

Earthrise. One of the most famous photographs of our pale blue dot. There is something so eerie about the picture, watching our home emerge from the shadows. It looks so calm down there. Yes there are storm systems circling the globe but from a distance they seem more like Van Gogh than virga. Everything is so peaceful.

It's different though, when that blue marble is rapidly increasing in size as you hurtle toward the ground at maximum velocity. This was the situation that astronaut Misty Mays found herself in on one sad November day. One minute she had been appreciating the beauty of our planet, realizing that no photo had ever done the view justice, and the next moment she found herself tumbling. The capsule she was in was a one manned repair vessel, not too different then those used for deep sea diving. She was supposed to be fixing some of the minor dings in the International Space Station's hull. Microscopic space trash penetrated the solid steel hull in a blink of an eye. It could be deadly to the station and to the astronauts as Mays found out. A single grain of garbage, smaller than a piece of sand, flew straight through her stabilizers and sent her tumbling toward the planet.

"Huston we have a problem," for a split second joy flowed through her as she got to say the iconic words. The radio crackled and buzzed.

"Huston I have a major problem," it wasn't so fun the second time. Still the radio buzzed. Just seconds ago she was having clear dialogue with Mission Control.

"Huston come in. Station come in. This is Misty Mays. I have an emergency does anyone copy?" Panic filled her voice as her craft flew head over heels.

There was the earth. Now the station. Now the earth. Now the vast emptiness of space. Now the station. Now the earth. The spinning was making her sick.

"Huston?"

Still the radio buzzed and Mays knew that she was on her own. She twinged the altimeter and jostled the joystick. Flashing lights erupted from the control panel as needles bounced from one end of the spectrum to the other. She

twiddled the flumdingers and tweaked the whosits but nothing slowed her fall. The earth rose big before her filling her whole view. She was going to crash land. Right into Nevada.

At least she would be warm she thought as reentry flames erupted all around her. Space was terribly cold and even in the highly insulated station the cold had crept in. If it wasn't for the whole burning to death bit Mays might even be happy to return to earth.

She had spent her entire life working up to this moment. Every test and every class were meant to propel her into space. She wanted to be the first woman astronaut and when Sally Ride beat her to it, Mays tried even harder to achieve the ultimate dream. She had gone to the very best schools and aced her classes. In flight training, and later the air force, she had been the best pilot around. She had killed despite a strong pacifist streak and protected tyrants who were better left to the masses. All in the name of space. When she finally was offered her dream, to train with NASA and potentially pilot the rocket, it had been the best moment of her life. Six years with NASA found her as pilot on her very first mission. With barely a glance over her shoulder as the engines blasted she was shooting for the stars.

That was six months ago. After that first amazing day of blast off, the beauty of space travel began to lose its luster. Living in space is cold, boring, and extremely uncomfortable. Peeing into a tube became the norm, along with food from a tube and bathing as well. She exercised for hours upon hours everyday only to be told that she was losing muscle mass. The adult diapers were uncomfortable and she missed walking on firm ground. Other than the beautiful view there wasn't much to like about space.

Now that she was homeward bound Mays was almost happy, she just wished she could have done it in a less lethal way. She continued to flip switches and pull wires but nothing seemed to have any affect. Her craft continued to plummet at top speed. She thought it was ironic: the best pilot ever dies in a crash because she was unable to start an engine. She estimated that there was only two minutes to impact. Time was running out.

Desperate for some idea Misty ripped open the three ringed binder that contained the starter's guide. For such a complicated craft the guide was suspiciously thin. Three animated pages floated up from the cover. Mays followed the basic steps for rebooting the rocket but nothing happened. As she turned the last page, giving up on life, a small sticky-note floated up out of the book. It had five words scribbled on it:

Don't Forget The Parking Brake

Mays reached for the lever as the Nevada desert loomed before her. As she decompressed it her craft rumbled to life. She hit the boosters and strained against the natural pull of gravity...

That was the day that astronaut Misty Mays crash landed into earth. It was the first time an astronaut had fallen from the ISS and survived. She was pulled from the wreckage of her vehicle, with pieces spread for miles around, mostly unharmed. The loss of musculature from time in space along with the sever g-force experienced in her crash put her in a coma which lasted four days. When she awoke the first thing she said was, "Bring me another blanket."

Mays went on to become the chief of NASA after fly a total of fifty-five more missions, leading the first mission to mars. She was recognized as a hero in her time.