

The Empress of Jupiter

A Farce

by
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CHARACTERS

Dr. Miranda Baliardo	A scientist, 40s
Cynthia	Miranda's sister, 40s-50s
Carla	Miranda's friend, 30s-40s
Skyler	Miranda's Research Assistant, 30s

TIME

Present.

PLACE

Somewhere in the United States on the planet Earth.

SCENE ONE

DR. MIRANDA BALIARDO's home study, somewhere in the United States, on the planet Earth. The room is filled with piles of books and the walls are scribbled with scientific calculations.

Miranda's Research Assistant, SKYLER, peers through a telescope while Miranda watches intently.

SKYLER

I don't see anything.

MIRANDA

Look harder.

SKYLER

I am.

MIRANDA

Don't blink.

SKYLER

How long can a person go without blinking?

MIRANDA

23 minutes.

SKYLER

The more I think about not blinking, the more I blink.

MIRANDA

Try using your other eye.

Skyler does.

SKYLER

It's the same.

MIRANDA

Maybe you've got something in your eye. An eyelash or a speck of dirt.

SKYLER

Sometimes I pull out eyelashes just to make a wish.

MIRANDA

It could be wombatnucleosis! Have you noticed a blurring of your vision?

SKYLER

No.

MIRANDA

A reddening of the iris?

SKYLER

I don't think so.

MIRANDA

So many options on Netflix you don't know what to choose?

SKYLER

Yes, actually!

MIRANDA

Let's rinse out your eyes.

SKYLER

Again?

MIRANDA

It's the only way.

SKYLER

Maybe if you told me what I'm supposed to see, I'd see it.

MIRANDA

But then how would you know if it's real? If you're actually seeing it and not just materializing it with your mind.

SKYLER

I only materialize with my elbows.

MIRANDA

Okay, I'll tell you. It's Jupiter!

SKYLER

The fifth planet from the sun?

MIRANDA

And the first in my heart.

SKYLER

But why are you showing me this now? You know I go spelunking on Sundays.

MIRANDA

Because I'm moving, Skyler.

SKYLER

Moving where?

MIRANDA

There.

SKYLER

Where's there?

MIRANDA

That little gaseous dot in the sky.

Miranda's sister CYNTHIA and friend CARLA enter.

CYNTHIA

We made it, Miranda! Now, tell us why we're here. You know I race canoes on Fridays.

SKYLER

She's moving.

CYNTHIA

Moving where?

MIRANDA

There.

CARLA

Where's there?

SKYLER

Jupiter.

CYNTHIA

But that's so far!

MIRANDA

400 million miles.

No one's ever been.

SKYLER

No one's ever tried.

MIRANDA

Is it even safe?

CARLA

It might be totally uninhabitable.

CYNTHIA

According to my research, Jupiter has everything I would need to survive.

MIRANDA

A Coach outlet store?

CYNTHIA

But why Jupiter? Why not Saturn?

CARLA

Or Florida?

SKYLER

You know what humidity does to my hair.

MIRANDA

This doesn't make any sense. Why would you leave your friends, your family?

CARLA

Your dermatologist? Who's going to treat your eczema?

CYNTHIA

I don't know.

MIRANDA

Maybe she's wanted for murder. Or coloring outside the lines!

SKYLER

Maybe she's hiding from loan sharks. Or actual sharks.

CARLA

Maybe she accidentally sexted her dry cleaner.

CYNTHIA

Skyler, Cynthia, and Carla gasp.

MIRANDA

It's not that. Although I did do that.

CARLA

Then what, Miri? Won't you get lonely living on a big, old, empty planet all by yourself?

MIRANDA

That's the thing. I don't think I'd be alone.

CYNTHIA

(dramatically)

You mean...

Beat.

What do you mean?

MIRANDA

When I was looking through my telescope one clear night, I saw a woman. She had dark hair, bright red lips, and unusually small hands...but that might have been because she was so far away.

CARLA

Who is she?

MIRANDA

I don't know, but she wore a cape and a royal blue pant suit, so I think she's some sort of leader.

SKYLER

Like an empress?

CYNTHIA

Or an influencer.

MIRANDA

Whoever she is, I want to meet her.

CARLA

When are you leaving?

MIRANDA

Tonight.

CARLA

But that's so soon! You know I herd sloths on Tuesdays.

CYNTHIA

Can't you stay one more night, Miranda? I want to give you a proper sendoff.

MIRANDA

I suppose it wouldn't hurt.

CARLA

As long as you don't stub your toe, fall down the stairs, land on your neck, throw out your back, and break all of your bones at once.

CYNTHIA

Splendid! I'll bring the wine!

SKYLER

Don't you think we should talk about this?

MIRANDA

I'm tired of talking and cleaning my ears. I've made up my mind.

CYNTHIA

You're so stubborn. This is just like when we were kids except we were shorter and I had all of my own teeth.

MIRANDA

I need to finish packing. What does one wear to meet the Empress of Jupiter?

ALL

Clogs.

Miranda leaves.

SKYLER

She's gone insane. Hysterical. Nuts!

Carla offers Skyler a bowl of salted cashews.

CARLA

Salted cashew?

SKYLER

I'd love one.

She eats some and then tosses the bowl.

CYNTHIA

You know when it started, don't you?

CARLA

It's been at least a few years.

CYNTHIA

It all began when *he* took office. She gave up on everything and stopped coloring her roots.

CARLA

I knew things were getting bad, but I didn't know they were this bad.

SKYLER

We're not really going to let her go, are we?

CYNTHIA

Of course not. I'm just buying us some time. And maybe a time share in Palm Beach.

SKYLER

She needs professional help. She's off her rocker. Bonkers. Bananas!

Carla offers Skyler a plate of plantains.

CARLA

Plantain?

SKYLER

Don't mind if I do.

She eats some and then tosses the plate.

CYNTHIA

I'm not locking her up. I just need a plan. And a private balcony.

CARLA

She seems pretty set on going.

SKYLER

She already cancelled her Hulu account.

CYNTHIA

I've got it!

CARLA

A plan?

CYNTHIA

No, a realtor. But also, a plan.

SKYLER

I'll do it, whatever it is.

CARLA

Me, too!

CYNTHIA

What if, instead of Miranda going to the Empress of Jupiter, we bring the Empress to her?

CARLA

If she even exists.

CYNTHIA

We'll make her exist. And she'll convince Miranda that Earth is where it's at, because we've got microwave ovens and Maggie Smith!

SCENE TWO

Later. Miranda wears space boots and packs a suitcase.

MIRANDA

Newton's first law of motion says that an object at rest stays at rest and an object in motion stays in motion unless acted upon by an external force. Because things don't just happen by themselves. They don't magically change direction or speed. Something has to come from the outside and change them. So, for an object like, I don't know, a rocket to start moving, there needs to be an unbalanced force, meaning the forces pushing the rocket in one direction must be greater than the forces pushing it in the opposite direction. So, while a big part of me wants to stay here with the people I love, the ones I've known my whole life, a bigger, more powerful part of me needs to leave.

Skyler jumps out of the suitcase.

SKYLER

You can't leave, Dr. Baliardo!

MIRANDA

How long have you been in there? Did I pack a swimsuit?

SKYLER

Just a beach ball. But I can't let you go. Our work is far too important.

MIRANDA

I'll need an inflatable lounge chair.

She packs an inflatable lounge chair.

SKYLER

That hole in the ozone layer isn't going to fill itself.

MIRANDA

It might.

SKYLER

But it might not.

MIRANDA

That's true, but it might.

SKYLER

I see your point, but it might not.

MIRANDA

I'm rocking what you're rolling, but it might.

SKYLER

I'm rolling a joint, but it might not.

She smokes a joint.

MIRANDA

I pick up what you're putting down, but it might.

SKYLER

I'm putting down my neighbor's goat, but it might not.

She puts down her neighbor's goat.

MIRANDA

I smell what you're stepping in, but it might.

SKYLER

I'm stepping in goat poop, but it might not.

She scrapes goat poop off the bottom of her shoe.

MIRANDA

I should pack extra deodorant.

She does.

SKYLER

We've been working on this for six years. You've spent your entire life using science to find solutions to the world's problems.

MIRANDA

And yet, there's one problem I can't solve.

SKYLER

What?

MIRANDA

We still haven't elected a woman president.

SKYLER

But we will. Someday!

MIRANDA
When?

SKYLER
Eventually!

MIRANDA
Who?

SKYLER
Someone!

MIRANDA
But that's so vague. I should pack a silverback gorilla.

She does.

SKYLER
So that's it? You're just going to hang up your spectrometer and move on?

MIRANDA
I'm not moving on. I'm just moving.

SKYLER
You're leaving everything you've ever known because there *might* be a woman on another planet.

MIRANDA
No, I'm leaving because we've had six presidents named James, five Johns, four Williams, and two Thomases if you count Woodrow Wilson, who went by Tommy until he was 16. I'm a scientist. 200 plus years of hard data tells me that statistically, John Stamos has a better shot at being POTUS than any woman. And Jonathon Taylor Thomas is three times as likely as him.

SKYLER
I wonder if they've seen *Home Improvement* in outer space.

MIRANDA
Most rockets are designed to burn up on reentry. Only some parts of the spacecraft can be reused. And even then, they need to be extensively refurbished. I'm tired, Skyler. I've been through this over and over again and each time, a part of me disappears. Each time, I pick myself up and try again, hope again, but I can't anymore. I can't write any more letters or knock on any more doors or march in any more rallies, but mostly because I have flat feet.

I know you think I'm losing my mind and maybe I am, but if I stay here, my mind—the thing I treasure most in this world—will be completely gone, wasted, outtie 5000.

SKYLER

Like a star after 10 billion years.

MIRANDA

Yes! It's exactly like that.

SKYLER

Earth will never be the same without you.

MIRANDA

Just think, if you could start over on a new planet, a planet without melting sea ice and shrinking forests, and Logan Paul, a whole planet ruled by one glorious woman, wouldn't you?

SCENE THREE

Miranda's living room. The room is filled with moving boxes.

Skyler writes a letter. Then, she nervously stuffs the letter into an envelope and seals it.

Miranda enters with wine glasses.

MIRANDA

Found them! They were in a box labeled "dumbbells" and the dumbbells were in a box labeled "throwing knives."

SKYLER

What's this, you say?

MIRANDA

The throwing knives were in a box labeled "beach towels" and the beach towels were in a box labeled "war hammer."

SKYLER

This is just a totally normal letter that I casually noticed on my way in.

MIRANDA

The war hammer was in a box labeled "party hats" and the party hats were in a box labeled "livestock," so let me know if you hear any mooing.

SKYLER

The handwriting looks like mine, but it isn't.

MIRANDA

Let me see.

Miranda reads it.

SKYLER

I write in Comic Sans, but this is Comic Sans Bold.

A cow moos.

MIRANDA

You won't believe this, Skyler. The Empress of Jupiter is making a super special, once-in-a-lifetime visit to Earth to meet me!

SKYLER
You don't say!

MIRANDA
I just did.

SKYLER
That sounds like a big deal.

MIRANDA
The biggest.

SKYLER
And definitely not an elaborate ruse to get you to stay here.

MIRANDA
Where are my clogs?

Cynthia enters disguised as the Empress of Jupiter.

CYNTHIA
Hold onto your hats, because the Queen of Jupiter is here!

SKYLER
You mean Empress.

CYNTHIA
Who?

SKYLER
You.

CYNTHIA
Me? That's right! The Empress of Jupiter has landed for a super special, once-in-a-lifetime visit to Earth.

“Drops of Jupiter” by Train begins to play. Miranda and Cynthia engage in a brief, choreographed dance.

MIRANDA
It's an honor, Your Empressness.

CYNTHIA
I'm very rich.

MIRANDA

I can't tell you how long I've wanted to meet you.

CYNTHIA

Then don't.

MIRANDA

How many nights I've stared into my telescope and wondered what it would be like to be near you, to smell you, to walk a mile in your shoes because I think we're about the same size.

CYNTHIA

The left one's bigger than the right.

MIRANDA

Sometimes I'd even lift my hand and wave, hoping you'd be looking through your own telescope at me.

CYNTHIA

Really?

Skyler clears her throat.

I mean, yes. I totally did that, too.

MIRANDA

There's so much I want to ask you, but I don't know where to begin.

SKYLER

Why don't you try?

MIRANDA

What's your judicial system like? Is there universal healthcare? Do you have Netflix?

CYNTHIA

Just Starz! But I have to warn you, life on Jupiter sucks a big one.

SKYLER

Did you hear that? Jupiter blows!

MIRANDA

That can't be true.

CYNTHIA

But it is. Jupiter is stuffy and humid and we're in the midst of a great recession, the greatest recession there ever was, which honestly isn't that great.

MIRANDA

I don't believe it.

CYNTHIA

Damnit, Miranda! You can't just decide to move somewhere halfway around the solar system. You've got too much here that matters. And you don't know what's out there.

SKYLER

She's got a point.

MIRANDA

(to Skyler)

I know what I'm giving up — my life, my friends, Pinkberry, but I have to believe there's frozen yogurt out there somewhere. Did you know that for a rocket to launch it needs to shed parts of itself? It has to separate from its main engine in midair. Otherwise it can be too heavy. But without those parts, without the engine, it would never have been able to leave the ground. I'm leaving you and maybe I'll be back one day, I don't know, but wherever I end up, because Jupiter is really big — it's like 300 times the size of Earth — I'll have made it there because of you.

Miranda and Skyler hug.

SKYLER

Good luck, Dr. Baliardo! Call me when you get there.

MIRANDA

I doubt I'll have cell service.

CYNTHIA

Hold up, this is *not* what we discussed.

MIRANDA

What?

CYNTHIA

You're not going anywhere! I'm the Chancellor/

SKYLER

Empress.

Of Jupiter and I forbid it!

CYNTHIA

Carla enters disguised as the Empress of Jupiter.

The President of Jupiter is here!

CARLA

You mean Empress.

SKYLER

Who?

CARLA

You.

SKYLER

Me! CARLA Me! CYNTHIA

That's right! The Empress of Jupiter has arrived.

CARLA

"Drops of Jupiter" by Train begins to play again, but
Miranda cuts it off.

Wait a second, I'm confused.

MIRANDA

So am I.

CYNTHIA

(gesturing towards Cynthia)
I thought *she* was the Empress of Jupiter.

MIRANDA

She is?

CARLA

I am.

CYNTHIA

Clearly, there are two Empresses of Jupiter.

SKYLER

MIRANDA

And 79 moons.

SKYLER

It's a very large planet. So, naturally, there are two rulers. One in the North and one in South. Like in Korea.

CARLA

Or *Game of Thrones*!

MIRANDA

And you both traveled all the way here to see me?

CARLA

On a super special, once-in-a-lifetime visit to Earth.

CYNTHIA

To stop you from making the biggest mistake of your life.

SKYLER

But what if it isn't a mistake? Maybe we're out of our minds to stay here and Miranda is totally sane. Clear-headed. Sober!

Carla offers Skyler a shot of whiskey.

CARLA

Whiskey?

SKYLER

Neat.

She drinks it and then tosses the glass.

CYNTHIA

What are you saying?

SKYLER

I think she should go if it will make her happy.

MIRANDA

It will.

CYNTHIA

But what about what makes me happy? If you're gone, who's going to prank call my ex-husbands?

CARLA

Who's going to hold my hand when my hand is cold? We need you, Miri.

MIRANDA

Carla, is that you?

Carla removes her disguise, revealing her true identity.

CARLA

I can't imagine my life without you.

SKYLER

Me neither. You've been like a second mother to me. And a father. And a family pet.

CARLA

She loves to have her belly rubbed.

SKYLER

But I know this is what's best for you.

MIRANDA

So this was just a mean trick?

CYNTHIA

If you're going to blame someone, blame me.

Cynthia removes her disguise, revealing her true identity.

It was all my idea. But I did it because I'm worried about you and worrying makes me break out.

MIRANDA

Have you called my dermatologist?

CYNTHIA

She's booked solid! You're the only permanent person in my life.

CARLA

You're the only woman I've ever truly loved.

Everyone gasps.

MIRANDA

I love you, too, Carla. I always have.

CARLA

Then don't go.

MIRANDA

I already cancelled my Hulu account.

CARLA

We can open a new one. Together!

Carla and Miranda almost kiss and then don't.

MIRANDA

I'm sorry, Carla, but I can't stay here. I gave Earth my best shot and look what happened, another man is in charge. Isaac Newton said the world would end in 2060. I don't know if he's right, he's probably not — he ingested a lot of mercury — but I don't want to stick around when there's a better place, a place made almost entirely of gas, one most have only seen in pictures, a place unlike anywhere else.

SKYLER

Take me with you!

CARLA

Skyler?

SKYLER

I'm over this planet!

CYNTHIA

Now, look what you've done.

MIRANDA

I have to do this alone, Skyler. Someone needs to finish our work and I only have enough oxygen for one person.

CYNTHIA

Is there anything we can do to make you stay?

CARLA

I can write more letters.

CYNTHIA

I can wear a different hat.

MIRANDA

My mind's made up.

Cynthia and Miranda hug, but Cynthia won't let go.

CYNTHIA

I feel like this is all my fault. You needed me and I was in Venezuela.

MIRANDA

Peru.

CYNTHIA

With my fourth husband.

MIRANDA

Fifth.

CYNTHIA

Until we were chased out of the country by some sort of flash mob.

MIRANDA

Earthquake.

Miranda finally breaks free from Cynthia's embrace.

CARLA

What do we do without you?

MIRANDA

Newton's first law of motion. Things are going to stay like this until something bigger and more powerful steps in, until something or *someone*, some external force changes its direction.

CYNTHIA

I can't change things. I wouldn't know what to wear.

MIRANDA

Yes, you do.

CYNTHIA

Clogs.

MIRANDA

Clogs.

SKYLER

But what if Newtonian Physics isn't the answer? What if all these binaries and absolutes are holding us back?

CYNTHIA

Do you really want to uproot your whole life for some guy with mercury poisoning?

MIRANDA

It's not about him. It's about her.

The Queen. CYNTHIA

President. CARLA

Empress. SKYLER

What about your research? CARLA

MIRANDA
It's Skyler's research now. Who knows, maybe she'll discover a new branch of physics.

SKYLER
Something that challenges Newton's hierarchal organizational systems.

MIRANDA
And reconfigures structures of value and longevity.

SKYLER
Quantum Womanism!

MIRANDA
If there's even the slightest chance that there's a better world out there, one run by a woman, I have to take it.

CYNTHIA
But what if she doesn't exist?

MIRANDA
Then I'll be the Empress of Jupiter.

SCENE FOUR

The next week, Miranda's study. The room is empty.

Cynthia, Carla, and Skyler crowd around the telescope.

SKYLER

Is that her?

CYNTHIA

I don't know.

CARLA

Let me see!

SKYLER

Maybe there's a smudge on the lens or a piece of dust.

CYNTHIA

I don't see a smudge.

CARLA

I don't see anything.

SKYLER

Maybe we should wipe the eyepiece.

CARLA

Maybe I should blow my nose.

CYNTHIA

Am I doing this right?

CARLA

It's all wrong.

CYNTHIA

It could be broken.

CARLA

It could be upside down.

SKYLER

Sometimes I stand on my head just to feel the blood rush to my brain.

It's no use.
CYNTHIA

Keep trying.
CARLA

My flight leaves in three hours.
CYNTHIA

I can't see.
SKYLER

I've got a campaign meeting. I'm running for office!
CARLA

Is there a Starbucks in St. Barts?
CYNTHIA

Today, City Council. Tomorrow, the Presidency!
CARLA

We need better lighting.
SKYLER

Okay, not really tomorrow, but I'm going all the way to the top. Even though I'm afraid of heights.
CARLA

I never look down.
SKYLER

Then maybe Miranda will come back home.
CARLA

Maybe I'll finally get a perfect tan.
CYNTHIA

How do you zoom in?
CARLA

It's not a camera.
SKYLER

Try again.
CARLA

SKYLER

Try closing your eyes and then opening them at the same time.

CARLA

Wider.

SKYLER

Slower.

CARLA

Maybe your eyelashes are too long.

CYNTHIA

Maybe my ankles are too round.

CARLA

Did you try turning it off and then on again?

CYNTHIA

Twice.

CARLA

Let me try.

CYNTHIA

Wait!

SKYLER

What is it?

CYNTHIA

I see her.

CARLA

Really?

SKYLER

What's she doing?

CARLA

What's she wearing?

SKYLER

It worked.

Out of the way!

CARLA

I can't believe it.

SKYLER

She's waving.

CYNTHIA

They all look at Jupiter wistfully.

THE END