

IT'S MARS TIME, BABY

CHARACTERS

ZACK: 25 year-old man, who takes nothing seriously and feels like he has no purpose in life. His solution? Go to Mars.

NIM / MARTIAN #1: 60 year-old woman, ZACK's mom, who has just about had it with ZACK's antics.

OZ / MARTIAN #2: 61 year-old man, ZACK's dad, who takes a more indifferent approach than his wife.

JOSH / MARTIAN #3: 16 year-old boy, ZACK's little brother, cares a lot more about ZACK than he pretends to .

NIKHIL: 34 year-old man, the director of the program that's sponsoring the trip to Mars, for whom, ZACK has a soft spot.

FREEZE-DRIED MARTIANS: the group, including Zack, that's going to Mars. The name was coined by ZACK after he heard that they will be undergoing cryogenation.

SYNOPSIS

ZACK's life feels meaningless. He graduated college, only to be in and out of soul-crushing jobs, he still lives with his parents, whose constant disappointment in him is more than apparent, and he has no idea what he wants to do with his life. So, when he heard of a billionaire-funded opportunity to go to Mars for free, he immediately jumped at the chance to make something of his life. The play explores how his family reacts to and deals with his decision, and ZACK's own ponderings of what it means to have purpose in life.

This submission contains excerpts from the play: ACT II Scene 2 and ACT II Scene 4.

ACT II, Scene 2

(Late afternoon, outside ZACK's training center. ZACK is sitting on a curb with his bag, when his mom, NIM, drives up. No words are exchanged as he gets into the passenger seat. His mom starts driving. After a long uncomfortable silence, NIM speaks.)

NIM
(starting to rummage around) Do you want a granola bar...?

(ZACK shakes his head, imperceptibly.)

What, did you eat already? No?? Well, then you need to eat something. *(still rummaging around)*
That's probably why you're...I swear it's here somewhere...

(She eventually gives up on finding the granola bar.)

You know what? We could go get some McDonald's instead. What do you say? It's been a while, hasn't it? I'm kinda craving it...We could go, just us two. Don't tell Josh or your dad though! No way, I would not hear the end of it...

ZACK
Don't want anything.

NIM
What do you mean you don't want anything?? Then, you're going to feel faint again and –

ZACK
I don't feel faint.

NIM
Okay...upset, then... or whatever you want to call it.

ZACK
(long sigh) I just wanna go sleep.

NIM
You can eat and then go to sleep.

ZACK
Don't wanna.

(NIM lets out an irritable sigh. Another long stretch of silence.)

NIM
(spotting an IHOP) Oh, IHOP! What about IH – ?

ZACK

I don't wanna! Please, can we just, can we just go home already?

NIM

Fine.

(Silence.)

They said you freaked out.

ZACK

(rolling his eyes) Oh, my God.

NIM

What, Zack? I'm trying, okay? They call me up, saying your son is freaking out. How do I not bring that up, Zack?

ZACK

Bring it up later.

NIM

What do you mean bring it up later?? We're going to have this conversation now.

ZACK

Mom, I'm really not in the mood to –

NIM

You're never going to be in the mood. *(pause.)* Zack, I'm – I know...something's wrong, obviously, so just...just talk to me. We can figure it out together.

ZACK

There's nothing to talk about.

NIM

What – ! Are you kidding me right now?

ZACK

I would never.

NIM

Why's it so hard to get a straight answer out of you!

ZACK

I'm giving you nothing but straight answers.

NIM

(whipping around) You're giving me nothing but straight bullshit! It's just, always with the... I just want to know what happened. You *wanted* to go to Mars, didn't you? So, what's wrong then, why did you freak out?

ZACK
Eyes on the road.

NIM
(whipping back to face the road) They are!

ZACK
Why are you freaking out.

NIM
I'm no – ! *(frustrated sigh and shakes her head)* I don't even know what to say, Zack.

ZACK
Good, maybe you'll stop saying I'm freaking out when I'm not

NIM
What else am I supposed to say? That's what they told me on the phone, your son is freaking out, he can't continue with training for today. They said you – you weren't even able to go home on your own! And that's all anyone has told me, so I have a right to know, *what* –

ZACK
It wasn't a freak out.

NIM
What – so, what was it, then?

ZACK
Wouldn't you like to know.

NIM
ZACK! Not everything has to be a joke, can you not be serious, for once in your life?

ZACK
Can you not be up my ass, for once in your life.

(NIM purses up her lips, and shuts up. An uncomfortable silence follows.)

(realizing he went too far) Where's the granola bar?

(It's NIM's turn to be unresponsive, as she simply shrugs. ZACK starts rummaging in the glove box.)

I don't see it, mom. Where...?

NIM

(resigned) Check under those papers.

ZACK

(picking up some pieces of paper) What, these?

NIM

No, check the – the other pile. No, Zack in between the thin – there you go.

ZACK

Ew, it's cranberries and peanuts.

NIM

We could have gone to IHOP.

ZACK

(opening the wrapper) I know...I'm just really tired, mom.

NIM

And why are you so tired?

ZACK

(taking a bite) It's not a big deal, I'm fine.

NIM

So, why am I driving you home then?

ZACK

(in a small voice) I'm sorry. Won't happen again.

NIM

(upset) I'm not mad about that, Zack. I'm worried about you. I just want to know what's going on. *(beat.)* You made this...crazy decision to go to Mars, and I was just so confused and – and hurt by it, but I thought, you know what, it makes my son happy, so, what the hell, go do your thing. But you're – I mean if it's making you – are you happy with this, Zack? Is this still what you want?

(A thud makes her turn to ZACK, who has dropped the granola bar and is choked up, trying to hold back tears.)

Oh, Zack...

(NIM quickly pulls over, as her son starts blubbing.)

Come here, baby.

(NIM pulls her son into a hug, and soothes him as he cries loudly into her shoulder.)

Shh, shh, it's okay. It's gonna be fine Zack, okay? Mama's right here. Everything will be fine. Don't worry about this space thing, we'll get you out of that program, ok – ?

ZACK

(pulling away, in between sobs) No, no I'll do –

NIM

It's okay, I'm sure they'll understand, Zack –

ZACK

(wiping his tears, and calming himself down) No, mom. I wanna do it. I'm doing it.

(Beat.)

NIM

Zack, no, I'm not gonna –

ZACK

Mom, this was just – this was just a, a hiccup. Y'know? It's – it's not – see, it was just my claustrophobia acting up. But like, I'm gonna be asleep anyway, so it won't really be a problem...it's just – it's gonna be fine. I'm fine, mom. Just...a bad day at work *(weakly smiles)*.

(NIM stares dumbfounded at ZACK. Slowly and quietly, she starts the car again. ZACK takes the granola bar he dropped on his seat, and resumes eating it.)

So what's for dinner tonight?

(No response.)

Mom?

NIM

I don't know.

ZACK

Don't kill me, but I'm kinda in the mood for IHOP now...

(No response.)

Don't I get a lil pick me up treat?

NIM

(bitter) You always get what you want.

ZACK

I sure didn't want to be in a car with you, but here we are.

NIM

Oh, you think I wanted to leave work to go pick up my adult son from his stupid space training because he had a little freak-out? Imagine having to explain that to your boss – !

ZACK

I thought your explanation was pretty succinct.

NIM

I'm trying so hard to understand what the hell it is that you're doing, but I'm really starting to lose my patience, Zack.

ZACK

Oh, you're *starting* to –

NIM

Yes, Zack, I'm starting to! I keep it together when you're doing whatever you want, and being a smart-ass, but I'm so done. I'm done putting up with your bullshit, day in and day out, and I'm done letting you walk over me – walk all over this family! You always just do whatever the hell you want, with no regard for anyone else, and you're breaking this family apart and you don't even care!

ZACK

See, this is why it's perfect: one last act of bullshit and you won't have to put up with me ever again. I'll be far, far away and you can be a happy little family.

NIM

No, we can't! That's not how that works. You think we're not gonna worry about you every single day?? Where you are, what you're doing, if you're even...

ZACK

(shrugs) Maybe at first. Give it a couple months. Then I'll just be the kooky son, who's off on a crazy little adventure, and you miss him sometimes, but let's be honest, he was too annoying for you, for Earth, even. Surely, he's on to greater things, mingling with the Martians maybe, and if not...oh well.

(He looks at his mom, who has angry tears streaming down her face. She quickly wipes them away, before ZACK can say anything, and pulls into the driveway of their house.)

ZACK

Mom, come o –

NIM

(without looking at him) Go. I have to get back to work.

(ZACK lingers, not knowing whether to comfort or give space.)

NIM
Go, Zack, I'm already late!

ZACK
(quickly getting out) Sorry. Okay, thanks, bye –

(NIM backs out and drives off, leaving her son alone, holding a half-eaten granola bar.)

ACT II, Scene 4*

(Lights up to a desolate reddish orange landscape – “Mars”. The only thing that breaks the reddish orange monotony is a white spaceship, located center stage left. A long pause, before we hear a whooshing sound, accompanied by the spaceship door opening. ZACK emerges, not wearing a spacesuit or gear of any kind. As he looks around and marvels for a bit, the spaceship disappears.)

ZACK
Fuck yeah, baby. I'm on Mars!!

(The rest of the FREEZE-DRIED MARTIANS and NIKHIL, without spacesuits, all run on stage and join him in cheering as he says:)

WOO! WE MADE IT! Nikhil, we did it!!

NIKHIL
(hugging him) We did it.

ZACK
(jumping around) First people on Mars, let's fuckin go! Hey, here comes the welcome wagon!

(A Mars Rover drives up, holding a bottle of champagne. Everyone produces a glass, seemingly out of nowhere.)

Pop that bubbly!

(ZACK grabs the champagne bottle, shakes it and pops it open, drenching himself and everyone else with the champagne. He pours some for himself and drinks it. No one else drinks any, but they cheer for ZACK.)

(with jubilation) Rover, take me to your leader!

(The Rover promptly leaves stage right, and an elated ZACK follows it. The FREEZE-DRIED MARTIANS and NIKHIL stay onstage, as the lights go out. Lights up to ZACK's house, albeit in a reddish orange tint. An out-of-place glass capsule – the cryogenic chamber – sits on the floor, center stage. The Rover enters, followed by ZACK.)

Woah this place is...amazing! You guys really got some advanced tech! Where's everyone – ?
(Three "Martians" appear, and the Rover drives over to them. They're wearing Martian masks.)

MARTIAN #1

(petting the Rover) Did you bring him over? Yeah? Oh, what a good boy you are, Rovie!

MARTIAN #2

(to ZACK) Did he give you our present?

(Everyone freezes in position, except ZACK.)

ZACK

Oh my god. Oh my fucking god. FUCK! *(walking downstage)* They're here! I'm talking with the Martians! *(deep breath, loudly screams)* I FUCKING DID IT! I'M HERE! I'm a Martian ambassador!

(NIKHIL appears.)

NIKHIL

Actually, you're a US ambassador –

ZACK

For the fucking Martians! How fucking cool is that!

NIKHIL

(chuckling) Extremely. Now, go do your thing, Mr. Ambassador.

(NIKHIL produces a blazer and a clip-on tie, which he proceeds to help ZACK into. ZACK adjusts his tie and blazer, then walks over to the MARTIANS, who unfreeze.)

ZACK

(suavely) Martians, it is such a pleasure to meet you. *(shaking their hands)* I'm the US ambassador, Zakir Datta. You can call me Zack.

(A pause where the MARTIANS simply stare at ZACK. NIKHIL nudges ZACK.)

Oh, and I'm a human. From Earth.

(The MARTIANS suddenly erupt in "oohs" and "aahs." They start pulling on ZACK's hair, ears and nose, lifting his arms, and poking his legs in wonder. ZACK waits patiently for this examination to be over.)

MARTIAN #1

(prodding his elbow) Oh, you must excuse us. We've only ever seen pictures, you know...

ZACK

(uncomfortable chuckle) Uh, no, I get it, I get it...I'm sure I'll be doing the same to you guys!

(The MARTIANS suddenly move away from ZACK, offended.)

Oh, sh – no, I'm, so sorry. That was just, what we call a "joke," back on Earth –

MARTIAN #2

It wasn't very funny.

ZACK

I – I'm um...

(Awkward silence, before the MARTIANS break into raucous laughter.)

MARTIAN #3

Now *that* was a good joke. You should've seen your face!

ZACK

(confused but trying to play along) Heh, that was – yeah, no, that was good.

(NIKHIL nudges ZACK again, and hands him a scroll of paper.)

Uh, yeah, so um, yes we were hoping to talk business with you...Here's a treaty that was prepared by ou –

MARTIAN #3

Booooooring.

(The MARTIANS start cackling again.)

ZACK

Uh yeah, yeah, I know. Boring but necessary, right? So, we wan–

MARTIAN #2

God, are all humans this boring?

(Cackling.)

ZACK

(trying to play it off) Hah yeah, we're not nearly as interesting as you guys!

MARTIAN #1

You can say that again!

(Cackling.)

ZACK

Haha yep, you got me! Um, so we had some ideas for a partnership –

MARTIAN #2

Oh my god, is he still going?

MARTIAN #3

Make it stop!

(Cackling.)

ZACK

Uh, right, okay... We – we can table that for later, I suppose...?

MARTIAN #3

(mimicking) “Table that for later!” God, you're annoying.

MARTIAN #1

(stifling a laugh) Yes, let's, uh, “table it.” It's time for supper anyway.

ZACK

Oh, supper...?

MARTIAN #1

Of course, we've prepared a splendid spread for you, Mr. Ambassador... some lovely Martian delicacies that you simply must try.

ZACK

Oh, yes, a-absolutely. That sounds... quite scrumptious.

(The MARTIANS burst into laughter again, this time, joined by NIKHIL.)

MARTIAN #2

Why's he talking like that?

MARTIAN #3
“Positively scrumptious.”

MARTIAN #1
Is this really the best human you’ve got?

NIKHIL
No, it was the only one we could afford to lose.

(The four let out another roar of laughter at this. ZACK stands by, deeply uncomfortable.)

MARTIAN #2
Oh, it’s been a while since we laughed that hard. *(slapping ZACK’s back)* You’re a funny one, Zack.

ZACK
I’m glad you’re having fun.

MARTIAN #1
(bustling about in the kitchen) We are! You’re just so easy to laugh at.

MARTIAN #3
(pulling out plates) Are all humans like that?

ZACK
Uhhh...yeah. *(chuckling)* I guess they are...Would you like any help?

MARTIAN #1
Oh, that’s so sweet of you, but no. You’re the guest! You should sit down and relax. You’d fuck it up if you tried anyway.

(The MARTIANS and NIKHIL, in the kitchen, start laughing again.)

ZACK
(hint of annoyance) Wow, you sounded just like my mom. You guys are making me feel right at home!

MARTIAN #2
(bringing bowls of food to the table) Your mom must not like you.

ZACK
Ehh...I’m sure she does...deep down.

MARTIAN #3
(laying the table) I won’t be surprised if *no* one likes you back home!

(More laughter.)

ZACK
(getting tired of this) You guys treat everyone like this, or just m – ?

MARTIAN #1
(putting more pots of food on the table) No, we just really don't like you!

(The MARTIANS and NIKHIL laugh as they take their seats the table. MARTIAN #1 and #2 are at either heads of the table, and MARTIAN #3, ZACK and NIKHIL, respectively, sit at the long end.)

Well, Zack, what would you rather try first? The octopus butternut squash soup, the quail eggs and snails, or the dumplings?

ZACK
Uhhh, what's in the dumplings?

MARTIAN #3
(chuckling) Oh, you cannot be serious.

MARTIAN #2
(roaring with laughter) What do you *think's* in the dumplings, idiot!

NIKHIL
(whispers to ZACK) They're just normal dumplings, don't be stupid.

ZACK
Oh, so...pork?

(The entire table screams and howls with laughter at this for a long time.)

I don't really see what's so funny. I just asked –

MARTIAN #1
Pork he says!

MARTIAN #2
No wonder the humans sent you up here !

(They all start laughing again. ZACK suddenly stands up.)

ZACK
You know what, I'm fucking sick of this. You guys are assholes, and your food looks like shit. I'm going back, I don't need this bullshit.

(The laughter stops, as ZACK starts crossing over to stage right. While his back is turned, the

MARTIANS rip off their masks, revealing his family underneath. They run up to ZACK, as NIKHIL disappears. Over the course of the next lines, all lights should fade, as a spotlight starts to gradually appear over the cryogenic chamber.)

NIM / MARTIAN #1
(pleading) Zack! Come back!

ZACK
(turning around) Mom?

OZ / MARTIAN #2
We miss you, son, please come back.

ZACK
Dad, I –

JOSH / MARTIAN #3
(grabbing his arm) Why'd you leave me?

ZACK
No, I di –

OZ
(grabbing his other arm) You abandoned us!

NIM
(grabbing his face) Zack. How could you do that to us.

ZACK
(getting upset) I'm sorry! I didn't – that's not – I was just trying to – I thought this would make you all happy!

JOSH
You thought this would make *you* happy.

NIM
(shaking him) Are you happy? You're not happy, tell me you're not happy!

ZACK
Mom, you – stop freaking out!

OZ
(pulling him towards the cryogenic chamber) You have to come back.

ZACK

What – no, I can't - !

JOSH

(pulling him) Don't you wanna see us?

ZACK

(hyperventilating) I – I don't – I don't know – I –

NIM

(pulling him) Don't you miss us?

ZACK

(planting his feet) I – I – I do, but I can't –

NIM

Why not?

(A pause. Then, everyone sporadically goes into action, trying to drag ZACK to the cryogenic chamber, now completely under spotlight. The rest of the stage is in darkness. ZACK is kicking and screaming, and trying to hold his ground, as he gets pulled closer and closer to the chamber.)

ZACK

(screaming) No, don't! Please! Don't put me in there, I can't, I can't do it! Please, I can't go back, I have to stay, I have to *stay*! Please, just let me stay, I can't go back!

(He's sobbing now, as he gets stuffed into the cryogenic chamber. His family stands over him, smiling proudly.)

NIM

(softly) You can do this.

(ZACK stops crying. His family snaps the door of the chamber shut. Simultaneously, blackout. And then, lights up to show ZACK suddenly sitting up in his bed, panting heavily. As he holds his head in his hands, the lights fade out.)

**Note: This is a dream sequence. People and props should appear and disappear, as in a dream. These abrupt changes are not noticed by any characters on stage. Also, all characters, other than ZACK, should be motionless and emotionless, until otherwise prompted by the script. In this*

scene, ZACK is the only “real” character on stage; everyone else is essentially a puppet in his world, unmoving till he wants them to play a part.