks up from the hood, and Feynman is GONE.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Kutyna walks into his kitchen, finding Feynman half-sprawled on the table, throwing papers around in a hurry.

FEYNMAN

Quick, help me find the weather reports for the morning of the launch!

EXT. NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCE - NEXT DAY

Feynman, wearing a white NASA lab coat over his suit, jogs up the steps to the imposing marble building, struggling to carry all of his papers and binders.

INT. ENTRY HALL

In the ornate and echoing entrance hall, Feynman's ID is checked by a GUARD.

GUARD

Feynman. Huh. Your name is familiar. You an academy member?

FEYNMAN

I was. I resigned.

GUARD

Why'd you want to turn down such an honor?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FEYNMAN

I don't like self-perpetuating honor societies. Now if you'll excuse me, I'm late for my press conference.

INT. NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCE PRESS ROOM - LATER

Feynman takes a seat next to Kutyna at the end of a long table above the PRESS.

The audience is a sea of photographers, reporters, and cameramen. Feynman wears the tie that has a HULA DANCING GIRL on it.

The General leans over and whispers to Feynman.

KUTYNA

Nice tie.

FEYNMAN

Thanks.

He waves a hand at the SECRETARY filling the speakers' cups with water.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

Excuse me miss! Can I have some ice water? Extra icy?

KUTYNA

(suspicious)

Why do you need ice water? You haven't said anything yet!

FEYNMAN

Shh. Here comes Rogers.

Rogers clears his throat and taps the microphone twice, wincing at the FEEDBACK. He, Neil Armstrong, and Chuck Yeager have the best seats, while Feynman is stuck off in the wings.

ROGERS

Hello and welcome, everyone. I hope you will find this meeting informative, for we have a lot of material to cover today. Now, since we here at NASA believe in getting straight to the point, we might as well get started, don't you think?

Feynman SNORTS. Rogers GLARES at him.

Feynman tries to catch the SECRETARY's attention again. He MIMES drinking water. She nods.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROGERS (CONT'D)

Let me first introduce the members of our esteemed commission...

As WITNESSES give TESTIMONY as Feynman waits impatiently for his water.

Finally, the SECRETARY arrives, but by now the WATER IS LUKEWARM. Feynman sticks his finger in it and grimaces. He waves the girl over again, and whispers to her.

FEYNMAN

No, this won't do at all. I need it cold!

She nods and rolls her eyes.

ROGERS

Next up, please welcome Lawrence Mulloy, project manager for the rockets, who has kindly agreed to answer any questions you might have concerning the seals in the Challenger shuttle.

Rogers begins taking questions from the audience.

REPORTER#1

Mr. Mulloy, one of our sources states that instead of cracked turbine blades as was originally suspected, the O-ring seals may have been the cause of the accident.

MULLOY

It is true that in previous missions, some O-ring erosion was detected. But the disintegration only went as far as the first seal, and the secondary seal was left intact.

REPORTER#2

But don't you feel that any erosion was cause for concern, seeing how the rubber was all that kept the whole shuttle from exploding?

MULLOY

(condescending)

The dual seal system is capable of handling three times the pressure than even exists in the rocket. Next question.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Feynman has finally gotten his ICE WATER. Kutyna watches Feynman pull out an O-RING and CLAMP it tightly with a small VISE. He then DROPS IT IN THE ICE WATER.

KUTYNA
(whispering)
Co-pilot to pilot: not now.

FEYNMAN
Why?

KUTYNA
Wait til the cameras are on you.

Feynman's face lights up, agreeing with him. He hides the glass of water.

MULLOY
Overall, the resiliency of the rubber rings is what makes the shuttle design so ingenious. It is a flawless component, which we are quite proud of.

INT. FEYNMAN HOUSE - SIMULTANEOUS

Gweneth and Michelle are in their den, watching the press conference on television.

GWENETH
Uh oh.

MICHELLE
What is it?

GWENETH
Your father's got that look on his face.

MICHELLE
What look?

GWENETH
The same one he had when he tried to turn down the Nobel Prize.

She turns up the volume on the TV.

INT. PRESS ROOM - LATER

Mulloy is still talking. REPORTERS in the audience look disoriented. Even the astronauts on stage look befuddled.

Feynman interrupts.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FEYNMAN

Uh, I have a question.

MULLOY

Yes, Dr. Feynman?

FEYNMAN

All these cork insulators and rubber bits and...

(checking his notes)

Zinc Chromate putty, what happens to their resiliency in cold weather?

MULLOY

That's of no real significance, as it was an average temperature the day of the launch.

FEYNMAN

Well now, I talked to an engineer last week who said that there was frost covering most of the launch equipment, so that fact must be incorrect.

Mulloy's smile has become very tight. The reporters start to PERK UP.

MULLOY

Again, either way, it makes little difference. The rubber is designed to work across an enormous temperature range-

FEYNMAN

(interrupting)

But did they ever test it out?

MULLOY

I'm sorry?

FEYNMAN

If the rubber wasn't resilient for a millisecond or two longer than you thought it would be, that would be an incredibly dangerous situation, right? I'm asking if you ever actually tested the O-rings' reaction to cold?

Mulloy is uncomfortable. He looks to Rogers for help.

MULLOY

Uh... No.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Feynman holds up his GLASS OF ICE WATER with the O-RING in it so everyone can see.

FEYNMAN

Well, let's try it now.

This comment causes an explosion of murmuring, the reporters shift in their seats to get a better view. Rogers looks flummoxed.

Feynman takes a DRY O-RING out of his coat pocket, having clamped it down with another VISE earlier.

He FISHES the cold O-ring out of the water as he talks, and LAYS IT NEXT TO THE DRY ONE.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

I put one of your seals in ice water, and discovered that when you put some pressure on it for a while and then undo it, it doesn't bounce back. See?

He TAKES THE CLAMP OFF the wet O-RING and, sure enough, it remains SEVERELY CRAMPED and mangled-looking. He takes the dry O-ring's clamp off too, and it shows NO SIGN OF DISTRESS.

He holds the two up to compare.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

Now, General Kutyna, could you tell me the temperature at the scene of the launch on January 28th?

The General clears his throat, uncomfortable at being in the spotlight.

KUTYNA

I believe it was 36 degrees Fahrenheit.

The crowd is silent for a moment, understanding. Suddenly, reporters start CLAMORING for attention, SHOUTING for Mulloy and Rogers to explain this phenomena. The two men look sick.

FEYNMAN

I think I found a flaw.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Bill Graham, WATCHES the proceedings on TV, and puts his head in his hands.

INT. HALLWAY - EVENING

People file out of the auditorium, as Feynman walks out a side door into the hallway. Rogers cuts him off as he rounds a corner.

ROGERS

What the hell do you think you're doing, Feynman?

Feynman tries to push past him.

FEYNMAN

Hey pal, out of my way.

Rogers doesn't budge.

ROGERS

Why didn't you tell me about the seals?

FEYNMAN

I just found out yesterday. I knew if I told you, you'd never let it go public.

ROGERS

There is a time and a place for these things. You made me look like a fool, and worse, you made NASA look unreliable.

FEYNMAN

Well it is!

He again tries to get by Rogers, but this time Rogers GRABS HIS ARM tightly and holds on.

ROGERS

If you don't watch it, Feynman, you're going to be off the committee.

FEYNMAN

Kick off your most successful investigator so far? That'll look really great at the congressional hearing in March. What's NASA hiding that it's so afraid I'll find out?

ROGERS

You're out of line. Don't make this committee into a crusade.

At this moment, Kutyna exits the auditorium. He spots Feynman and Rogers arguing, and heads towards them.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FEYNMAN

You're one to talk. I know your way of running things, I remember how you helped Nixon cozy up to Pinochet, orchestrated a coup

ROGERS

(furious)

You're no innocent. You have generations of blood on your hands. What you created will kill long after we're both dead and gone.

He stalks away, leaving Feynman shaken. Kutyna approaches him.

KUTYNA

You okay, Dick?

FEYNMAN

(distracted)

Yeah. I gotta run, I have a doctor's appointment.

KUTYNA

Want a lift?

FEYNMAN

Nah that's okay.

He wanders away from Kutyna, who looks after him, worried.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - LATER

Feynman, still wearing his white NASA lab coat, waits for his name to be called. He leafs through various medical charts and notes.

A pretty female doctor, SYLVIA JENSON sits next to him.

SYLVIA

I haven't seen you before, you must be one of the new docs.

Feynman is about to correct her, when she bats her eyes at him and extends her hand.

NURSE

Dr. Sylvia Jenson.

FEYNMAN

(playing along)

Dr. Richard Feynman.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She peers at the medical charts in his hands.

SYLVIA

You in cancer studies too?

FEYNMAN

Just recreationally. This case holds particular interest for me-- the patient has two very rare forms of cancer.

SYLVIA

You don't mind if I look?

He allows her to take the charts from his hands. She peruses.

SYLVIA (CONT'D)

Can this be right? Myxoid liposarcoma and Waldenstrom's macroglobulinemia?! The odds of that are astronomical.

FEYNMAN

The- uh, patient was exposed to high levels of radiation in his youth.

SYLVIA

Well he's paying for it now, poor guy. I hope he pulls through.

Feynman smiles.

FEYNMAN

Me too. He's got a lot of work left to do.

At that moment the DESK NURSE reads his name off the waiting list.

DESK NURSE

Feynman? Doctor Connelly will see you now.

As he gets up, Sylvia notices that the back of his lab coat is embroidered with the NASA insignia.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - LATER

DOCTOR CONNELLY, 50, looks at Feynman's charts.

DOCTOR CONNELLY

How's the pain?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FEYNMAN

Still the same. Those little white pills help me out, though. I'm running low.

DOCTOR CONNELLY

I got your diagnosis from your physician in California. I'll be sure to renew his prescription for you.

INT. MOTEL HALLWAY - NEXT MORNING

General Kutyna approaches Feynman's room. He hears a curious DRUMMING sound, which grows louder as he approaches the room. He knocks on the door, which is partially ajar. The drumming stops.

FEYNMAN (O.S.)

Come on in!

MOTEL ROOM

Kutyna peers around the room, which is empty. He hesitantly approaches the bathroom.

MOTEL BATHROOM

Feynman sits on the toilet, his feet planted firmly on the toilet seat. He has his bongo drums out.

KUTYNA

What is this, a drum session?

FEYNMAN

I always drum in the bathroom. Fantastic acoustics.

Kutyna sits gingerly on the bath tub's edge.

KUTYNA

Look Dick, about what happened yesterday--

FEYNMAN

Yeah, I'm sorry I didn't tell you what I was planning beforehand, I didn't want to ruin the surprise.

KUTYNA

I meant what happened afterwards. With Rogers.

FEYNMAN

Oh.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He turns his attention to his drumming.

KUTYNA

If you don't mind me asking, what did Rogers mean by all that?

FEYNMAN

He was just trying to get to me, digging up the past. Things I did in another lifetime.

KUTYNA

The atom bomb, you mean?

FEYNMAN

Yeah. Everyone likes to tag me with it. Even my own son, Carl. He says I gave the world a death wish, that I was "contributing to man's Hobbesian fate." He went to school for philosophy, of all things. The day he told me, what a row we had. I always told my kids to do whatever they wanted when they grew up, but I meant something useful!

Feynman laughs, but his eyes are sad.

KUTYNA

You see him much?

FEYNMAN

Not since he started school. We just end up fighting. I can understand quantum electrodynamics, but I can't understand him.

KUTYNA

I think that feeling is universal among parents.

Feynman suddenly stares at him, a hint desperation in his voice.

FEYNMAN

He just didn't understand the mentality we had at the time, you know? We were fighting a war-- we were patriots! We didn't think about ethics, or consequences. We were just solving math problems in the desert.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

KUTYNA

It's all over and done with. There's no use in thinking about it.

Feynman laughs ruefully.

FEYNMAN

I'm old, man. If I don't think about it now, when will I?

Kutyna lets that rest.

KUTYNA

Come on, we're going to be late for the briefing.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - LATER

The meeting has just ended. Rogers corners Feynman.

ROGERS

How are you feeling, Mr. Feynman?

FEYNMAN

Great. Having a blast.

ROGERS

Really. You look pale, at the moment. How's your health, if you don't mind me asking?

FEYNMAN

(hostile)

Never felt so good. How's YOUR health, Commissioner?

ROGERS

I would feel terrible if the concerns of this committee aggravated your current condition.

FEYNMAN

My "condition" isn't aggravated, I am.

ROGERS

I'm just concerned for your welfare. I like to make sure the members of my committee are unimpaired by any of life's unfortunate distractions.

Leaving the threat hanging unspoken in the air, he walks away.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Feynman, exhausted, gets under the covers of his bed, without even taking his shoes off. He takes something out of his pocket: a RUBBER O-RING. He disgustedly THROWS IT into a far corner of the room.

The phone RINGS.

FEYNMAN
(picking up)
Yeah what?

GWENETH (O.S.)
Darling you sound awful. How are you feeling?

FEYNMAN
I am A-Ok, lady. How are you?

GWENETH
I want you to come home, Dick. We miss you, and Dr. Morton wants to do some more tests.

Feynman is quiet for a long moment.

FEYNMAN (O.S.)
I can't.

INT. KITCHEN - SIMULTANEOUS

Gweneth is on the kitchen phone, looking anxious.

GWENETH
Why not?! You've figured out why the damn shuttle exploded! Leave all the paperwork to them and come home. We'll have a party and everything.

FEYNMAN (O.S.)
No, there's still something I have to do. I can't put it into words just yet, but I think if I pull it off I can really change the way NASA works.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - SIMULTANEOUS

Feynman pinches the bridge of his nose as he talks.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GWENETH (O.C.)

But doesn't the press conference mean anything? The public will demand an explanation.

FEYNMAN

NASA's image got a little tarnished, that's all. And Rogers has already started his PR clean-up job: "An unfortunate oversight, no one's to blame." If I leave, no one else is going to step up and start asking the right questions, not now. All the rats are running for cover.

INT. KITCHEN

Gweneth looks over to Michelle, who is lingering nearby, eavesdropping.

GWENETH

Dear, hold on.

She muffles the receiver.

GWENETH (CONT'D)

Michelle, will you please talk to him? He won't listen to me.

Michelle hesitates, then reluctantly takes the phone.

MICHELLE

Hi Dad, it's me.

INT. HOTEL ROOM

Feynman's face breaks into a grateful smile.

FEYNMAN

Pumpkin! I've missed your voice.

MICHELLE (O.C.)

I've missed yours too. I've been working on my chess strategy, wait til you see.

FEYNMAN

I'm afraid I can't come home just yet.

MICHELLE (O.C.)

But why?!

Feynman sits heavily on his bed.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FEYNMAN

I've just gotta see this thing through,
make sure nothing gets covered up.
Otherwise, I'd be responsible if the next
shuttle exploded for the same reasons.

MICHELLE (O.C.)

No you wouldn't. You're not the only
person on that committee. It's not fair!

FEYNMAN

Let me tell you a story, like when you
were a kid, remember? ...When I was a
young man, right after we dropped the
bomb on Hiroshima, I remember sitting in
a cafe in New York, watching some
construction workers building a bridge. I
remember wanting to run over there and
shake them, tell them they were a bunch a
bozos, to stop wasting their time! That
there wasn't any point to creating
anything new, we were all going to blow
each other up anyway. ...I thought
bettering the world was a waste of time,
that it was futile to try and change our
fate.

He stops, suddenly self-conscious.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

Listen to me, talking about fate. Carl
would never let me live it down.

MICHELLE (O.S.)

Keep going.

Feynman struggles to keep the emotion out of his voice.

FEYNMAN

But ever since I've raised two top notch
kids, I've tried to stop believing life
is futile. Human intervention has to
count for something, right? I have to
hold on to that belief, that I can make a
difference. Without that, I will despair.

There is a long pause on the other end of the phone.

INT. KITCHEN - SIMULTANEOUS

Michelle's eyes are glossy with tears. She takes a shaky
breath.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MICHELLE

I think I understand. I think you should stay and see it through.

Gwen hears this comment and her mouth opens.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

I have to go.

She hangs up the phone, then immediately rushes into Gwen's arms for a comforting hug.

INT. NASA ARCHIVES - NEXT MORNING

Feynman approaches the door to one of the rooms in the massive NASA Ames Archives. He swipes his ID card through the door's reader head to gain access.

The panel blinks red, access denied. Annoyed, Feynman tries again, still it blinks red.

INT. NASA ARCHIVES OFFICE - LATER

Feynman argues with the SECRETARY at the archives. She is the quintessential passive aggressive bureaucrat who guards the door to the ARCHIVE ROOM.

SECRETARY

Red means restricted access.

FEYNMAN

Look, my card just stopped working, you know I have access, I was here yesterday!

SECRETARY

I'm not allowed to let someone in with a red light. If it really had stopped working, it would blink orange. If it was orange, I'd let you in. But red? Nuh-uh.

FEYNMAN

Look, call William Rogers. He'll tell you-

SECRETARY

Chairman Rogers won't be in all week.

He DANGLES his ID badge in front of her nose.

FEYNMAN

Isn't there a list somewhere with my name on it?!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SECRETARY

This isn't a nightclub.

Feynman, overcome with annoyance, growls and stalks away.

INT. AMES EMPLOYEE LOUNGE - MOMENTS LATER

Feynman stalks past the door to an employee lounge area-- then stops and peers his head back in. He has an idea.

Inside is a refrigerator with MAGNETS on it. Feynman enters the room and takes a magnet. He ferociously rubs the magnet across the ID card's magnetic strip.

INT. NASA ARCHIVES - MOMENTS LATER

Feynman approaches the same doorway. He swipes his magnetically charged card through, this time causing the panel to malfunction.

Sure enough, the reader this time flashes ORANGE. Feynman grins, then sweetly calls over to the Secretary.

FEYNMAN

Oh, miss?

INT. ARCHIVES - HOURS LATER

Feynman is deep in the depths of the archives, surrounded by files. He has found something.

FEYNMAN

(under his breath)

Son of a bitch.

INT. SEEDY STRIP JOINT - THAT NIGHT

Kutyna finishes reading the file that Feynman has given him. He shuts the manila cover, a serious look on his face.

KUTYNA

This is going to get a lot of people in a lot of trouble.

FEYNMAN

I'm not trying to get people fired, I'm trying to make NASA realize its priorities are all screwed up!

Kutyna slaps the papers with his hand.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KUTYNA

These Thiokol engineering reports list cold weather as the number one danger to the stability of the ship. This petition begs Mr. Mulloy and several other... prominent officials to delay the launch so they could replace the seals.

FEYNMAN

(pointing to a date)
And it was written up six months before the thing ever took off. But now look on the back.

Kutyna turns the petition over and sees the words, "GO FOR IT!" written in red ink and underlined.

KUTYNA

It makes no sense. If they knew about the seals' weakness, and if every single engineer signed this petition, how could Thiokol still have decided to go ahead with the launch? They knew there was a high chance of failure!

FEYNMAN

I don't know. I don't know.

KUTYNA

And for Mr. Mulloy to lie under oath on national TV-- Jesus, no wonder he was jumpy!

(pause)

Do you think Rogers knows?

FEYNMAN

I don't think so. Not about this, anyway. But he's probably been feeling a lot of heat from his higher ups to keep me occupied elsewhere.

KUTYNA

We still need to find out why Thiokol overruled its engineers' objections.

FEYNMAN

It won't be easy. There's a lock down, no one's talking.

They regard each other silently. Finally, Kutyna breaks the silence.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

KUTYNA

So. What do we do now?

FEYNMAN

Not we, me. You said yourself I'm the only free agent here, this has to be my thing, this time.

KUTYNA

And what is this "thing?"

FEYNMAN

I'm going to write a special report about the reliability of NASA's safety controls. And I'm going to make sure every person who needs to see it sees it. And if Rogers, or Mulloy, or NASA itself won't let me, I'm going to publicly accuse them of careless endangerment.

Kutyna whistles.

KUTYNA

You're going to make yourself a target. I've seen how they intimidate people.

FEYNMAN

It won't work on me.

KUTYNA

There might be threats. NASA and Thiokol both have a lot riding on this investigation, a billion dollar industry's at stake.

FEYNMAN

(blandly)

I'm not scared of them. I'd choose being taken out by a sniper over dying in a hospital bed any day.

But Kutyna doesn't take it so lightly.

EXT. STREET - LATE THAT NIGHT

Feynman pulls his coat tight around himself as he walks home.

He walks by a cemetery and pauses, regarding it calmly. Suddenly he raises a hand up to his face, thumb pressed to nose, and wiggles his fingers at Death.

FEYNMAN

Thhhhhbbbt!!!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He smiles at his own silliness, but suddenly hears a noise-- WHISTLING-- not cheerful, but atonal, without melody.

He looks around, but he's alone. The whistling continues.

Spooked, Feynman starts walking faster, peering occasionally over his shoulder.

EXT. STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Feynman hurries down the deserted street, too busy looking over his shoulder to see where he's going. Suddenly, the WHISTLER appears from out of the shadows, literally in front of Feynman.

Feynman jumps a little, startled.

FEYNMAN

Jesus!

The whistler speaks to him with the calmness of a hired killer-- or possibly just a junkie in the calm right after his fix.

WHISTLER

You should watch your step.

FEYNMAN

What do you mean by that?!

WHISTLER

Hey old man, don't have a heart attack.

The whistler continues on his way, malevolent in his ambiguity, continuing his off key whistling. Feynman stares after him-- was he just a bystander?

INT. HOTEL ROOM - LATER THAT WEEK

Feynman sits at the desk in his hotel room. He writes a letter.

FEYNMAN (V.O.)

Dear Gweneth, there are exceedingly powerful political forces and consequences involved here, but although my General friend here has explained them to me, I try to disregard them and proceed with apparent naive and determined purpose: to root out the rats.

MONTAGE SEQUENCE:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

-- Feynman trying to enter different laboratories and being denied access.

-- Feynman trying to interview people who shake their heads and walk away.

-- Feynman crossing names off lists of NASA contacts, etc.

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

Problem is, everyone's playing deaf and dumb, and I'm on everyone's blacklist.

-- Feynman tries not to fall asleep in Rogers' meetings.

-- He is given the cold shoulder by the other investigator-generals.

-- Rogers watches Feynman from across the room at a meeting.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

It's probably just Washington paranoia setting in, but I think he is looking for the slightest provocation to get me out of here.

-- Feynman notices Rogers staring at him. Rogers smiles, then looks away.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

Anyway, they're flying us down to Florida tomorrow to tour Kennedy Space Center and be briefed. I'm thrilled-- I haven't been on a field trip in years.

INT. KENNEDY CENTER - DAY

Feynman, wearing full tropical TOURIST GEAR and shorts, tours Kennedy center with the Committee.

FEYNMAN (V.O.)

My guess is they'll give us little party favors and show us a grand time, and not let me get into technical detail with anybody. But it won't work, for two reasons.

Feynman SLIPS UNNOTICED under a velvet rope towards an exit sign, as the group turns the corner.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FEYNMAN (CONT'D (CONT'D)

One, I do technical information exchange much faster than they think, and two, I smell certain rats which I will not forget. I just love the smell of rats, it is the spoor of exciting adventure.

INT. KENNEDY CENTER LABORATORIES- DAY

Feynman sneaks into the offices, looking like a comic spy. In the hallways he nearly COLLIDES with a COURIER, who is pushing a hand-truck heaped with boxes.

Feynman sees that the boxes are stamped with the Morton Thiokol logo.

INT. HALLWAY NEAR FILING OFFICES - MOMENTS LATER

Feynman follows the oblivious courier from a safe distance behind. When the courier rounds the corner into an open filing office door, Feynman lingers just outside, eavesdropping.

SECRETARY #1

(exasperated)

You want me to sign for all of them? Why didn't they just take care of it on location?

Another SECRETARY chimes in.

SECRETARY #2

Boss wants to do take care of the trash personally, I guess.

SECRETARY #1

(muttering)

Doesn't he have anything better to do? Come on, help me put these boxes away.

INT. HALLWAY NEAR FILING OFFICES - 45 MINS LATER

Feynman waits for the secretaries exit, on their way out to lunch.

He checks to make sure their office is empty, then RIFLES through their file cabinets and storage closets, looking for the said boxes. But there's nothing.

Suddenly, he spots the large OFFICE SAFE in a far corner of the file room.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Before he can investigate further, he has to bid a hasty retreat as the girls return carrying sack lunches.

EXT. TARMAC AROUND KENNEDY CENTER - LATER

Feynman quietly rejoins his tour group, trying to appear like he's never been gone. The TOUR LEADER continues to point out various buildings and their purposes.

TOUR LEADER

And over on your left is the roll out trail for the Trident C4 Rocket launch taking place next week. You should try and come, folks, even a routine satellite launch is a big deal over here.

Feynman raises his hands.

FEYNMAN

What's that white hangar over there for?

Feynman points to said hangar, a hive of activity, which has teams of forklifts carrying equipment in and out of it.

TOUR LEADER

That's the reconstruction hangar, where we are storing the twenty tons of wreckage recovered from the Challenger launch site. It's strictly off limits.

Feynman's eyes glow.

FEYNMAN

Is that right?

INT. FLORIDA HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Feynman speaks on the phone to Allan McDonald.

FEYNMAN

I don't care what you have to do, pull some strings for me. They won't let me get anywhere near it.

McDonald responds.

He hears some sudden CLICKING on the phone, and holds the receiver away from him, curious. After a moment he puts it back to his ear.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

Did you hear that? ... Ah nothing, probably just a bad connection.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

Look, I've got tomorrow off, will you try to get me in?

INT. NASA HANGAR - NEXT MORNING

Feynman, dressed all in white, with white gloves and hair cap, enters the hangar, which is crawling with similarly-dressed NASA ENGINEERS.

On the floor has been laid out a gigantic chart, stretching the entire length of the hangar. Recovered pieces of wreckage from the Challenger shuttle have been strategically placed on the chart, in an attempt to salvage information.

Feynman passes by a section of the hull, which is burnt and twisted. He notices a blistered remnant of an American flag insignia showing through the soot.

This image roots him to the floor. The tragedy is suddenly palpable, unavoidable.

INT. NASA SURVEILLANCE ROOM - LATER

Two SECURITY GUARDS monitor a bank of TV screens, displaying various shots of the Kennedy Complex.

The phone RINGS. A guard picks up, and listens to the voice on the other end of the phone.

The guard then types some coordinates into the computer, which zooms in on the reconstruction hangar's interior.

ON MONITOR: Feynman examines part of the wreckage.

GUARD

(speaking into the phone)

He took the bait. We caught him... Yes Chairman, he is there without formal approval. It's a pretty serious offense. ...Don't worry, we'll take care of it.

INT. RECONSTRUCTION HANGAR - MOMENTS LATER

Feynman is talking to a group of engineers, who seem to think he's one of them.

FEYNMAN

How would you define NASA's relationship to Thiokol?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ENGINEER

Well, you know. NASA needs Thiokol,
Thiokol needs us. We pay them close to
two billion dollars to make our boosters.

FEYNMAN

Don't you, I mean, we, ever use other
companies?

ENGINEER #2

We can't, even if we wanted to. It's part
of our thirty year contract-- only
Thiokol gets to bid. They have a
monopoly.

Suddenly Feynman notices two security GUARDS enter the
hangar, and start peering around. Fortunately, everyone looks
the same from behind, dressed in matching white "bunny suits"
which keep them from contaminating the evidence.

FEYNMAN

(alarmed)

Hey, someone should get those guys some
bunny suits!

The engineers turn around. As their backs are turned, Feynman
disappears.

INT. RECONSTRUCTION HANGAR - MOMENTS LATER

As the guards interrogate the engineers with pictures of
Feynman, we see Feynman has hitched a ride on the back of a
forklift.

He passes behind the guards, as the forklift takes him out of
the hangar and into the Florida sunshine.

EXT. BEACH BOARDWALK- DAY

Feynman walks around the boardwalk in his shorts and
sunglasses. He sees several GIRLS IN BIKINIS and goes to chat
with them.

EXT. BEACH - LATER

The same group of bikini-clad blondes tan themselves on the
beach. Feynman smiles as he gets sunblock rubbed on his back
by a KNOCKOUT a quarter his age.

EXT. OCEAN - AFTERNOON

Feynman SWIMS alone.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He swims far out, then FLOATS on his back, staring up at the sky. There are muted sounds of the people on the beach, and gulls crying overhead, but most immediate is the sound of the water lapping against his ears.

INT. FLORIDA HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Feynman vents on the phone to Michelle.

FEYNMAN

It's so frustrating, so unscientific. I'm not used to having information destroyed, locked away. How can I solve this when they won't even let me near their records?

INT. FEYNMAN HOUSE - SIMULTANEOUS

Michelle sits in her father's study, curled up in his leather chair.

MICHELLE

So it's a challenge. I thought you liked those.

FEYNMAN (O.S.)

I lied.

MICHELLE

Look Dad, you're going crazy 'cause you're trying to do this the conventional way. But that's not what you're good at, you're good at being unconventional. So why don't you try to think of the most unconventional way to get the information you need?

INT. FLORIDA HOTEL ROOM

Feynman considers this.

FEYNMAN

I think you inherited my smarts, sweetheart.

MICHELLE (O.S.)

Too bad I'm adopted.

FEYNMAN

Your brother sure doesn't take after me, even though he shares my DNA.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MICHELLE (O.S.)

Go easy on Carl, Dad. He has a big pair
of bunny slippers to fill.

Feynman smiles at that.

INT. KENNEDY CENTER OFFICES - LATER THAT WEEK

Feynman returns to the filing office he was in earlier. He lurks behind a corner, watching the same two secretaries at their desks.

He checks his watch. A couple minutes to nine am.

The secretaries don't seem to be moving. Suddenly though, a CLERK pokes his head into their offices.

CLERK

Ladies! Hurry up or you'll miss the
Trident C4 launch.

Immediately the secretaries open their desk drawers, remove sets of binoculars, and hurry out of the room.

Feynman was waiting for this. He slips into their offices.

INT. KENNEDY CENTER OFFICES - MINUTES LATER

Feynman squats by the office safe, an impressive-looking piece of machinery. He confidently spins the dial, as if he already knows the combination.

Sure enough, with a heavy CLICK, the combination lock springs open, revealing a stack of FILES marked with the Thiokol insignia.

He grabs them and closes the safe as he hears the excited secretaries returning from the launch.

EXT. UNDER A PIER - LATER THAT DAY

General Kutyna, looking out of place on the beach, peers amongst the pier's pilings.

He is startled by a wild-eyed Feynman, hiding behind a pier foundation. He carries a briefcase, and looks ecstatic.

KUTYNA

I appreciate the ambience, but couldn't
we have had our clandestine encounter in
a parking lot or something?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FEYNMAN

One of us could be bugged and not even know it. This way, the waves make it hard to hear.

KUTYNA

This better be good. I'm getting sand in my loafers.

Feynman takes some papers out of his briefcase.

FEYNMAN

I found the last piece to the puzzle. You want to know why Thiokol bowed out to NASA pressure? Because the House of Representatives' Science and Technology committee had recently decided that Thiokol's monopoly on NASA was unjust. Plans were in the works to make NASA open up the bid to competing aerospace companies. Thiokol was scared, and scared bad. Suddenly they were losing their grip on that juicy two billion dollar contract.

KUTYNA

So when NASA said they absolutely had to fly on January 28th--

FEYNMAN

Thiokol was in no position to say no. Not even if every one of their engineers protested it.

Kutyna, overwhelmed, sits on the sand. Feynman sits beside him.

KUTYNA

How did you get your hands on this? I can't imagine they'd leave something this incriminating lying around.

FEYNMAN

I broke into the Kennedy Center private archives.

KUTYNA

You what?! How the hell did you manage that?

FEYNMAN

(enjoying the telling of it all)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

I'm an amateur safecracker. At Los Alamos I used to get bored, so I would try to break into filing cabinets for fun. When I got good at that, I moved on to combination locks. Eventually I opened safes that held the secrets to the atom bomb and would leave little notes-- it drove Oppenheimer nuts.

He smiles at the memory.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

Anyway, I realized that I could probably still do the same thing at NASA, combination locks haven't changed that much in forty years.

KUTYNA

How did you do it without getting caught?

FLASHBACK:

INT. KENNEDY CENTER OFFICES - EARLIER THAT DAY

We're back with Feynman, as he watches the secretaries leave to view the launch. He hurries into the room.

FEYNMAN (V.O.)

First thing I realized was that on most locks, there's a five number margin of error, meaning if the first number of the combination is three, anything from one to five would still work. Which cuts the number of possible combinations down from millions to just eight thousand.

Feynman starts opening desk drawers of the secretaries, ignoring the safe entirely. He peers under their desks, on the bottom of their pencil holders, for no apparent reason.

There is a lot to sort through, as the desks are covered in picture frames, potted plants, NASA souvenirs, etc. Several magazine pictures of Tom Cruise in "Top Gun" are taped to the walls.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

But locks are a mix of mechanical logic, and human logic, see. People choose combinations they can remember, which more likely than not are dates, birthdays, anniversaries, you get it. Out of the eight thousand possible combinations, only 162 of them would work as dates. 162 is a manageable number.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KUTYNA (V.O.)

(impressed)

But how'd you have the time to try out
162 combinations?

FEYNMAN (V.O.)

Well, I didn't. So I figured I'd look in
the secretaries' desk drawers, since
people usually are afraid they'll forget
the combination, and write it down
somewhere.

Feynman looks harried and tense-- he's having no luck.

Staring at the desks, he suddenly notices a distinct FOLD and
dog-eared corner of the magazine photo of Tom Cruise. He
gently lifts the corner up, and sees a series of NUMBERS
written in light pencil there.

EXT. UNDER A PIER - SIMULTANEOUS

Back at the pier, Kutyna stands up, then offers Feynman a
hand.

KUTYNA

You did it. You've got them. Feynman,
you've got them! There's no way they can
write this off. Are you going to Rogers
with it?

FEYNMAN

Screw him. I'm going public.

Kutyna looks serious. Feynman is manically pacing around, but
Kutyna stops him.

KUTYNA

Be careful. Be more careful than you've
ever been. Don't say anything to the
press unless you're sure--

FEYNMAN

Oh come on, General, you're talking like
they're gonna put a horse's head in my
bed tomorrow morning.

KUTYNA

You have to be ready to take everything
they throw at you. Public opinion, Dick.
It's their most powerful tool, and boy,
do they know how to use it.

(Pause, then delicately)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KUTYNA (CONT'D)

And Dick, you may not want to spend the rest of your life defending yourself.

FEYNMAN

I'm not dead yet, man!

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Feynman rushes into his hotel bathroom, and hunches over the toilet, vomiting violently.

After a moment, too weak to get up, he closes the toilet lid and lays his cheek against it. His eyes close in pain.

He takes his pill bottle out of his pocket, ready to take some pain medication. But his hands are so shaky that he SPILLS the pills across the floor.

His eyes lock on the pills. He picks one up, and brings it close to his eyes, his brow clouding...

INT. ROGERS'S OFFICE - MORNING

Feynman is in a rage. He thrusts the pill bottle in Rogers' face.

FEYNMAN

These aren't my pills! They look different! Someone switched my pills, and don't think I don't know who's responsible!

ROGERS

You're being irrational, Feynman-- prescriptions don't all look alike--

FEYNMAN

I got my prescription renewed, renewed by some Washington doctor-- ever since then I've been much sicker!

Rogers is completely calm, and in contrast to Feynman's rage, he seems the more rational.

ROGERS

I'm sorry to hear that. But a man with cancer tends to get sicker.

FEYNMAN

You have to believe me! Someone's trying to kill me!

ROGERS

I have to admit I'm concerned--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FEYNMAN

Good! Me too!

ROGERS

No, I mean that maybe your judgement has been affected. You're under a lot of stress, your health is declining, and now this paranoia... The committee needs its members to be impartial--

FEYNMAN

Are you threatening me, Sir?

ROGERS

I think it's best for everyone involved if I recommend you retire from the committee, for health reasons.

FEYNMAN

Better for who? Better for you, better for NASA! I'm taking this live!

He storms out.

INT. MACNEIL-LEHRER NEWSHOUR STUDIO - A WEEK LATER

Feynman sits in a chair, FIDGETING as a MAKEUP WOMAN powders his face. He is dressed conservatively for once. A PA with a clipboard and a headset pokes his head in the dressing room.

PRODUCTION ASSISTANT

Five minutes everyone, five minutes.

Feynman shoos off the hands of the makeup artist..

FEYNMAN

That's enough, woman, I'm sixty-nine years old! I'm not supposed to look good.

He leaves the room, following the beckoning gestures of the stage manager.

INT. FEYNMAN HOUSE - SIMULTANEOUS

Gweneth and Michelle Feynman are on the couch with random assorted friends and family. They have a bowl of popcorn on the coffee table, but no one touches it. They are all nervous.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MICHELLE

But I don't get it, Mom, I thought everyone already knew NASA messed up the shuttle launch. That's why all those reporters kept calling us last month.

GWENETH

This is more important, honey. Your father made NASA look inefficient, but I think tonight he's going to show that the space program is, well, corrupt--

Her last word overlaps with the voice of JIM LEHRER, who is introducing the NASA segment on TV.

LEHRER

Corruption in NASA? Safety issues following the aftermath of the Challenger disaster, after this public message.

INT. MACNEIL-LEHRER NEWSHOUR STUDIO - MOMENTS LATER

Feynman sits in a chair across from Jim Lehrer. Feynman SWIVELS 360 degrees around in the chair a few times, obviously amused, while Jim is getting re-powdered.

MAN

And we're on in five, four, three... Cue music!

The MUSIC of the show comes on.

JIM LEHRER

With us now for a "Newsmaker" interview is a key member of the presidential commission. He is Richard Feynman, the Nobel Prize-winning physicist from the California Institute of Technology.

He turns to face Feynman.

JIM LEHRER (CONT'D)

Welcome, sir. Was this an accident that did not have to happen?

FEYNMAN

First of all, it was no true accident. NASA had many, many warnings that there was something wrong, but the warnings were disregarded.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JIM LEHRER

Disregarded out of incompetence, out of a faulty system, out of out of bad judgement? For what reason?

CUT TO:

INT. ROGERS'S OFFICE - SIMULTANEOUS

Rogers watches the interview on television. He holds the remote control tightly in his fist.

FEYNMAN (O.S.)

That's what I've been running around trying to discover. Mainly, all three. Again and again I've heard statements like, "Nothing could have gone wrong," or "There was only a one in a million chance of malfunction," but all it means is, "Nothing bad's happened before, so it must be okay cause it was okay last time." That's kind of a blind and childish attitude, and sooner or later someone was going to get hurt. NASA has been living in a fantasy world.

Rogers picks up the phone on his desk and speaks into it.

ROGERS

Get me Graham, Beggs, and our top three press correspondents. Now.

INT. MACNEIL-LEHRER NEWSHOUR STUDIO - SIMULTANEOUS

JIM LEHRER

And yet at your commission, we heard Chairman Rogers say, "We're not here to blame anybody." Why not?

FEYNMAN

It's too easy to point fingers and start firing people, but what's the point if the next guy in line makes the same mistakes?

JIM LEHRER

And what, in your opinion, were those mistakes?

CUT TO:

INT. NASA LABORATORY LOUNGE ROOM

Various familiar engineers and scientists, including Roger Boisjoly, are crowded into a room watching the show.

FEYNMAN (ON TV SCREEN)

NASA's most dangerous mistake was in setting up a system of communication which squelched the engineers' voices. If the engineers find a bug, they can only report it to their project manager. If he chooses to ignore the problem, as Mr. Mulloy did with the O-rings, there is no other way for the engineers to disagree. The whole system is designed to discourage information from moving up to the big guys.

The engineers exchange surprised glances. They can't believe someone is taking their side for once. Boisjoly smiles.

INT. FEYNMAN HOUSE - SIMULTANEOUS

Family sits watching screen. Gweneth holds Michelle's hand.

FEYNMAN (O.S.)

This self-imposed ignorance makes "accidents" like the Challenger not so accidental after all. You see, the crew of the shuttle didn't die because of rubber joint seals and escaping hydrogen gas-- they died because safety is not NASA's number one priority, and hasn't been for some time.

JIM LEHRER (O.S.)

That's a rather heavy statement you're making, Professor.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D) (O.S.) (CONT'D)

You asked for my opinion. I'm a professor of physics, not of management and human relations. But you asked for my opinion.

JIM LEHRER (O.S.)

So tell me, what are you going to do now?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FEYNMAN (O.S.)

I'm writing up a report to present to the President, and in it I give a very thorough run down on the problems I've found in NASA's organization, and the mismanagement leading up to the Challenger disaster.

GWENETH

Good for you, Dick. Good for you.

JIM LEHRER (O.S.)

I'm sure we all look forward to reading it. Thanks so much for your time, Mr. Feynman.

INT. MOTEL 6 - NEXT MORNING

Feynman is SNORING. The phone is off the hook.

Suddenly, Feynman is jolted awake by a POUNDING on his door. He staggers to the door, in his undershirt and boxers, and opens it to reveal REPORTERS and PHOTOGRAPHERS. FLASHES go off in his face.

REPORTER#1

Mr. Feynman! We're from the Washington Post, and hoping you could answer some questions for us!

FEYNMAN

Wha-? Who are you people?! Go away, I'm sleeping.

He starts to close the door when another reporter SHOVES the morning newspaper in his face.

REPORTER#2

But sir! How do you respond to the allegations made against you this morning?

Feynman, seeing his NAME IN BOLD in the paper's HEADLINES, grabs it and SLAMS the door.

INT. DINER - EVENING

Feynman and Kutyna sit in their usual booth. Feynman READS ALOUD from the paper.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FEYNMAN

"Chairman Rogers, however, was more forthcoming about the events leading up to Tuesday night's interview. He stated, "Dr. Feynman is at heart a technical man, and has said himself that he has little experience in understanding the subtleties of human relations. When asked to comment, the professor said, "Don't bug me, man!"

KUTYNA

Well, that's basically the truth, right?

Feynman picks up another paper.

FEYNMAN

And here! The bastards at the Post even went to my favorite topless bar and talked to the strippers about me.

KUTYNA

I told you this would happen, Dick. You've just got to let it go. What's more important to you? What people think of you, or what you leave behind?

Feynman quiets down. He pauses, and takes a deep drink from his beer mug.

FEYNMAN

I miss my family, General. I want to go home. I feel... I feel old.

INT. MOTEL 6 - NIGHT

Feynman TYPES on his typewriter, going a mile a minute. He stops, checks his notes, and continues.

Finally he sits back, and stares at his last page. He's DONE. The phone RINGS.

FEYNMAN

(answering)

Yeah what?

GWENETH (O.S.)

Darling, what is going on over there? Is it absolutely horrible for you?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FEYNMAN

What, you mean with the press? No, I'm fine. I've stopped reading the papers, though. Anyway, I've been too busy to think of anything except the report. How are you?

GWENETH (OS)

Oh it's been terrible! The things they're saying about you! The neighbors keep asking me if it's true, if you used to go to those wild sex parties, if you used to be friends with that German spy--

FEYNMAN

Honey, calm down. If they're saying it, it's probably true.

GWENETH

Richard!

FEYNMAN

I'm no saint, you know that. But you know I love you, and I've been as faithful as I can be. These guys are digging up every ounce of dirt they can about me.

GWENETH

(on the verge of tears)
I just don't know what to do.

FEYNMAN

I'm sorry you're getting dragged into this mess. Is Michelle OK?

GWENETH

She's holding up better than me. But we need you here, Dick. The house feels so empty...

FEYNMAN

I'll be home soon. I miss you. And honey?

GWENETH

Yes?

FEYNMAN

You were right. It's worth it.

He hangs up. As soon as he puts the phone down it RINGS again. He answers.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

Hello?

ROGERS (O.S.)

Feynman? It's Rogers. Can we meet for drinks?

FEYNMAN

(angry)

I don't know, will there be any strippers there?

ROGERS

I know how ugly this has gotten. I want it to end as much as you do. Meet me at the Ritz Carlton at 8, I want to make a peace offering.

INT. RITZ-CARLETON - NIGHT

Feynman looks uncomfortable in the posh interior. He sits at a table, waiting impatiently for Rogers to show.

Finally, ROGERS arrives. He puts his briefcase down on the table between them.

FEYNMAN

If you're going to try and talk me out of writing the report, you're out of luck. I finished it this afternoon.

ROGERS

It's not the report we're concerned with, it's the press coverage. As you know, NASA's budget is coming under Congressional Review. The timing for this little interview of yours couldn't have been worse.

He stops, then begins again, with a gentler tone of voice.

ROGERS (CONT'D)

Look, we're not trying to cover anything up. We're just in a tight spot. That's why we want to offer you this compromise.

He takes out a sheet of paper and hands it to Feynman. Feynman gets out his reading glasses, squinting at all the fine print.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROGERS (CONT'D)

This paper states that we'll allow you to attach your report to the committee's official Presidential report as an appendix, which guarantees that all the right people will read your complaints about NASA, and more importantly, take it seriously.

FEYNMAN

I'm not signing any papers.. I can get my report read on my own.

ROGERS

After the ruckus you made at the press conference, I'm sure plenty of people will be interested. But not the *right* people. With all respect, Mr. Feynman, an unsanctioned, unofficial report written by a renegade investigator, even a scientific man like yourself, probably won't be at the top of the President's reading list. Sure, you'll probably get on a few more talk shows, but it won't make any real difference in the long run. And that is what you're trying to do, isn't it? Make a difference?

Feynman is quiet for a moment, thinking it over.

FEYNMAN

So, say I turn over my report to you. You'll attach it to your official report, have everyone on the committee read it and sign it, and show it to the heads of NASA? What's the catch?

Rogers taps the paper.

ROGERS

That you sign this contract, promising that you will not publish this report or show it to the press once the committee has been disbanded. Leave the press out of this. Let NASA handle it privately, with a minimum of fuss.

FEYNMAN

No way.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

ROGERS

What's more important, fixing the problems you see in NASA or letting the press have a field day?

FEYNMAN

I've worked too hard on this to have it locked up in some government vault.

ROGERS

(trying another tactic)

Dick, I want your report to get read as much as you do. But it's my job to make sure change happens in an orderly, non-destructive manner.

FEYNMAN

Change is never orderly! Nature has proven that over and over. If things are going to change, they have to get messy!

INT. HOTEL BATHROOM - EVENING

Feynman sits in the middle of a BUBBLE BATH. He's brought the PHONE into the bathroom with him, its cord running under the door. He's talking to Gweneth.

FEYNMAN

I don't trust him.

INT. FEYNMAN HOUSE - EVENING

Gweneth too, takes a BUBBLE BATH and talks on the phone. She wears a shower cap and pours bath salts into the tub as she speaks.

GWENETH

Yes, but he is a government man, doesn't that mean he's kind of required to do what he says he will?

INT. HOTEL BATHROOM - SIMULTANEOUS

Feynman laughs as he scrubs his back with a long-handled bath brush.

FEYNMAN

Sweetheart, in America, it usually goes the other way.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GWENETH (O.S.)

Look, all I'm saying is that if you don't sign his paper, you run the risk of becoming a tool for the extremists who want to dismantle the space program altogether. After all your hard work, it would be a shame if the president never got to read it. And to get kicked off the committee after all this time, well, it doesn't feel right.

FEYNMAN

You think I should sign it?

INT. FEYNMAN HOUSE - SIMULTANEOUS

Gweneth stops scrubbing her feet and thinks.

GWENETH

(finally)

I think you should do what's in the best interest of your report. I mean, you may not trust Rogers, but it would be nice to have an official document guaranteeing your work gets read.

INT. HOTEL BATHROOM - SIMULTANEOUS

Feynman rubs soap onto a washcloth.

FEYNMAN

Maybe you're right. I'll think about it.

The soap between his hands SLIPS into the tub.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

Whoops! Dropped the soap. Hey, if you were here, you could find it for me.

GWENETH (O.S.)

(laughing)

You are a dirty old man.

FEYNMAN

But I'm getting cleaner.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAY

A couple days later. Feynman dresses, when there is a KNOCK at the door. He opens it, and the FRONT DESK CLERK hands him a bottle of fine CHAMPAGNE with a note.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLERK

Nice bubbly, huh? Don't get too many deliveries like that round here.

He lingers for a tip, but Feynman just closes the door.

INT. BAR - DAY

Feynman wears a silly looking PARTY HAT and pops the bottle of champagne. Kutyna and two BARMAIDS are squeezed into the booth with him, also wearing party hats.

Feynman grins as the CHAMPAGNE spills over his knuckles, and pours glasses for everyone.

FEYNMAN

Here's to getting the hell out of here!

The barmaids giggle and clink glasses with him. Kutyna, however, is more reticent.

KUTYNA

Congratulations, Dick, I mean it. But are you sure everything's going to work out the way you say it will?

FEYNMAN

Come on, Kutyna, I signed a legal document, they have to include my report. There's going to be major changes around NASA, just wait.

KUTYNA

I certainly hope so.

FEYNMAN

Look, if Rogers tries to pull anything funny, I'll just drop my report on Dan Rather's doorstep. I'm the one with the power, here.

KUTYNA

I wish you had shown me the contract before you signed it.

FEYNMAN

Ah, enough with this doom and gloom. Let's dance!

Feynman grabs up one of the WAITRESSES, and spins her around. Kutyna laughs, and offers his hand to the other girl. Soon, everyone DANCES.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Feynman's POV: The colors and faces swirl around Feynman, crescendoing, until suddenly it cuts to blackness.

INT. HOSPITAL - MORNING

Feynman WAKES with a jolt. He is surrounded by a few FRIENDS and FAMILY. He is in the hospital, hooked up to an I.V.

FEYNMAN

What happened?

KUTYNA

You collapsed on the dance floor. You had a mild heart attack.

GWENETH

I flew out here as soon as I heard. I'm taking you home, darling.

She takes his hand and tries not to cry.

GWENETH (CONT'D)

It's time you came home.

FEYNMAN

I'm so tired. I've never been so tired.

Dr. Sylvia Jenson pokes her head in the door.

SYLVIA

Mrs. Feynman? Is he awake?

GWENETH

Yes, doctor. Everyone, thanks so much for coming by, but we need some time to be alone right now.

Everyone files by Feynman and wishes him luck.

KUTYNA

Copilot to pilot: get better ASAP. That's an order.

Feynman rolls his eyes and grins weakly.

They leave, as Sylvia comes in and pulls up a chair.

FEYNMAN

Boy am I glad to see you, and not that Dr. Connelly. He tried to kill me.

Gwen looks embarrassed by this.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SYLVIA

Dr. Connolly was recently transferred to another hospital. I'm sure it was just a coincidence.

FEYNMAN

Coincidences may appear in nature, but not in Washington, Dr. Jenson.

SYLVIA

I have some bad news to tell you. I just got the results of your tests.

FEYNMAN

Let me guess-- my tumor has metastasized, doubling in tissue mass. It's spread to my lone kidney.

She looks confused.

SYLVIA

I thought you weren't a medical doctor.

FEYNMAN

I'm not. I just take a personal interest in my own death. Only happens once, I might as well do a study of it.

Gwen can't take it anymore.

GWENETH

I'm sorry, but what are you trying to say?

SYLVIA

The survival rate for advanced stomach cancer, especially at Dr. Feynman's age, is very low.

FEYNMAN

Factoring in the variables, I calculated nine percent.

GWENETH

How long do we have?

SYLVIA

Anywhere from a couple months to a year. Of course, there are some options. You could try radiation or chemotherapy, but these would only serve to prolong your life a few months at most. They are not cures.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Gweneth squeezes Feynman's hand, as hard as she can. Feynman is quiet for a minute. Then:

FEYNMAN

No, no I don't think so. I don't want to live like that. In pain, throwing up, balding. I'm ugly enough as it is.

Gweneth starts crying softly. The doctor stands up.

SYLVIA

Think it over. I'll be right outside if you need me.

He leaves. Feynman watches his wife crying, and starts WHISTLING 'TAPS.' She looks at him, and he winks at her.

GWENETH

Stop it, Dick. Please stop.

FEYNMAN

Sorry. I just can't help thinking of that scene from Tom Sawyer where he goes to his own funeral, and laughs at all the fools crying for him. I just feel like laughing, that's all.

He starts LAUGHING, a big, hearty laugh. After a few moments, Gweneth tearfully smiles.

INT. NASA OFFICE BUILDING - DAY

Several days later, Feynman walks into Rogers's office. He is using a cane now, but looking a little better.

Rogers leafs through a copy of FEYNMAN'S REPORT on his desk. There are entire sections CROSSED OFF in red ink, others circled or REWRITTEN. He stands up as Feynman enters.

ROGERS

Well, Professor, I'm glad to see you're up and about again.

FEYNMAN

Just stopping by to sign my name to the official report before I go home. Has everyone else left?

ROGERS

Almost. We have the Senatorial Review next month, followed by the Presidential award ceremony, so most people are going home for a break.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FEYNMAN

Listen, I just want to sign the report
get out of here, so let's get on with it.

Rogers hands him back his REPORT, a THICK STACK of papers
labeled as "Special Investigation Concerning the Challenger
Shuttle."

Feynman flips through it to the end, to his appendix called
"APPENDIX F: PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS ON THE RELIABILITY OF THE
SHUTTLE." He READS through it, flippantly at first, and then
with more concern.

Rogers watches Feynman's face.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

What did you do to it? It's different!

ROGERS

We merely cleaned it up a little.

FEYNMAN

This is a piece of pro-NASA propaganda! I
had pages and pages of critical problems
I've encountered in the shuttles
currently being built! Where are they?
Where are my interviews with the Thiokol
engineers?

ROGERS

We thought it was a little... wordy. You
dwell too much on the past. It's the
future the president is concerned with.

Feynman reads a section aloud, outraged.

FEYNMAN

"It is my personal recommendation that
NASA continue to receive the support of
the Administration and the nation, as it
provides a symbol of national pride and
technological leadership. I applaud
NASA's spectacular achievements of the
past and anticipate impressive
achievements to come--" Who wrote this
bullshit!?

ROGERS

I did. Don't worry, it doesn't really
mean anything, it's just motherhood and
apple pie stuff.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

FEYNMAN

Well if it doesn't mean anything, it's not necessary. Take it out, and put my statistics back in.

ROGERS

We have to say things the president wants to hear.

FEYNMAN

(flabbergasted)

Why wouldn't the president want to hear the scientific truth? People are overlooking mistakes that should be fixed, not applauded!

Rogers smiles to himself and starts gathering up the papers on his desk.

ROGERS

It must feel really good to be a champion of science, Feynman. You must feel great when you wake up in the morning, all raring to go and save poor, misguided NASA. But you're not living in reality.

FEYNMAN

I'm not going to let you publish my report like this.

ROGERS

Fine. But then it will never get published. You signed a contract, remember?

FEYNMAN

So I'll break it. I'll go on Larry King and read it out loud. I'll mail it to every member of congress. I'll place my report on the president's breakfast table.

ROGERS

(matter of factly)

Than we'll sue you for everything you've got. You-- well, more precisely, your family, will be tied up in litigation for years. Do you have time for that? Because I do.

Feynman says nothing, he is too filled with impotent rage. Finally:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

FEYNMAN

Take my name off the committee. I'm not going to sign your goddamn report.

He THROWS the report down on Rogers's desk, and leaves, relying heavily on his cane.

Rogers watches him for a second, perhaps feeling a pang of something, then SIGHS, and drops Feynman's report heavily INTO THE WASTE BIN.

EXT. WASHINGTON DC PARK - DAY

Kutyna and Feynman walk through the park together.

FEYNMAN

He changed everything, Kutyna. He took my name and--

KUTYNA

But didn't you read the contract?

FEYNMAN

Of course I read it!

KUTYNA

And it said nothing about keeping your report in its original form?

FEYNMAN

I didn't even *think*-- I mean, in the scientific world, it would be unthinkable.

KUTYNA

This is not the scientific world, here, Dick. Things don't make sense. Natural laws don't apply.

FEYNMAN

It's like we're not even men anymore. We're just a manifestation of influences.

He sits down on a bench.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

I should have known he would pull something like this. I'm supposed to be this great thinker, right? Ha! I'm a complete nimrod.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KUTYNA

(gently)

You wanted to believe him.

FEYNMAN

The truth is, I just wanted to go home.

INT. MOTEL 6 - DAY

Feynman PACKS. He takes the PHOTOS of his wife and kids off the walls where he's taped them up. He looks at the scattered NASA PARAPHERNALIA which litters his room-- books, charts, blueprints, pieces of rubber and metal, small models of spacecraft-- and turns away from it.

INT. PLANE - NIGHT

Feynman sits once more staring out the window of the plane. He is different from the man who came to DC, he is a man who knows his adventures are over, that death is all that awaits him at home.

Gweneth SLEEPS in the seat next to him, her head nestled on his shoulder, holding his hand. He squeezes it absentmindedly, and stares out the window.

He places his other hand ON THE WINDOW for a second, fingers splayed out. He examines the VEINS and WRINKLES in his hand.

Disgusted, he takes his hand off the window, and watches the CONDENSATION from the warmth of his palm EVAPORATE slowly off the glass. He closes his eyes.

EXT. FEYNMAN HOUSE - NIGHT

Gweneth and Feynman pull up to their house in their old station wagon. Michelle RUNS up to the car as her father is getting out. They HUG and KISS.

Feynman tries to carry his suitcase, but this time he is too weak. Michelle carries it for him. Pride wounded, he is forced to follow behind them on his cane.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Feynman sits at the breakfast table, drinking his coffee and watching the morning news.

TV NEWSCASTER

...in conclusion to their investigation,
the committee will soon be presenting
their report to Congress.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TV NEWSCASTER (CONT'D)

The proceeding is scheduled to occur next month, followed by the Presidential Award Ceremony at the White House. We go now to our correspondent in Washington, who has with her William Rogers, the Chairman of the Special Investigation. Hailey?

Television cuts to a shot of a WOMAN interviewing Rogers on the steps of a government building.

HAILEY

Thanks Jon. Tell me, Chairman Rogers, how has this investigation affected you?

ROGERS

Well, it's been a hard time for all of us, these past few months, but ultimately rewarding.

HAILEY

What do you have to say about the resignation of your most successful investigator, just weeks before the hearing?

ROGERS

Unfortunately, the stress of the investigation disagreed with Dr. Feynman's health. He is home now, resting with his wife and family.

Feynman shuts the television off, irritated.

FEYNMAN

That son of a bitch. "Home, resting."

Feynman hasn't noticed that Gweneth has been watching from the doorway.

GWENETH

(firmly)

Well that is what you're doing, Richard. God knows you deserve it. I should never have let you go.

FEYNMAN

I should have just stuck with my Theory of Social Irresponsibility, and avoided the whole mess all together.

Gweneth ignores that and starts fixing breakfast.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

GWENETH

What do you want, honey, cereal or eggs?

FEYNMAN

I'm not hungry.

GWENETH

You want me to get you the paper so you can do your crossword?

FEYNMAN

No. I've had enough with papers, with games. I've had enough.

He sits at the table for a few moments, staring at his coffee mug. He scoots the chair back abruptly.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

I'm going for a walk.

GWENETH

Take a sweater!

FEYNMAN

(on his way out the door)

This is California, woman!

EXT. HILLS NEAR HOUSE - LATER

Feynman walks along the windswept hills overlooking the ocean. There is a barren beauty to the area.

He should have taken a sweater. The SEA BREEZE is brisk, and Feynman feels it.

Feynman walks along a rough sort of path, BEATING SHRUBBERY with his cane, as he talks to himself.

FEYNMAN

Here's for you, Rogers. Here's for your stinking committee!

He soundly WHACKS the head off a dry yucca plant.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

And here's for you, Washington Post, for calling me "ailing!"

He WHACKS another plant.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

And most of all, here's for you, you
stubborn old fool, for letting yourself
fall into his trap!

He pulls back his arm to really let loose, but stops, and
starts to CRY instead. SEAGULLS wheel overhead, calling out
to each other. Feynman wipes the tears from his eyes,
surprised at them.

Gweneth CALLS OUT to him, she jogs up the path, a SWEATER in
her hands.

GWENETH

Dick, wait up. You need to stay warm.

She catches up.

GWENETH (CONT'D)

Now Dick, the doctor said--

He cuts her off by HUGGING HER fiercely to him.

GWENETH (CONT'D)

Darling? Are you alright? Dick, you're
crying.

She tenderly cups his face, concern in her eyes.

FEYNMAN

Have I ever told you how good you are to
me? You're a good woman, Gwen.

GWENETH

Well now I know you're feeling ill.

FEYNMAN

No, I mean it.

They start walking down the path together, holding hands like
school kids.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

I really had something worth reading in
that report. This case got under my skin,
Gwen, and not just because it was my
last.

GWENETH

Don't say that--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

FEYNMAN

Why not? It's true. It was my last case, and it mattered. More than just some ooze in a test tube, some equations on the board. The last thing I did that really got to me like that was the Manhattan Project.

GWENETH

I know.

Feynman is silent. He stops and stares at the grey, choppy ocean.

FEYNMAN

Did you know what the desert looked like at ground zero? I mean, the actual earth.
(pause)

I went back there a week after the detonation, even though I knew it was radioactive. The ground... was shining. Silver like a mirror. The tower we had built vaporized into nothing, and the sand from the desert floor had melted into the most beautiful green glass, all around the crater.

Gweneth takes his arm, a comforting presence.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

I've been having these dreams, Gwen-- about Hiroshima. The day they dropped the bomb, we partied, it was a big celebration. I was dancing as people were dying. I dream about that all the time.

GWENETH

Stop it. You're torturing yourself--

FEYNMAN

Not enough. We didn't know-- we were too close to it to see what we were really doing. And we were too close to it when we tested it out in the desert. That's why I've got this dragon in my belly, that's been waiting for me all these years.

He sits down on a hillock of coarse sand grass. Gwen sits beside him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

GWENETH

I don't understand, Dick, you always talk about the project like it was your crowning glory. You'd always laugh when people asked you if you felt guilty about the bomb, and say "science--

FEYNMAN

(cutting her off)

"Science and guilt don't mix." Yeah, I know what I said.

He's quiet for a second.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

But I'm dying, Gwen. Dying men don't get a second chance. That report was all I had. Without it the most important thing I'll leave behind is my physics work.

GWENETH

Physics isn't the most important thing, Dick. Love is.

They sit silently on the hill together, watching the gulls.

INT. CALTECH CLASSROOM - DAY

Feynman slips in the back door of the CLASSROOM, careful not to disturb the TEACHER. It is his old physics class. The substitute is intelligent but dry, and the STUDENTS look weary and bored.

The bell rings, and the students pour out. As they see Feynman standing by the door, they crowd around him.

GROSSEART

We've missed you, Professor. When are you coming back?

FEYNMAN

Ah... Well, I'm not actually going to be coming back. I sent in my resignation this morning.

They look dismayed. Before anyone can say anything, an OFFICE GIRL comes in with a note.

GIRL

Professor Feynman? You have a call in the office.

Feynman nods. He shakes hands with the now solemn students.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FEYNMAN

Goodbye. It was a pleasure learning from you all.

INT. COLLEGE OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Feynman picks up the phone.

KUTYNA

Dick? That you?

FEYNMAN

Yeah, who's this?

KUTYNA

It's your copilot, you dummy. I've been trying to get a hold of you since you got back.

FEYNMAN

We had the phone off the hook all week. Reporters, you know. What's going on?

KUTYNA

It's this Senate hearing. Look, Dick, I think you should come.

FEYNMAN

And put myself back in the lion's mouth? No thanks.

KUTYNA

It looks bad for everyone to be there but you. Besides, I miss you, Dick. I didn't get to say goodbye at the hospital, not really. And I think you deserve to be there, and to see how all our work-- your work-- is received by congress.

FEYNMAN

I dunno...

KUTYNA

It'll really put a spoke in Rogers' wheels if you show.

INT. SENATE CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

The room is FILLED WITH REPORTERS and government officials. The mood is calm, and focused.

Rogers stands in at a table along with every member of the committee, except Feynman.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Kutyna has an EMPTY CHAIR beside him. In front of them are the raised desks of the CONGRESSIONAL REPRESENTATIVES, who are old, distinguished men and women.

ROGERS

(confidently)

In conclusion, I hope that the report you have read fulfills your expectations, and helps shed some light on the tragic circumstances behind the accident.

The oldest and most dignified-looking of the Senators answers in a heavy southern drawl.

SENATOR HOLLINGS

Thank you, Chairman Rogers.

Rogers takes turns to take his seat. As he does so, he sees FEYNMAN ENTER the room, and conspicuously squeeze between the packed rows of people until he TAKES THE EMPTY CHAIR next to Kutyna. Rogers scowls and acknowledges him.

FEYNMAN

(quietly, to Kutyna)

What'd I miss?

KUTYNA

(whispering)

Nothing but some top quality butt-kissing.

SENATOR HOLLINGS

(to Rogers)

Now, myself and my colleagues have read your little report quite thoroughly, and it appears you have done an excellent job, Mr. Rogers.

ROGERS

(preening)

Thank you, Sir.

SENATOR HOLLINGS

But if there's one thing I've learned from Washington, it's that appearances can be deceiving, especially where big government is concerned.

Rogers's smile falters.

ROGERS

I- I'm afraid I don't understand--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

SENATOR HOLLINGS

Don't start fretting, I just have a few questions to ask you about your investigation. There's been some talk of Congress initiating our own committee to look into this, if we find your report to be-- well, less than objective.

ROGERS

(pale)

I was not informed of any such--

SENATOR HOLLINGS

Now calm down, Mr. Rogers, this isn't a witch hunt. We just want to verify that your investigation was sufficient. Mainly, I'm wonderin' if your staff was adequate for the job, no offense to those present. It seems like you had a lot of big names, but not too many meat and potatoes science types.

ROGERS

Well, our focus wasn't so much on the technological aspects, so much as the bigger picture--

SENATOR HOLLINGS

Well, that's just my point, see.

Feynman leans over and whispers to Kutyna.

FEYNMAN

What's he doing?

Kutyna wears a cryptic smile.

KUTYNA

The Senator is a good man. Just brimming with piss n' vinegar. We go way back.

SENATOR HOLLINGS

From my experience, the "bigger picture" usually only gets in the way. You can't just sit and read what's given to you-- you need to get your hands dirty. And it concerns me that so few of your investigators seemed to be doing that.

ROGERS

(losing his cool)

I'm afraid I don't understand.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

ROGERS (CONT'D)

It would be inefficient to let a hundred gumshoes run amok--

SENATOR HOLLINGS

I'm concerned that your investigation didn't have enough gumshoes. That's the problem with presidential committees, I've been on them, and they eat up whatever's fed to them, without looking to see who's doing the feeding. Follow?

ROGERS

Yes, sir.

SENATOR HOLLINGS

Now I'm not questioning your competence, I'm just trying to decide whether it would be in the public's interest to launch another investigation. See, when it's not done right the first time, people won't let go of it. They're still investigating the Warren Commission Report around this town, and JFK's been dead for 23 years.

Some CHUCKLES are heard from the audience.

SENATOR HOLLINGS (CONT'D)

What I want to know is, do you think this report is unbiased towards NASA?

Rogers opens his mouth. The Senator cuts him off.

SENATOR HOLLINGS (CONT'D)

Now, be honest. I want your honest to God answer. Did you investigate this explosion to the best of your abilities, without giving in to outside influence?

ROGERS

Yes sir, I believe we did.

The senator SIGHS, and exchanges a look with his fellow Senators.

SENATOR HOLLINGS

I'm afraid I disagree.

The room explodes in MURMURS and WHISPERING. Rogers looks sick. Kutyna calmly RETRIEVES SOMETHING from his briefcase and slides it across the desk to Feynman.

KUTYNA

You're going to need this in a second.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

FEYNMAN

My report? How did you--

The Senator REGAINS ORDER by clearing his throat into the microphone several times.

SENATOR HOLLINGS

Excuse me. Could we have some quiet please? Thank you. Now, Mr. Rogers, unless you have any more information that you have neglected to share with us, I am afraid we will have to rule in favor of electing a new commission to resume the investigation. I want to nip this story in the bud.

Roger confers with his lawyer, who sits near him at the table. As he does so, Feynman STANDS UP, unnoticed at first.

FEYNMAN

I think I may have some information that could be of interest in this matter.

SENATOR HOLLINGS

And who might you be?

FEYNMAN

Richard Feynman.

SENATOR HOLLINGS

Oh yes, our one renegade scientist. I was so disappointed when you resigned from the committee. What information do you allude to?

FEYNMAN

Well, there were some portions of the report which didn't make the final edit, and if it's alright with Rogers, I could hand them over for your inspection.

Rogers furiously meets his gaze.

FEYNMAN (CONT'D)

That is, if Rogers would be willing to waive certain...legal restrictions.

SENATOR HOLLINGS

(impatient)

Well, Rogers? Can I see these documents or not?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

Rogers is caught in indecision: does he give in and let NASA's mismanagement be revealed, or does he say no and lose his investigation? Finally:

ROGERS

Show him.

Feynman hands a copy of his appendix to the Senator. The Senator puts on his reading glasses and peruses the document.

SENATOR HOLLINGS

What am I looking at, here?

FEYNMAN

This is the "lost" Appendix F. It has all my data on the reliability of the shuttle, and details the gross incompetence I found on the part of NASA's safety commission.

SENATOR HOLLINGS

Gross incompetence, eh? And why wasn't this included in the original report?

Feynman looks at Rogers. Rogers, white-faced, does nothing. After an agonizing instant, Feynman turns back to the Senators.

FEYNMAN

Chairman Rogers and I decided the original report was too... "wordy." We cut it down to a more manageable size.

SENATOR HOLLINGS

I'll bet you did. Well I'm glad to see someone had the foresight to keep a spare copy with them, else this Congressional Review might have turned out differently. Give us a moment, would you gentlemen, to review this new information.

EXT. PRESIDENTIAL ROSE GARDEN - DAY

SUPER: TWO WEEKS LATER

Feynman, Kutyna, Rogers, and the rest of the committee are lined up on a dais surrounded by roses. PRESIDENT REAGAN is pinning MEDALS on each of the investigators. Gweneth and Michelle are in the audience, taking pictures.

While the President is still at the other end of the line, Rogers leans in and whispers to Feynman through his smile, eyes averted.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROGERS

You're a son of a bitch, you know that?

FEYNMAN

I'm the son of a bitch who saved your
ass, Chairman. Smile for the camera.

The press takes a PHOTO of them smiling at each other. The President comes by and PINS A MEDAL on Kutyna, shakes his hand, and moves on to Feynman.

REAGAN

Splendid work Mr. Feynman. A thoroughly
enjoyable read. Congratulations.

He pins his medal on, shakes his hand, and moves down the line.

Feynman scowls for a moment, and whispers to Kutyna, on his other side:

FEYNMAN

A good read? What am I, a beach book?

KUTYNA

At least he read it.

FEYNMAN

But what's he gonna do about it?

KUTYNA

Nothing. But someone somewhere along the
line will, rest assured.

The official ceremony ends, the audience CLAPS, people begin to head inside for the reception.

Gwen runs up and hugs Feynman, and exclaims over his medal.

FEYNMAN

Yeah, I'm a big hero alright. Where's my
parade?

GWENETH

Oh Dick, I'm so proud of you.

She kisses him.

GWENETH (CONT'D)

Someone else is proud of you, too.

From behind her steps up CARL FEYNMAN, 30.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CARL
Congratulations, Dad.

Feynman, eyes tearing, immediately pulls him into a fierce hug.

CARL (CONT'D)
It's okay--

FEYNMAN
No, it's not. I've been a stubborn fool for too long. Carl, I'm sorry. If you want to be a philosopher, that's fine with me. At least you'll ask a lot of questions--

Carl smiles, and interrupts him.

CARL
I changed my major to computer science. Philosophy was really boring.

FEYNMAN
Oh thank god!

MICHELLE
Are you ready to go, Dad? We've got the car waiting in the back.

FEYNMAN
You go ahead, I'll be right there.

His wife and daughter head off. Feynman shakes a few hands, general niceties. Kutyna steps up behind him.

KUTYNA
How do you feel?

FEYNMAN
I feel good, you know. Real good. But not because I took Rogers down a notch, or even cause I got my picture in all the papers. I think I did some good work out here, and I think it meant something.

KUTYNA
It did. It will. Just wait.

FEYNMAN
I don't have time to wait, man. I'm out of here. I've got a couple blondes in a red sports car expecting me.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Kutyna laughs and slaps him on the back.

KUTYNA

Go on. I'll see you later.

Feynman knows he won't. Kutyna doesn't know how little time Feynman has left.

FEYNMAN

Pilot to Co-pilot: thanks.

They smile, clasp hands, and go separate ways.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

Feynman and family in RED CONVERTIBLE, speeding down the highway, Feynman behind the wheel. He looks happy and at peace.

A legend appears superimposed on the image:

CARD #1

On June 13, 1986, President Reagan directed NASA to undertake Feynman's recommendations on decentralizing their management system.

As a result, classified information was made available to personnel at all levels. Experienced astronauts were placed in key NASA management positions. New rules required all key engineers at NASA to be in complete agreement regarding launch decisions.

CARD #2

A mechanism was put into place that would allow NASA and contractor personnel to provide open and anonymous reporting of Space Shuttle safety concerns without fear of reprisal.

By all appearances, Feynman's hopes for change in the Space Program were realized before his death in 1988.

FADE TO BLACK.

FEYNMAN'S VOICE

For a successful technology, reality must take precedence over public relations, for nature cannot be fooled.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CARD #3

In memory of the courageous crews of the Challenger and
Columbia Space Shuttle Disasters.

FADE OUT.