

LYLA BUILDS A SPACESHIP

or

One More Use for Duct Tape

a second chance

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CHARACTERS

- LYLA Mid-twenties, detached from the world either by choice or circumstance. She speaks softly, even playfully at times, but with pointed accuracy, living with one foot in this world and one foot in a far off place.
- HAL Early thirties, well dressed, a product of good breeding but now seeking something he touched years ago. Too serious for his age.

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A courtyard of a rest home or facility. LYLA, in a brightly colored spring dress, sits on a blanket amid random scraps of cardboard, metal, an assortment of things she has collected. She works on something large which resembles little more than cardboard, metal and silver tape. She is a focused engineer surrounded by grass, a bush or two, maybe a bench, moving purposefully, only occasionally pausing to survey her work. HAL enters.

HAL

Excuse me. Lyla?

LYLA gives him a short glance then turns back to her work.

HAL

I'm looking for Lyla. The man at the desk said I'd find her out here. The nurse over there pointed me to you. She said the one you're looking for is that girl tinkering away. Your project?

HAL thinks he's made a mistake. Then she stops but doesn't look his way.

LYLA

Interruptions. (referring to her work) I've got to get that smoother or (trailing off...)

HAL

Oh. I'll help?

LYLA

Duct tape.

HAL

Excuse me?

LYLA

Duct tape.

HAL

Oh. Yes. I'm sure it's around here somewhere.

HAL searches superficially, not sure he should disturb the piled madness before him. After a moment or two, LYLA reaches over and plucks it up as if she knew where it was all along, rips off several strips and begins patching random areas and fastening things to her cardboard project.

HAL

Ah, there it is. Right in front of my nose.

He laughs hoping this may start to engage her. It does not.

LYLA

(Not stopping her project)

You're name's Hal. Ten years ago you had a fling with my sister, Amanda. Ten days of nice conversations, flirtations, and companionship. She fell for you. You never returned her call after that last night. That one night. I believe intercourse was involved. Her first orgasm, as I recall. Not your first.

LYLA continues her work, seemingly unaffected. After recovering from the blunt assessment, he continues.

HAL

Oh. Wow. She told you all that?

LYLA

She tells me everything. Even your description down to your dimpled cheek and the size of your penis. Which leans to the left I believe. Every Wednesday evening and other Saturday. She brings 80s music and Star Trek films. Last week she brought the films of John Hughes for a change. Interesting but juvenile and predictable. Short-sighted. I prefer Star Trek. The original film, director's cut. The latest one is quite good. Inventive, and –

HAL

Yes, it is, I guess. I'm sorry to interrupt, but I was wondering, well...I just wanted to know if you'd...if you'd heard...from Mandy, your sister?

LYLA stands, surveying her progress. She plucks a leaf from a nearby bush then eats it like she's eating from a bowl of popcorn.

HAL

That's probably not good for you.

LYLA

Mentha piperita.

HAL

Uhhh –

LYLA

Chocolate mint.

HAL

(laughing)

It is? Like ice cream? The bush? Sure.

LYLA

(regarding her project)

Something's missing. How to overcome the atmospheric friction....think, Lyla.

LYLA grabs another leaf, eats it. She gets an idea and goes back to work.

HAL

It took some time to track you down. I've been looking for your sister for some time, phone books, online, but it's been so long. I figured she'd moved but I remember her saying she had a sister, Lyla. I remembered your name. Lyla. And that Mandy said she lived here. At this place. Not at home. Mandy never said why. Could you stop that for a minute?

LYLA

You seek Amanda. She's not here. I haven't seen her at all this week. Absent on Wednesday and a no-show yesterday as well. Gave me time to work. I enjoy our visits but I find that they do take time away from research.

HAL

Your research? A cardboard box? Or a cardboard something. What is that?

LYLA turns to him as if to reveal it then changes her mind, grabs another leaf, eats it then continues working.

LYLA

Amanda is not here. If you seek an orgasm, you won't find it here. I am involved in something at the moment.

HAL

No, that's not what I seek. (sighs) This is a bad idea. I'm just thought... Could I leave a note? Maybe she'll show up. You could give it to her.

LYLA

If I'm here, I could. Though I don't think she will want your note.

HAL

You're probably right. If she told you that, she probably told you a lot worse. Colored me very appropriately. I'm not going to make excuses for the past. I was an ass. Played around a lot. A lot of women. Parties. Fun stuff, I guess. Well, it's not important. I just wanted to say I'm sorry to her. For some of the things I did. Sort of a thing I'm doing, a sort of self-imposed walk. I promised myself I'd try to fix some things.

LYLA

Mandy is not here. She wasn't here on Wednesday and she wasn't here yesterday.

HAL

Yeah, I gotcha. I'm sorry to interrupt. I just didn't know who to talk to. Your mother, maybe? I could find her.

LYLA

Good luck. That's going to be an expensive phone call.

HAL

She live abroad? Doesn't matter. I'd really like to find Mandy. Talk to her. Money's no expense really.

LYLA

My mother left five years ago.

LYLA peers into the sky briefly.

HAL

Oh. I'm sorry. I didn't know.

LYLA

(as if confused by his apology)

It wasn't your idea. Sometimes our minds are strong but our bodies are weak. Sometimes it's the other way around. My mother was the other way around. She left her body intact though. More duct tape.

HAL

Duct tape? Ah, I got this.

HAL goes for the duct tape and then starts to notice all the bits of metal and random wires and utensils.

LYLA

(referring to a piece of metal that looks a lot like a mixer blade)

Please be careful with those components. That particular piece you're about to stand on is very difficult to find. It may hold the key to this entire project's success.

HAL

Duct tape. A miracle invention, isn't it?

LYLA

Correct. Few people understand its potential usages.

HAL

I know people who make wallets out of it, clothes even. In college, there's no telling what all I used it for.

LYLA

No, you didn't.

HAL

Pardon?

LYLA

You knew Mandy. Mandy made wallets and clothes out of duct tape. Mandy knew people who made wallets and clothes out of duct tape. Your hands are soft, manicured. You spent approximately \$1200 on your ensemble. I believe that watch is Tag Heuer, retail approximately \$3300. \$150 on the haircut and styling gel, vanilla and palm scented. You have no friends who use duct tape. The attempt to continue the conversation is thoughtful, but unnecessary. If you wish to remain here and observe, you can. You may even help. Just make sure you are clear at takeoff and tell them you had no idea what I was doing. Say you were coerced.

HAL

(laughing politely)

Takeoff? You building a rocket?

LYLA

Actually, no. The rocket was the first step. After the initially tests were successful, I decided the natural next step was an orbital objective. Then who knows.

HAL

So that's why you're here.

LYLA

That's why I'm here. It's a place where I can think and work in peace.

HAL

Ah. Not because you build rockets and spaceships out of cardboard and you think that it's somehow going to propel you into space? Doesn't that sound a bit...(not wanting to say "crazy") far-fetched?

LYLA

It is far-fetched. Crazy even.

She plucks another leaf and eats it. She offers one to HAL who politely declines.

LYLA (cont'd)

But given time, all good ideas seemingly crazy at first are often the springboard for great things, life-changing, culture changing events. Magellan, Columbus, explorers all thought to be far-fetched in their pie-in-the-sky goals. Then came Armstrong and Aldrin. Kirk and Picard.

HAL

I don't think those last two are real.

LYLA

(pausing briefly then dismissing him)

Who knew duct tape would save an Apollo crew? That an industrial glue would become Post-It Notes?

HAL

Wasn't the Post-It Note a failed experiment? He didn't mean to make it or something?

LYLA

(impressed with his point)

Very good. But even mistakes have proven important. Silly Putty, Cheese, Chocolate Chip Cookies. All mistakes.

HAL

But those don't kill you. If you don't make cheese, you don't burn up in the atmosphere or plummet to your death.

LYLA

That is very true.

LYLA continues to work. HAL decides to help.

HAL

I shouldn't have lied. Frankly, I don't know why I did.

LYLA

You're trying to find a reason to stay, to keep talking. You don't need one. Just don't get in the way.

HAL

I won't.

As a gesture, he walks over and plucks a leaf. After sniffing it, he sticks it in his mouth then hesitantly chews.

HAL

Hey, it does taste a bit like chocolate mint. Weird.

LYLA

Of course. I'm not crazy. Who would just reach out and start gnawing on some random tree? Mentha piperita. Chocolate mint. Some people make tea out of it. I'm sure the people here don't know what they've got. Probably planted it by accident. There isn't another one around. Happy accidents. A mistake. See?

HAL

(relaxing a bit)

To be honest, I don't know where I'd go.

LYLA

I find that hard to believe. You are attractive, probably rich, a sense of style. Intercourse should be easy for you.

HAL

(not happy about the admission)

You'd think. Yeah, I guess it is. It's always been easy.

LYLA

Do you find me attractive?

HAL

I'm not sure we should be talking about this. Here. I came to find Mandy. Your sister.

LYLA

When you first entered I felt your eyes on me. Approximately seven seconds surveying my body before you spoke. I assume you were looking at certain areas, my legs, my breasts. Three seconds on the legs, four or five on the breasts. They are accentuated by this dress. Maybe that's why Mandy gave it to me.

HAL

I was not...I may have been. I'm sorry. I wasn't expecting you to look the way you do. A lot like her. From behind. When I came out here and first saw you. For a moment I hoped it was her.

LYLA

I'm sorry to disappoint you. But I appreciate the honesty and the seven seconds.

HAL

(confused)

Ok. You too. I don't get this brutal honesty. It's a little refreshing.

LYLA

There was an accident. Amanda was in an accident.

HAL

Wait. What?

LYLA

That's why she didn't come this week.

HAL

Oh, my gosh. Uh, was she hurt? Is she in the hospital?

LYLA peers into the sky once more.

LYLA

No. I think I'm going to need more weight. The oddity of flight is that you need a critical weight for control. Too little weight and you are at the mercy of wind currents and propulsion needs a little something to push.

HAL

Is that why you're building this ship? To get up there? Near her?

LYLA

Why are you trying to find Amanda?

HAL

I told you. I didn't like myself back then. I don't like myself much now. I'm trying to come to terms with some things. It's a long story. Call it a bucket list of sorts. Wishful thinking maybe.

LYLA

Well, the ship only carries one person. It's a prototype.

HAL

The ship? This thing? This mass of cardboard and duct tape and kitchen utensils?! That's not a real rocket ship. You're not an astronaut or whatever. You're in the courtyard of a – (stopping himself)

LYLA

Is this how you hurt women? Congratulations, Hal. You're batting the proverbial thousand.

HAL

No. Look, I'm sorry. But you have got to see this isn't going to work.

Without any indication, LYLA leaps at HAL and kisses him. HAL is taken offguard and pushes her off of him.

HAL

What the hell are you doing?

LYLA

Still breaking hearts, aren't you, Hal?

HAL

I, uh, I don't know what you think you're doing but I just came hoping to find Mandy. Or someone who knows Mandy. Or something.

LYLA

(smiling)

I wanted to reward you for trying to save me. It was adorable. Arousing. This is very dangerous work but rest assured I've taken all the necessary precautions. There is no reward without great risk.

HAL

I wasn't trying to...I mean I'm just saying that you know that thing will never...

Before he can finish his thought, LYLA leaps for him again, kissing him harder this time, grabbing

his hands and placing them on her body, trying to put them in the most inappropriate of places, finishing with a hard clutch of his rear with both hands.

HAL

(muffled from Lyla's attack)

What are...? This... Please stop.

HAL finally manages to pull her off of him. LYLA giggles. HAL looks around for help.

LYLA

No one is coming. They don't really pay attention to me. "Harmless." I'm sure they mentioned that. Do you think I could get away with a rocket test flight and the construction of this module if they were always watching me?

HAL

Why did you do that?

LYLA

(giggling again)

I'm an explorer. I need to discover things. Call it a test flight. And I found it arousing that you would try to save me. And now that I think about it, what if I succeed in breaking the earth's bonds? I will need someone to help me populate some far off place, a young planet, a distant moon. I will need another's DNA. Yours would suffice.

HAL

Save you? I'm not trying to save anyone. Now I know why Mandy kept quiet about you. I don't think I'm helping you and this is not helping me.

LYLA

What was it about Amanda that made you sleep with her?

HAL

God, I don't know. She was there, maybe. That's why. I did a lot of stupid things back then. Slept around a lot.

LYLA

What made you talk to her that night? What started it all?

HAL

I liked her smile. She asked me weird questions. Interesting ones. What do I see myself doing in five years? Ten years. Things like that. Things most women looking for one night stands don't ask.

LYLA

What made you seek her out after ten years?

HAL

I told you I wanted to make amends for some things. I started getting these headaches about a year ago and they just got worse and worse. At first I thought I was working too hard or living too hard. Stress or guilt even –

LYLA starts to move toward HAL, he steps back to retreat, but instead, LYLA moves over to the pile of utensils, grabs one of the weirder looking items then moves to her orbital module.

LYLA

Could you hand me more duct tape? This thing has got to be ready for its test tomorrow.

Confused more than ever, HAL hands her the duct tape.

HAL

(noticing something in the pile)

Are those airline peanuts? You must have a dozen packets or more.

LYLA

Shark repellent. In most test flights, the ocean is the safest place for landing. Astronauts are often provided with sufficient shark repellent just in case. Always be prepared.

HAL

Shark repellent, right. For the spaceship.

LYLA

Correct. I do wish I could take you with me. If I had known you'd be interested, I could have planned for this.

HAL

(trying to find the most polite of exit strategies)

Yeah, ok. Look, good luck with your “flight”.

LYLA

Amanda was the first one you sought out. The only one you’ve been looking for.

HAL

Maybe. Yeah. I never forgave myself for her.

LYLA

If you want to keep lying to yourself, don’t let me stop you.

HAL

What do you know? You’re just some crazy, perverted sister she kept hidden away from the world. If I hadn’t stumbled upon you, no one would know you existed.

LYLA

She didn’t keep me hidden! I came here of my own free will. I needed to think. And you don’t have a lot of time.

HAL

(overly defensive, as if she’s touched on something)

What do you mean by that? What do you know? You needed a place to think, right. Because you can’t build a rocket ship in your backyard, the neighbors may talk. Okay, look, I never thought I had anything to apologize for, with her, that week, that night, but when I look back over the last few decades, only a few things stick with me and Mandy’s conversations were one of them.

LYLA rips off a strip of duct tape and covers Hal’s mouth then returns to her work.

LYLA

Words tend to shoot out of you like propulsion. You shouldn’t waste that energy. How did you imagine this would go, Hal? Get a number, give her a call, talk for a few hours then things would just work themselves out? Instead, you are on the brink of something glorious. Something so few have experienced. You want to find Amanda? Come with me. You’re cute, confused, even when you are wasting propulsion feeling sorry for yourself. I’ve just decided I need a co-pilot. A few adjustments over the next few days, weight ratios adjustments, another seat, some steering, and welcome aboard.

HAL

(removing the duct tape slowly)

I don't think so. (joking) I wouldn't pass the physical. The headaches, well, they weren't stress induced. With how I was living, I always thought I'd get a venereal disease, never a brain tumor.

LYLA

Looking for a cure turned into looking for a savior. Time to start making new memories, Hal. And since I know the pilot and the engineer, I think I can pull a few strings. Mandy was your last stop? Last chance? No. But it may be a hell of a way to find out what's next. Hand me the...

HAL

Yeah, I know. Duct tape.

LYLA

Did you know that zero gravity may have all kinds of odd effects on the human body - slowing bodily functions, distorting them? Scientists even theorize living in space will change our body chemistry, extending life, changing our immune systems, even slowing tumor growth and degenerative neurological disorders.

After a pause but without a word, HAL grabs a leaf, eats it, picks up the duct tape, and sits by her as they work together.

BLACKOUT

END OF PLAY