

ASTRONAUT

A short play by

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Characters

Conner Clay, a nine year old boy, Captain of Friendship I

Bear, Conner's plush teddy bear, Land Module Pilot

Setting and Time

The play takes place in an attic. The time is the present.

NOTES: None of Bear's lines are to be read aloud during a performance. Bear's lines are in place to help the actor playing Conner and the director. For the audience's peace of mind, I recommend an adult actor play Conner.

The attic in Conner Clay's house. Boxes and miscellaneous items clutter a majority of the attic, save a small nook in the middle of the room where Conner has designated his play space. The room has a door and window.

In the darkness, a flashlight appears near the window and scans the play space. The spotlight is accompanied by the sounds of a nine year old boy gurgling engine noises with his mouth in-between words.

CONNER

You're coming in too hot, Bear! Bear? Do you copy? This is Friendship I. We need a status report, Bear! Do you copy? Look, Bear, it's Conner. You're approaching the surface too fast! You won't be able to slow down fast enough once you break the atmosphere! Bear? Can you hear me? If you don't take your foot off the gas you will be flattened faster than that carton of eggs in my second grade science project! Bear, you're approaching the surface-

BEAR

--Just getting the transmission, Friendship! I'm losing speed.

CONNER

Good to hear your voice, Bear. What's your altitude and speed?

BEAR

Little over 40,000 feet and closing at 600 miles-

CONNER

-Negative, Bear, that's still too fast for a surface landing!

BEAR

Activating reverse auxiliary fuel thrusters--

CONNER

--No time for reverse fuel thrusters, Bear! You're gonna have to pull up and try to land again on the next pass.

Conner continues to simulate fake noise while waiting for Bear's responses. His flashlight finds the teddy bear sitting on a pile of bed sheets. Bear is covered head to toe in an aluminum foil spacesuit and spacecraft, fashioned out of an old shoebox.

BEAR

Not enough fuel for another pass! I gotta land it now, Friendship--

CONNER

--Negative! It's suicide, Bear! I've got you on spotlight. You're out of time. I repeat, pull up. Bear--

BEAR

--I'm losing speed. I can land it. I'm 10,000 feet and closing--

CONNER

--You don't have any time! Abort the landing and-Bear, Bear--
?

Conner stops making engine noises, kills the flashlight and turns on a lamp.

What was that, Bear?

BEAR

A mistake. Look, it was just a simulation--

CONNER

--Simulation or not, I can't have my best Land Module Pilot refusing direct orders trying to act like a hero. As Captain, it is my duty to see to the safety of every man, woman and child aboard this massive starship. That kind of crazy flying could get you killed out there. How are we supposed to chart new planets or meet new scores of peaceful civilizations without our best pilot?

BEAR

Maybe I'm not your best pilot.

CONNER

Don't talk like that, you're the best pilot we have in the Fleet! I couldn't be the Pilot--

BEAR

--Wait a second, Conner. Do you hear that?

CONNER

Huh? What are you saying, Bear?

BEAR

Do you hear that noise downstairs?

CONNER

A noise from downstairs? Oh, no. What does it sound like?

Conner drops the game. For the first time, he faces the audience.

Conner has a large purple bruise under his eye.

BEAR

Like your dad is in the liquor cabinet.

CONNER

Dad's already into...? But it's too early! He almost never starts this early.

BEAR

He must have had a long day down at the factory.

CONNER

Yeah, must have. You know how much he hates that job...oh, what are we gonna do, Bear? You know how he gets when he--

BEAR

--You should run away. We should run away.

CONNER

We've been over this, Bear! We can't run away--

BEAR

--You always talk about running away? Maybe now is the time.

CONNER

But it's not, it's a bad idea. What if we got caught? We-we're not even supposed to be in the attic! I know we always talk about how great it would be to get away from here, but...but...if we got caught then he'd really...

BEAR

Not if we make it to the police station.

CONNER

How far away is the police station?

BEAR

It's just three miles, we could cut through the woods. Be there in an hour.

CONNER

Face it, Bear. We're stuck here.

BEAR

Coward.

CONNER

What did you just call me?

BEAR

I called you a coward. It's true right?

CONNER

You've got a lot of nerve calling me that, Bear. You better cut it out.

BEAR

Coward.

CONNER

I'm serious! Calling me names isn't going to change my mind. So, stop it!

BEAR

Mom wasn't too afraid to leave...

CONNER

That was over the line...you know that was different! You know that-that...she's a grown up!

BEAR

She's a person, like you, who got tired of being afraid.

CONNER

I'm not a coward and I'm not afraid!

Conner grabs a suitcase behind one
of the boxes.

If proof is what you want, I'll prove it to you! I'll prove I'm not afraid of him. Capt. Conner Clay is fearless. Fine, Bear, let's run away. But, if we do this, you have to promise to stay with me no matter what. You'll never abandon me-us?

BEAR

Of course--

CONNER

--But on top of that, I want you to pledge your life to-to the discovery of new worlds, to your whole family aboard Friendship 1 and, no matter how dangerous it gets, always be my pilot?

BEAR

Cross my heart.

CONNER

Okay, good. I promise to stay with you too. Cross my heart.

Conner starts to pack.

We don't have much time. Once he starts you know how he can be. What do we need to take with us?

BEAR

How about socks and underwear?

CONNER

Okay, good! Mom used to always say make sure you have plenty of clean socks and underwear! What else?

Conner starts opening boxes and
begins to pull out old dingy
clothes.

BEAR

Can't live without clothes, right? You need T-shirts and pants and stuff.

CONNER

Right, T-shirts and pants are obvious, Bear. I'm talking about other stuff. Can you think of any other stuff we might need? Quick, Bear! Think!

Conner finds a number of T-shirts
and tosses them in the suitcase. He
stumbles across a large sweater.
This probably belonged to Uncle Lawrence, huh...?

BEAR

What about all that leftover lunch money?

CONNER

Oh, right! And it's not leftover lunch money, it's change
I've saved up that I find on the playground at recess. It's
going to come in handy now!

Conner grabs his quart-size plastic
bag of change and tosses it in the
suitcase.

Perfect! There must be at least...I don't know! A hundred
dollars?

BEAR

Has to be!

The sound of a glass shattering is
heard downstairs.

CONNER

Shh! Keep your voice down, Bear! Did you hear that? He broke
his glass or something--

BEAR

--I know. What else do you need to pack?

CONNER

I don't know, I think I have everything.

BEAR

Wait?! What about your book?

CONNER

I knew you wouldn't let me forget my solar system book. It's
all you ever want me to read to you before bed anymore.

BEAR

Hey, you can't teach an old bear new tricks, right?

CONNER

Well, you aren't that old. Once we find a new home, I'm taking some of this hundred dollars and buying some new books so we don't have to keep looking at the same facts every day. We know it rains diamonds on Neptune. We need to learn some new stuff.

Conner opens the book.

This book is still awesome, even though we've memorized every page. Boy, mom really nailed it with this one, huh? Wouldn't it be amazing if we could travel the universe and see some of the pictures in this book for real? Well, if we had a real starship, we could. Just think about it, Bear. How amazing would it be to fly a spaceship and be an astronaut? We could see the vast expanse of the cosmos. We could shoot across the rings of Saturn! We could watch a supernova burst open and paint beautiful colors all over the black canvas behind. We could...we could...we could just live in a place where...

The sound of footsteps are heard ascending the stairs. Conner turns off the lamp, grabs Bear and hides behind the boxes.

The footsteps come right up to the door, but the door remains closed. After a moment, the footsteps walk away. Conner comes out of hiding and turns the lamp back on.

That was a close one, Bear...

BEAR

So, let's get out of here while we still can!

CONNER

Okay okay! Don't forget your space helmet.

Conner closes the suitcase.

BEAR

Do I ever forget my space helmet?

CONNER

No need to be rude, Bear, it was just a question. Now, remember to keep your voice down.

Conner slides a box under the window and hops on top. He pushes the window up, but it won't move.

Bear? I-I--

BEAR

--What's wrong? Conner?

CONNER

It isn't opening!

BEAR

Why isn't it opening?

CONNER

I don't know-I-I don't have any idea! I think there's something blocking it. It's stuck! Won't budge!

BEAR

What is it?

CONNER

No clue. It's locked or something and I-I-I'm not tall enough to reach up there and unlock it.

BEAR

There has to be another way out of the house.

CONNER

I have an idea.

BEAR

Let's hear it.

CONNER

What if we try the hallway window? It's probably not locked and we can climb down the gutters easily enough.

BEAR

It's worth a shot, right?

CONNER

I agree, we have to try. Come on!

Conner turns the doorknob, but it's locked.

No...no...

Conner continues to twist the doorknob.

BEAR

What?

CONNER

No, no, no, no, no! Why is it locked? When did he lock the door?

BEAR

I don't know.

CONNER

Why would he lock it?

Conner twists and turns the knob, frantically.

BEAR

Hey, keep it down, he's going to hear us!

CONNER

I don't care if he hears us!

BEAR

I'm scared, Conner.

CONNER

I'm scared too!

BEAR

You don't have to do this.

CONNER

Quiet, Bear!

BEAR

You know how mad he'll be.

CONNER

If she can leave, I can too!

Conner continues to struggle with the doorknob.

BEAR
This isn't worth it!

CONNER
I'm tired of him!

BEAR
But you have me.

CONNER
Leave me alone!

BEAR
You can't do this!

CONNER
SHUT UP!

Conner strikes Bear.

After a moment, Conner places Bear
back in his spacecraft.

No more trial runs. You be the Captain-I'll be the Pilot.
Once I break the Martian atmosphere, I'll have to punch the
thrusters to nail the landing. It'll be tough, but I can do
it. I know I can do it. Just think, Bear. A new dawn breaks
of the horizon with a world of chance. Today, Mars. Tomorrow?
Bear?

Blackout.