

## The Last Signal

In the year 2148, Earth had grown silent. Cities once bustling with noise had crumbled into ruins, reclaimed by nature. A virus, unknown and airborne, had wiped out 90% of the population. What remained were pockets of survivors, disconnected, scattered, and hopeless.

Far above Earth, aboard the orbital station *Eidolon*, 17-year-old **Lia Mercer** stared at the blue planet through a reinforced glass dome.

"Still no signals?" she asked.

Beside her, the station's AI, **ARX-9**, responded in a gentle tone.

"Negative. No transmissions in 47 days, 3 hours, and 12 minutes."

Lia sighed, clutching a worn photograph—her family, smiling in front of a cottage in Vermont. All of them gone. She was the last crew member aboard *Eidolon*. The others had taken the emergency pods months ago, hoping for a miracle. She stayed.

Each day, she broadcasted a simple message:

*"This is Lia Mercer, orbital station Eidolon. If you're out there, respond. I'm alive."*

It became routine—wake up, eat, exercise, broadcast. Hope.

Until one day, the silence broke.

ARX's voice startled her. "Incoming transmission... weak signal... origin: Earth, sector B-7."

Lia's heart raced. "Play it!"

A scratchy voice filtered through. "...Lia?... this is Dr. Elan Mercer... your father... I'm alive... coordinates..."

The message cut.

She dropped the photo. "Dad?!"

It couldn't be. He was a virologist, stationed in a remote underground lab in Alaska. Sector B-7.

Lia had one choice: launch the last emergency pod and go to Earth.

ARX protested. "Atmospheric descent is unstable. The station is your safest—"

"I'm going."

The pod roared through the atmosphere. Lia gripped the controls as fire and wind screamed around her. She passed out from the G-force.

When she awoke, the Earth was cold, quiet, and still.

Wearing a rebreather and an insulated suit, Lia trekked through frozen plains. Drones from the pod hovered beside her, mapping the terrain.

The coordinates led her to a snow-covered facility half-buried in ice. The nameplate read:

**“Polaris Research Center – Virology Division.”**

Inside, everything was powered down—except for a single room.

The light flickered.

And in the middle sat **Dr. Elan Mercer**, frail, bearded, and wide-eyed.

“Lia...” he whispered, stumbling forward.

She ran and embraced him. “You’re alive.”

Tears mixed with frost on her face.

Elan led her to a chamber. “We developed a cure, but it needed time... and test subjects. I couldn’t leave.”

He showed her a vial glowing faintly blue.

“It neutralizes the virus completely. But without global comms... it was useless. Until I heard your signal.”

She stared at it. “We can save them.”

He nodded. “But we need a way to broadcast it...”

Together, they sent drones to awaken abandoned satellites and relay the cure data. ARX, still active in orbit, helped coordinate.

One by one, faint green dots started blinking across the map—other survivors, responding, emerging.

Months passed. The Earth slowly healed.

Fields were tilled again. Fires burned in hearths. Laughter returned.

And at the center of it, two voices each day echoed from a rebuilt tower:

*“This is Lia and Elan Mercer. The cure is here. You are not alone.”*