

It Had to Be Done by Mason Lynch

“It’s getting hotter every year, isn’t it?” my coworker Dan asked. “Yep, seems like it” I whispered, making certain I didn’t take my hands off the drone I was fixing. Amazon has a strict policy on working unless it is your scheduled break and body movement sensors are placed all over the shop. Getting “off task” one too many times would lead to termination. I just got a talking to three months ago for using the restroom for 6 minutes instead of my allowed 5. Suddenly, my supervisor came in. He was wearing his usual khakis, Amazon embroidered long sleeve button up, and spotless brown leather dress shoes. He was documenting something quickly on his tablet and looked up at Dan with a fake smile and said, “Hey Dan can you follow me?” Dan reluctantly followed our supervisor out the door. I didn’t see him for the rest of the day. The microphones must have picked up his voice. What a shame, Dan was really nice. He shouldn’t have spoken so loudly.

I left work after my shift at 4PM sharp. I climbed into my electric self-driving car and pushed the setting on the display for home. Since I am part of the 50% of the world that is employed, I can afford a vehicle. I only had to put down \$20,000 and sign for a 15-year loan. I usually watch my 4D Virtual Reality podcast while in my car. My daughter and I use to love watching Space X’s Mars series. We would spend hours watching and pretending we were on Mars together. It was her dream to leave earth on one of the colony flights. I began to tear up and I hadn’t even begun a program. It has been four years since I lost her, but her memory was still so fresh in my mind. She would have been 18 today. I could have saw her off. I took of my headset and stared out at the concrete landscape that was before me. I noticed the highway was in the middle of an advertisement as I was being driven home. As part of the new models 4D experience, the scent of fresh coffee beans filled my nostrils from the air ducts placed around the

car. I looked out and saw a hologram of a young couple sipping on Starbucks. They seemed happy. I looked down and saw a picture of an iced latte on my display. It looked perfectly blended and had a slight bit of condensation on it. I routed my vehicle to the nearest Starbucks.

Today I didn't want to just go through the drive thru kiosk, I wanted to go to the "social space" kiosk. Double glass reflective doors opened for me as I walked into the establishment. The area I saw was small but well appointed, the walls were a forest green, the floors were made from a laminated oak wood, and fake vines spotted the place. Displays with drink and food options were everywhere. I chose an iced latte with vanilla flavoring and oat milk and within 10 seconds it was brewed and ejected from the kiosk. I didn't even have to physically pay. It was deducted from my UBI account via facial recognition. I sat down at a table and began sipping my latte. I was the odd one out not having my headset on. Most the people at the Starbucks seemed younger. They were on virtual dates or travels, I was sure. I couldn't understand why you wouldn't meet someone in person. That is how my ex-wife and I did it using Bumble 20 years ago in June of 2030. They still had people working at the counter then. While I was reminiscing, I couldn't help but notice a woman kept staring at me from across the room. It was making me uncomfortable. I didn't want to stare back or approach her. Any negative remarks associated with my person could have me flagged and canceled. That would mean I lose my job and I must move into universal housing like the other half of the world. So, I briefly glanced up at her but we still met eyes. She was about 35 years old, thin, pale white, with perfectly cut black hair in a bob, and business casual clothes on. I threw up a quick smile and coolly started to grab my coffee to leave but out of the corner of my eye I saw her approaching the table.

She sat down and asked, "Are you Liam Dane, age 43?" I replied nervously with "Yes, who is asking?" She said "My name is Michaela Nickels. I am a recruiter with Blue Origin. We

have it that you expressed the intent of leaving your (package drone repairer) position for one in our exploration division on Mars. Is that correct?" I was flabbergasted. I replied to that position years ago, before my daughter committed suicide, they must be desperate if they are coming to me personally now. I took a sip of my coffee then replied with "Yes, but why now?" She smirked and she said "The world is running out of qualified applicants that are physically fit enough for the position. Not only that, but your social life also aligns well with what we need. No wife, no kids, no close friends...no attachments." I didn't know what to say. I suppose I was tired with my comfortable but exhausting life. My daughter Alaina would have wanted me to, at least before she was drug down by social media during her teen years. I quickly said "Yes, I will do it". Michaela was taken aback. She gained her composure and said "Okay then, the interview process will be nothing like you have done, and I suggest starting training right now for your flight physical. My contact has been sent to all your systems. We will be in touch. Good luck Mr. Dane. You will need it". She then vanished.

It took a month before I heard from her again. In the meantime, I was working out harder than I had any time in my life. I was running three miles a day, doing calisthenics, and eating right. I was determined to make my daughter proud. She called at 4:05 PM right after I got off shift and sat down in my car. I accepted her call and she told me coordinates were put into my cars navigation and it was going to begin taking me there. Before I could ask why, she hung up on me. The destination was a Blue Origin facility not far from my own. My mind raced with what to expect. I was certain it was going to be the interview. Before I knew the car came to a halt and the speakers emitted "Please exit the vehicle and proceed to building 110 office 38. Thank you." I sheepishly walked up to the building. It was a large concrete building, painted a dark blue, no insignias of any kind were around the building except for the building number, and

there was only one door. It was a small steel door with no handle of any kind or window. I walked up to the door. A display next to it lit up green and I heard a female robotic voice say, “Please stand clear of the door”. I step backed and hydraulics lifted the door open. It must have been several inches thick. A hallway led to a single door with a sign next it that said, “OFFICE 38”. I cautiously approached the office door. The hallway was dim, and it looked like soundproofing lined the halls. I could hear the door close behind me as I grabbed the office door handle.

I opened the door, and the room was nearly empty except for a generic metal table, metal chair, and a large camera pointing at the desk. I sat down and I heard a voice. “Hello Liam, how are you today?” “Fine” I replied. It spoke again and said “Wonderful, now this interview will be short. We have just a few questions to ask and it is imperative you answer truthfully. Are you ready?” I took a deep breath and said “yes”. The interviewer started immediately. “We will start out with an easy one. Do you want to go to Mars?” “Yes, yes I do” I said. “Good, now this one will be a bit trickier. Would you stop a man from getting mugged knowing that your own life would be in jeopardy,” The voice questioned? I looked down at the table for a while and shook my head. The voice spoke again. “Okay last question, this one will be hard so take your time. If you had a child and it succumbed to an illness but the only way to keep that child alive was to take from another. Would you, knowing that both children will be in pain for the rest of their lives?” My throat went dry, and my bottom lip began to quiver when I heard the question. I thought about my daughter, how I would do anything to see her now. I looked at the camera directly and stated “Yes”. The camera peered at me with its large lens. Finally, I heard the voice once more. “Thank you, that concludes our interview. You may exit the building. We will be in touch Mr. Dane.

I laid in bed with my eyes wide open. My mind raced with thoughts about the interview. Why was it only three questions? Did I fail it? Why were the questions so strange? When will I hear back? I leaned over to grab my bottle of melatonin to calm my nerves. As I was reaching my phone began to ring. It was my ex-wife, Judy. I haven't heard from her in years. I wonder why she was calling. I pressed answer and waited. She said "Liam". I answered back with "Hey Judy, how are you?". She stated, "I got something to tell you.". I asked what and she said, "I am pregnant, it is a girl." I could hear her start to cry. I asked if she was okay, and she asked, "what if she turns out like Alaina?". I immediately knew what to say, I have been keeping the thought bottled up within me for years. "Judy, she won't. You were an amazing mom but all that stress and anger from our fighting on top of stress from social media and school is what did it. You and John are meant for each other. We weren't, we found out we were pregnant after just a month of dating. We were just kids, and we didn't even know each other. This time will be different for you, I promise. I could hear her sniffing. She finally replied with "Thanks Liam, I needed that." I blurted out "I am going to Mars Judy; I am doing it for Alaina." She was taken aback. She asked me some questions and then finally said "Look, I got to go Liam. Please stay safe." With that she was gone, and my mind wasn't on the job anymore.

It took three days before I finally heard from Blue Origin. They gave me a ship date that was a month out and told me I wouldn't be reporting to my job at Amazon anymore. I would be reporting to a lab for physical and mental testing as well as equipment familiarization until I shipped out. The next few weeks were some of the most exciting of my life. Everyone at the lab seemed so intelligent and kind. They always reminded me of the contribution I was making for humanity and how I was part of a few lucky one in our generation to set foot on Mars. I beamed,

Alaina would be so fascinated and proud. Launch day was exciting. I shook hands of all the scientists and engineers who worked at the lab. They all wished me and about 100 others off before we boarded Blue Origin's new supercarrier class ship. Supposedly the ship can take us there in a month. It used to take seven. I began to tear up as we had lift off. I could see earth fade away in the port holes of the ship. My old life was now a thing of the past.

I woke up with excitement in my heart. Today was the day I was going to land on Mars. We were only a hundred thousand miles away. As we were approaching the flight crew seemed all uneasy. Almost like they didn't want to talk to any of us. All of us passengers peered out the porthole anxiously awaiting our arrival. As the red planet got closer and closer it began to look strange. It looked like massive hexagons were dotting the planet. They must be lithium mines. Tens of thousands of oil drills also spotted the planet. This wasn't an exploration mission. It was a mining mission. The red planet was being used up for profit. You could hear a pin drop when one of the flight engineers spoke up and said "It had to be done. Earth's natural resources were being used up at an alarming rate and no corporation wanted to slow down production. So, this is our solution."