

"Whisper My Name to the Stars"

by
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INT. COMMONWEALTH PUB - EVENING

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A crowded pub with lots of wood fixtures and furniture. Sports memorabilia and pictures from films and TV series line the walls. The sounds of laughter and conversation are plentiful. The bartenders and servers are very busy. All the customers are having a good time.

The occasional space alien strolls uneventfully by. It is no big deal. Any aliens shown should look *mostly* like an Earth person but definitely not be of this world.

An oval, wooden sign reads "Commonwealth Pub, Boston, Massachusetts, Established 2038."

RAY WHITFIELD, 32, enters. He is muscular with a head of curly, black hair. He's wearing jeans, a black t-shirt, and a leather jacket.

Ray looks around for the man he is to meet. He spots him: PROFESSOR DOUGLAS PIERCE, 60, is seated alone at a small, circular table nursing a glass of something. He is nearly bald and dressed in a full, blue suit. His face shows a life of many hardships.

Whitfield approaches him, snaking through the bar crowd.

WHITFIELD

Professor Pierce?

Pierce looks up from his chair.

PIERCE

Yes?

WHITFIELD

Ray Whitfield.

The Professor stands and holds out his right hand, which Whitfield shakes heartily.

PIERCE

Pleased to meet you.

He sits and gestures at the empty chair across from him.

PIERCE

Have a seat.

Whitfield sits.

PIERCE

Would you like a drink?

(CONTINUED)

Ray holds up one hand.

WHITFIELD

No thanks. I never drink when I'm talking business.

PIERCE

You don't know what you're missing.

He holds up his glass.

PIERCE

They make a gin and tonic here that is *pure* nectar.

Ray chuckles slightly.

WHITFIELD

I'll take your word for that, Professor.

PIERCE

"Doug," please.

WHITFIELD

And I'm "Ray."

PIERCE

I'm "Professor" all day long to my students. It's nice to hear my *given* name every once in a while.

He takes a drink of his nectar.

WHITFIELD

If you don't mind cutting to the chase, it's been a *long* day.

PIERCE

I hear the Oporians are really keeping you - may I call you a "space jockey?" - busy.

WHITFIELD

And how!

(beat)

Ever since they arrived on Earth, people have developed a new interest in recreational space flight.

(longish beat)

It puts food on the table.

(CONTINUED)

PIERCE

(beat)

You asked for the chase: I want to hire you.

WHITFIELD

What's the destination?

PIERCE

The Wentek Cluster.

WHITFIELD

That's *pretty* far away. Even at best speed, a round trip will take about two weeks.

PIERCE

Can you get me there?

WHITFIELD

My ship can get anyone anywhere, but it won't be cheap.

PIERCE

How much?

WHITFIELD

Tough to say.

PIERCE

How about a ballpark?

Ray mulls the question.

WHITFIELD

Around 30,000 new dollars.

PIERCE

(quickly)

Deal.

(beat)

When can we leave?

WHITFIELD

That's a new area of space to us Earthers. I'll need to get some travel permits and check my ship's systems. We'll be far from any repair docks.

PIERCE

How long will that take?

(CONTINUED)

WHITFIELD

About a week.

Pierce takes another drink.

PIERCE

So we could *potentially* arrive at the Cluster about two weeks from today?

WHITFIELD

(beat)

Yeah, give or take a little.

PIERCE

Sounds good to me.

WHITFIELD

You haven't seen my ship yet.

PIERCE

No need. Your reputation precedes you.

Pierce reaches into a suitcoat pocket and removes his debit card. He presses his thumb on an embedded chip, and a tiny video screen lights up with a beep. He hands the card to Ray.

PIERCE

As you can see, I have more than enough for the trip.

Ray takes a quick glimpse at the bank balance on the screen and returns the card to the Professor.

WHITFIELD

I never doubted you.

PIERCE

Then we have a deal?

WHITFIELD

We do.

(beat)

The permits and ship prep shouldn't cause any problems.

PIERCE

You'll get me a contract?

Ray shakes his head.

(CONTINUED)

WHITFIELD

I don't use anything like that.

He holds out his hand, which Doug shakes.

WHITFIELD

That's enough for me.

(beat)

I'll get started on the preliminary stuff in the morning.

PIERCE

Excellent!

WHITFIELD

How long will you want to stay at the Cluster?

PIERCE

Not long.

WHITFIELD

You're the boss.

(beat)

I'll need half the fare before we leave and the other half when we get home.

PIERCE

You'll have it.

Whitfield thinks for a moment.

WHITFIELD

Say. . . uhm. . . you're a smart guy.

Doug is amused.

PIERCE

The University seems to think so.

WHITFIELD

Whaddya think about what some people are saying: That the Wentek Cluster is the. . . gateway?

PIERCE

It all sounds like wishful thinking to me.

(beat)

There would have to be a Heaven for there to be a gateway from here to there.

(CONTINUED)

WHITFIELD

(surprised)

You don't believe in Heaven?

PIERCE

In all my years on this Earth, I haven't seen one scrap of scientific evidence to verify its existence.

(beat)

I've gotta go with that.

He throws back the rest of his gin and tonic, and holds up one hand to signal a server.

WHITFIELD

Since we're not discussing business anymore, how about that drink?

FADE TO:

A beautiful, crowded, Catholic church. Sunlight and the sounds of chirping birds filter into the sanctuary through the open, stained-glass windows.

MONSIGNOR STEVENSON, 52, dressed in standard-issue vestments, is preaching his sermon from the altar lectern. His hair is salt and pepper, and his round face is beaming. He speaks into a microphone.

STEVENSON

Many of you are fearful of the aliens now on Earth - the Oporians.

Some of his congregation squirm in their pews.

STEVENSON

I have always thought how egotistical it would be of mankind to believe we are the only life forms in the universe.

(beat)

Now we know we are not. The one thing we didn't expect is that they came to us.

A few members chuckle.

(CONTINUED)

STEVENSON

We should thank the Lord they are benevolent.

(beat)

Once you accept their appearance - the multiple eyes, for instance - you will learn they are a fine race. I'm sure *our* appearance was surprising to them, especially if they ever saw me before my first cup of coffee in the morning.

Some more chuckles here.

STEVENSON

Now, regarding the Cluster, I don't see what the problem is. They call it *pruftar*, meaning the gateway to the souls. This shows that they believe in an afterlife, like we do.

Some applause.

STEVENSON

If they are correct, wonderful. We never knew the Cluster *existed* until they arrived and showed us how to search for it.

(beat)

None of the talking heads on TV can agree what its purpose is. I heard one commentator describe the Oporians' belief as "ridiculous." I find the idea intriguing.

Some more squirming.

STEVENSON

If the Cluster is what they tell us, *great*. I look forward to learning more.

(beat)

It would be "ridiculous" for us to question the deeply held religious beliefs of *any* of God's children - and that's what these aliens are.

FADE TO:

It is a partly cloudy day.

(CONTINUED)

On Platform C is a large, older, triangular spaceship named *Esther*. Walking near it, Whitfield stops, looks up, and smiles. From behind him, he hears his name being called.

PIERCE
(calling)
Ray!

He turns and sees Pierce hurriedly approaching him. He is pulling a wheeled suitcase and carrying a valise.

WHITFIELD
Calm down! We're right on time.

Pierce reaches him and tries to hide the fact that he is breathing heavily. He slowly gets his wind back.

PIERCE
Don't get old, Ray.

Ray smiles.

WHITFIELD
I'll make a note of it.

Ray gestures at the valise.

WHITFIELD
What's in there?

PIERCE
Exams to grade. I may as well make good use of the flight time.

WHITFIELD
Good thinking.

PIERCE
A professor's work is *never* done.

Ray reaches for the suitcase.

WHITFIELD
Let me take that.

PIERCE
That's not -

WHITFIELD
You're the client.
(beat)
It's all part of the service.

(CONTINUED)

Doug smiles and looks up at the spaceship.

PIERCE

That's her?

WHITFIELD

(proudly)

Yeah, the *Esther*.

PIERCE

(beat)

A relative?

WHITFIELD

My grandmother on my mother's side. Wonderful woman.

PIERCE

Milk and cookies?

Ray grins, remembering.

WHITFIELD

Oh yeah. Her cookies were the best!

He gestures at the ship.

WHITFIELD

She's our home for the next two weeks. I hope you find everything comfortable.

Doug reaches into his pocket and pulls out his debit card. He holds it in front of Ray.

PIERCE

You said half on departure.

The pilot presses his thumb against a chip on the card. There is a beep.

WHITFIELD

All set.

Ray picks up the suitcase.

WHITFIELD

There's about thirty minutes until liftoff.

(beat)

I'll show you your quarters.

FADE TO:

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INT. THE *ESTHER'S* FLIGHT DECK - LATER

4

The ship is now in space. The flight deck shines like Christmas, with many twinkling, and some beeping, lights.

Ray is seated at the controls as Doug enters.

WHITFIELD

Hello, stranger. I've barely seen you since liftoff.

(beat)

Grading papers?

Doug rubs his tired eyes.

PIERCE

Oh, yes.

(beat)

After a while, it gets you right here.

WHITFIELD

Are your students passing?

PIERCE

Most of them. This paper makes up a big percentage of their grade.

(beat)

How are things going up here?

WHITFIELD

No worries. Right on course and schedule.

(beat)

I'm looking forward to seeing the Cluster close up. I hear it's beautiful.

PIERCE

I've heard the same.

WHITFIELD

I forgot to mention that *Esther* is equipped for video and audio recording - in case you want to do any of that when we reach the Cluster.

(beat)

No extra charge.

Pierce smiles.

(CONTINUED)

PIERCE
I'll keep that in mind.

FADE TO:

INT. THE *ESTHER*'S FLIGHT DECK - DAYS LATER

ACROSS THE SCREEN: ARRIVING AT THE WENTEK CLUSTER.

Both men are on the flight deck as the ship approaches the Cluster. Ray sits and works the navigational controls, while Doug stands behind him, one hand on the pilot seat's headrest. They are enthralled by the view outside the vessel.

The Wentek Cluster fills the viewscreen. Seven stars swirl about each other in a seemingly random cosmic dance. As each moves, it leaves a bright, pink trail. The trails coalesce into a great cloud in the center.

Ray presses a few buttons. He looks concerned.

PIERCE
Problem?

A few more button presses.

WHITFIELD
Not with the flight, but these
sensor readings are all jumbled.

PIERCE
I guess they would be.

WHITFIELD
(beat)
I don't follow.

PIERCE
How could a ship's sensor grid,
made by men, possibly comprehend
something like this?

WHITFIELD
Makes sense.
(beat)
Anyway, there's nothing about the
Cluster that's dangerous. . . at
least from this distance.

PIERCE
May I use the communications
system?

(CONTINUED)

WHITFIELD

(surprised)

Sure, but we're pretty far from home. Any message you send will take -

PIERCE

I don't want to send a message to Earth.

WHITFIELD

No?

PIERCE

I want to send one into the Cluster.

WHITFIELD

Why?

PIERCE

(longish beat)

Ever been married?

WHITFIELD

Never. You?

Doug nods yes.

PIERCE

For more than twenty years. Karen was the joy of my life.

WHITFIELD

She died?

PIERCE

About seven years ago.

WHITFIELD

I'm sorry for your. . .

The truth occurs to the pilot.

WHITFIELD

Wait a minute, Doug. You *believe* what people say about the Cluster being a gateway to Heaven, don't you?

PIERCE

I'm not sure. I like to think so.

(CONTINUED)

WHITFIELD

At the bar, you said you *didn't* believe it.

PIERCE

Would you have brought me out here if you thought I was a religious kook?

(beat)

Can you fly *Esther* into that thing?

WHITFIELD

With the crazy sensor readings we're getting, I'm not sure.

PIERCE

I can't let this opportunity pass! If there's *any* truth to -

WHITFIELD

There's no harm in making a call, right?

FADE TO:

Doug bends over the comm panel. His hands shaking, he presses some buttons, turns a dial, and grabs the corded microphone.

Ray presses a few more buttons.

WHITFIELD

That's as close as I can safely get.

(beat)

She's all yours.

Doug spaces his words carefully. His voice is shaky.

PIERCE

This is Douglas Pierce. I'm trying to reach my wife, Karen. If anyone can hear -

Some static suddenly comes over the speaker, along with an older woman's voice - *ESTHER*.

ESTHER

Is Ray with you?

(CONTINUED)

Doug is confused.

PIERCE

Yes, he's. . . right here.

He looks at his pilot.

PIERCE

It's. . . uhm. . . for you.

Doug hands over the mike.

WHITFIELD

Hello, this is Ray Whitfield.
Who's this?

Esther sounds a bit hurt.

ESTHER

You don't recognize my voice?

It all suddenly connects for Ray, and he is amazed.

WHITFIELD

Grandma?

ESTHER

(proudly)
That's right!

Whitfield's eyes quickly scan his surroundings.

WHITFIELD

Where. . . Where are you?

ESTHER

Out here. . . in the Cluster.

PIERCE

(very pleased)
Then it *is* a gateway.

ESTHER

It sure is.

PIERCE

Fantastic!

WHITFIELD

I. . . I don't know what to say.

ESTHER

I don't remember you ever being at
a loss for words, sonny boy.

(CONTINUED)

Ray chuckles.

ESTHER

Are you well?

WHITFIELD

I'm OK but I've gotta go. I have a client here who's -

ESTHER

Yes, I know.

(beat)

Someone's looking for Mrs. Pierce right now.

Ray hands the mike back to Doug.

The static rises to a crescendo and then retreats a little bit. Doug hunches over the comm panel, his face hopeful but ashen.

A younger, female voice comes on the speaker. She is a bit tough to hear over the static.

KAREN

(anxiously)

Sweetheart, are you there?

Both men are astonished. Tears of joy instantly start to travel down Doug's cheeks. He is so overcome, it is tough for him to speak.

PIERCE

Karen?

KAREN

It's me.

The static becomes louder.

PIERCE

(to Ray)

Is there any way to clean up the signal?

WHITFIELD

Afraid not. There's a lot of interference coming from the Cluster.

KAREN

(anxiously)

Are you still there, dear?

(CONTINUED)

PIERCE

(quickly)
I'm here, my love.
(beat)
God, I miss you.

KAREN

I miss you too, but we need to
talk *fast*.

PIERCE

Why?

KAREN

The Cluster's intrusion into
normal space is accidental. The
powers that be here are working to
close it off as soon as possible.

WHITFIELD

Why do that?

KAREN

They say the Cluster provides
proof of an afterlife and that
faith can't have proof.

There is a loud burst of static.

KAREN

I don't know how much longer we'll
be able to talk.

PIERCE

Karen, do you have any idea what
would happen if we piloted this
ship into the Cluster?

WHITFIELD

(alarmed)
Doug, we -

KAREN

I don't. It could be very
dangerous - even deadly.

The static grows very loud, overpowering Karen's signal.

PIERCE

(pleading)
Get her back, Ray. Get her back!

He tries a few tricks with no success.

(CONTINUED)

WHITFIELD

No good. It's like her signal's being jammed.

PIERCE

That's it! No communications. A blackout. That must be the bigwigs' first step.

Ray puts a hand gently on Doug's shoulder.

WHITFIELD

I'm glad you got to talk with her again.

Doug is very confused.

PIERCE

What are you saying? This. . .
This isn't the end.

WHITFIELD

What more is there to do?

Doug briefly paces the flight deck. Then he turns quickly to Ray.

PIERCE

Do you have a lifeboat onboard?

WHITFIELD

Sure, but why?

PIERCE

I could fly it into the Cluster before it closes up.

WHITFIELD

We don't know if *Esther* could make it. What chance would a lifeboat have?

PIERCE

I'm not asking you to join me, Ray. If there's a chance it might work. . .

Ray rises from his seat to speak with his passenger and is met by an impressive right hook to the jaw. The floor rises up to meet him as he crumbles into an unconscious heap.

(CONTINUED)

6 CONTINUED: (5)

6

The Cluster grows ever bigger on the viewscreen.

FADE TO:

7 INT. THE *ESTHER*'S FLIGHT DECK - LATER

7

Ray awakens slowly, a cut on his chin from Doug's punch dribbling blood.

He jumps to his feet and quickly regrets doing so, as his head swoons and he needs to grab onto the wall for support. He shakes his head a few times to bring himself to rights. He looks around, but there is no sign of the Professor.

WHITFIELD

(calling)

Doug!

(longish beat)

Doug!!

Something occurs to him.

WHITFIELD

That damn fool!

Doug punches up a view of the hangar deck on a video screen. The lifeboat is there.

WHITFIELD

Then where the hell. . .

He begins to leave the flight deck when he notices an empty hook in an open locker labeled EVA SUITS. One suit is missing. He turns and looks in horror at the Cluster.

WHITFIELD

He's out there!

He quickly sits and starts scanning the space surrounding the ship. After a minute or so, he finds him: Doug, in the missing EVA suit, is floating between *Esther* and the swirling Wentek Cluster. There is no lifeline connecting him to the ship.

Ray urgently gets on the mike.

WHITFIELD

Doug! Doug, answer me!

Pierce responds, his voice barely louder than the static behind it.

(CONTINUED)

PIERCE

I'm here.

WHITFIELD

Are you *crazy*?

PIERCE

I'd be crazy *not* to try this.

WHITFIELD

Doug -

PIERCE

I'm sorry I had to hit you, but I knew you'd try to stop me.

Ray rubs his injured chin.

WHITFIELD

Where does a mild-mannered professor get a right hook like that?

PIERCE

Boxing classes.

(beat)

When you are a mild-mannered professor, some people get the idea you're an easy hit.

WHITFIELD

(authoritatively)

It's time to come back in now.

PIERCE

No, but thanks for your concern.

Out the viewport, Ray can see that Doug is closing on the object of his desire.

WHITFIELD

You could be *killed* by the Cluster.

PIERCE

We'll soon know. I'm starting to feel its gravitational pull.

The static grows louder. Doug becomes tougher to hear as he approaches the Cluster.

WHITFIELD

I can *still* get you a lifeline.

(CONTINUED)

PIERCE

Don't worry about me.

(beat)

By the way, I transferred the rest
of what I owe you to your account
before I left the ship.

WHITFIELD

That's not important now.

PIERCE

Do me a favor?

WHITFIELD

Anything, just get back in here!

PIERCE

Make sure those test papers get
back to the University. They'll
know what. . .

His voice fades as static takes over the speakers.

Ray anxiously works the comm panel controls.

WHITFIELD

Doug, I can't hear you.

Much more static.

WHITFIELD

Doug!

Pierce, floating in the void, is much nearer the Cluster.

Ray bites his lip.

He is amazed when he sees a hand - a *human* hand - reach
out from the multicolored phenomenon. There is a fleeting
glimpse of a woman's face behind it.

Doug grasps the offered hand with a gloved one and is
pulled inside the Cluster.

Seconds later, one by one, the phenomenon's stars vanish.
Their pink trails disappear like water going down a
drain.

FADE TO:

Ray is furiously working the comm panel.

(CONTINUED)

WHITFIELD

Doug, come in.

With the Cluster gone, there is no more static - only an eerie quiet.

WHITFIELD

Doug. . . *Anyone*, please answer!

On a viewscreen, he pulls up the video of Doug's space walk. He pauses it at the second the hand reaches out of the Cluster.

He selects the face and runs a computer bank search. What comes up is a seven-year-old obituary of Karen Pierce, beloved wife of Professor Douglas Pierce.

He focuses on Doug's face and enlarges the image over and over again.

He is smiling.

FADE TO BLACK.