

The Last Signal

In the year 2145, Earth's last communication satellite blinked out of existence.

Humanity, scattered across colonies on Mars, Europa, and Titan, watched as the final threads of interstellar communication unraveled. The vast silence of space closed in.

On a remote mining outpost on Europa, Commander Lena Hart stood in the dim control room, staring at static screens. She was used to being isolated - but this silence felt heavier.

'Commander, the signal... it's coming from Sector 9,' reported Kaito, the station's technician.

Lena snapped to attention. Sector 9 had been abandoned for over a decade after the Europa Deep Ice Collapse.

'Patch it through.'

A garbled transmission played. Static - then a voice.

'...is anyone... there...'

The voice sent a chill down Lena's spine. It was impossible. That voice belonged to Dr. Elias Shaw -

a scientist who vanished in the ice collapse thirteen years ago.

'This is Commander Hart. Identify yourself.'

More static. Then: 'Lena... help...'

Kaito's eyes widened. 'Is this a prank?'

Lena shook her head, 'Get the submersible ready. We're going to Sector 9.'

The ice fields of Europa stretched endlessly, jagged cracks hiding secrets beneath.

The submersible, *Valkyrie*, descended into the frozen abyss. Lena piloted while Kaito monitored signals.

As they reached the collapsed research station, Lena gasped. Lights flickered beneath the ice - a hidden facility, still powered.

Inside, they found Dr. Shaw - alive, unchanged, as if time stood still.

He whispered, 'They wouldn't let me leave...'

'Who?' Lena asked.

Shaw's eyes turned glassy. 'The Architects... they built this moon...'

Before Lena could ask, the ground shook. Massive, geometric shapes rose from the ice - beings made of light and form, ancient and watching.

A voice echoed in their minds, 'You were not meant to return.'

Lena and Kaito raced back to *Valkyrie*, pursued by shimmering forms. As they escaped, Lena realized -

they hadn't discovered life. Life had discovered them.

Above the ice, under Europa's alien sky, the last signal repeated endlessly:

'You were not meant to return.'

The silence of space wasn't empty.

It was waiting.