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Robbie's Adventures in Space

He heard nothing... utter silence. There was no wind outside, no birds, no talking. Complete emptiness of sound, interrupted only by his breathing. Robbie watched as his warm breath hit the shield and spread across his helmet like a thin piece of tissue paper. It appeared and disappeared with every breath he took. Suddenly, he became aware of the whirring sound of air cycling inside his suit. He felt the weight of the suit, a flexible cage confining him. It was an odd pressure trying to bend around his body, squeezing his elbows and knees. There was a tightness in his boots; it felt almost like trying to wiggle his toes inside a big metal coffee mug like his dad's.

Robbie was blissfully consumed in space. He sat crouching inside the entry to the ship, not quite inside, and observed the stars. He stood up and took one last long look at the starry-filled void. He sighed and reached for the handle. He grabbed it with his large awkward gloves; his tiny fingers strained to move properly inside of them. The door was massive compared to the small hand gripping it. He planted his feet on opposite sides and pulled; it barely moved, creeping slowly almost like cold syrup, slow and resistant. He felt it slowly lock into place as he turned the handle, rotating it in his small hands. With a loud *thunk*, it was closed. Robbie felt the sound move through his entire body like a bass drum pressing against his insides. He grabbed a second smaller handle and closed the secondary door, now protected inside his small moon lander. He was thoroughly aware the only thing protecting him from the vacuum of space were these two barriers. He could feel anxiety sitting subliminally in the pit of his stomach. Almost boiling to the surface, but curiosity and amazement took over instead.

He hit a button on a console and watched as a small yellow light began to blink furiously. Suddenly it stopped, staying a solid, bright yellow. Silence in the small room gave way to a slight hissing noise that began to grow louder. Slowly he felt the suit press against him somehow snuggier than before. The air pushed in and pressurized the tiny space. As the pressure stopped, he undressed slowly. He closed his eyes as he fumbled with the heavy gloves, unhooking two metal rings that connected them to his wrists. He tossed them aside watching them float away and slowly bump into the walls. He removed his

helmet, wiggling it slightly. He felt it unclick and watched as it too slowly floated upwards. Next came the suit, heavy and cumbersome. Putting his suit away took a lot more effort than the gloves and helmet. Robbie undid several large buttons and zippers that moved down the sides and front of the suit. As he did, he slowly crawled free. The material was a shiny cloth that reminded him of the medieval knights he had read about before. Only this suit was different from theirs. There were no dragons in space.

He slowly gathered the suit; the helmet on the ceiling and gloves awkwardly floating, suspended between a shelf and the wall. He secured the pieces to a rack behind him and buckled straps across the suit like a person on a stretcher. He placed the helmet on top, almost like an expensive snowman. He saw his little face reflecting off the gold-tinted glass. He could see he was still just Robbie, but he felt like so much more. He opened a second door. Now, he was inside the tiny command and living module. He pulled up and over the captain's chair and began to flip the switches, carefully and meticulously pressing them in a specific order. First, the battery then secondary power, amperage metering systems, main computer, display, and overlay. Finally, the small screen connecting him to the world outside his window came to life. He turned and looked at the display observing the progress he had made. The painstakingly slow progress moving towards the moon. He was on that large gray orb in the night sky. He was on the moon.

He sat down, smiling at the screen, and watched as the numbers changed. Some climbed higher, some lower, some not changing at all. Despite the constantly moving screen, his focus remained on one important cluster: the ones showing the distance to the surface. Seeing that value sitting at zero made him happy. He vividly remembered watching it plummet as he came in for landing. He remembered it quickly dropping to zero, reminiscent of that countdown to midnight at the end of the year.

As he reflected on everything he had done, he pulled out a small pouch of thickened applesauce. He slowly moved, floating toward the "kitchen," which was nothing more than a few aluminum cabinets. He grabbed a bag of water and attached the applesauce bag to a small tube protruding from the bag and opened a dry chicken paste, chewing on the thickened paste-like gum. As he ate the chicken paste, he held the little packet of applesauce to the tube and sealed the port to the water bag. He pressed a button on the

side of the pouch and let the packet slowly swell and hum as water slowly pumped rehydrated the applesauce. Once he felt the rubber package puff up fully, he released the button and pulled the pouch off excited for this sweet treat.

He was perfectly content watching the computers and taking in the sights until he heard a chirp - a beep from the console next to him. He slowly turned towards the communications system noticing the small green light blinking and beeping, waiting for him to press it.

He put on a wired headset, pressed the green button, and turned on the radio: "This is Zipper One, come in."

No reply. He waited a second longer and then heard "Robbie. Robbie? Robbie!" The sound was unmistakable. It was his mom. "It's time to wake up sleepyhead!"

Robbie slowly pried his eyes open. Light was already creeping into the room, a glow bouncing off of the walls as his mom sat on the edge of the bed, gently rubbing his hair. What happened? How was he just on the moon and now sitting in this bed?

"Did you have a good dream? You seemed to be having fun last night. Dad and I could hear you tossing and turning. What were you doing last night, buddy?" Mom said.

Robbie sat up slowly, groggily smiling. He blinked several times to try to wake up. He stretched, freely and easily moving his arms over his head. Gone was the weightless feeling of space. He smacked his lips swearing he could taste a lingering applesauce flavor. It felt so good, comfortable under the heavy comforters, under gravity?

"I dreamt I was on a rocket, Mom! I went to the moon. I was the commander of my own..."

But she stopped him. He couldn't finish the sentence before she said, "sounds cool, little dude, but I need you to get moving."

Robbie declared loudly, "Mom, I was on the moon and was on my own ship!"

She stopped and turned back to his bed. She gently rustled his hair again and looked at him almost teasingly; her eyes wide and eyebrows lifted, "Really? All by yourself? Are you sure? It seems like a dangerous trip!"

Robbie crossed his arms and adamantly replied, “Of course, I was doing it by myself! It’s a small capsule. Don’t you know it’s easier to send a kid than a grownup! I was doing everything a real astronaut does!”

She listened patiently while he described it all: the launch, the flight, seeing the stars in space, the suit. It was so real and vivid.

“Really, that seems amazing, sweet boy. If you do well in school, you’ll be able to go to space too one day!”

He sighed knowing this was her way of sending him off to school and ending the conversation. Luckily, his class was going over space this week. They learned about the planets and how the moon orbits the earth. They watched videos about astronauts and how NASA explored the moon and their plans for the future. Nothing he watched could have prepared him for the feeling of space. He was there and knew what he experienced. He had been to the moon.

Robbie knew his day would be filled with more talk of space and suddenly was eager to get up and go to school. He quickly got dressed and raced downstairs. His mom had waffles and bananas ready. He did appreciate the food on Earth after chewing the chicken paste the night before. He practically inhaled the breakfast. The ride to school was uneventful. His mom listened to the news as he tried to remember every detail of his trip to the moon. She may not believe him, but he knew what he experienced. His mind was consumed with thoughts about the Solar System; where would he travel to next? Everything felt possible.

His day felt like a blur. He went to class, played with his friends, and did everything expected of him, but he could not shake the feeling of space. He could feel the suit, the helmet, the way his breath filled the space. When he got home, he did his homework without even being asked. Now that he was done, he could tell his mom more about space. He told her everything he had learned today and everything he knew from his travels. He told her all the facts about space, rockets, and the solar system. She smiled, hugged Robbie tightly, and sent him off to play almost dismissing him again. He went upstairs to build his very own spaceship knowingly exactly how it should look.

At dinner, Robbie told his dad about his adventures. The details were somehow more impressive than the ones shared with his mom.

While his mom sat quietly listening, Dad took it all in and replied in a more encouraging, “My goodness, bud. Do you think I could ever go with you?”

After dinner, Robbie and his brother went to get ready for bed. Robbie quickly washed up and brushed his teeth and ran to the stairs to say good night. He heard his parents talking though.

“Do you think it’s a good idea to encourage him like that, Michael? He needs to realize it was a dream. I don’t want him to be made fun of for this. He knows it’s not real” he heard his mom say.

Thankfully Dad was the level-headed one; “Do you think it’s a good idea to stifle his creativity, Beth? How do we know he didn’t go? We always tell him anything is possible if he tries hard enough.”

Robbie couldn’t believe she still did not believe him. He knew he was on the moon. He quietly told her from around the corner, “Mom, I know what I did. I was in space.” She didn’t reply.

As Robbie fell asleep that night he was once again in his ship. Robbie heard a loud beeping sound that grew louder and louder. He looked around quickly. The autopilot had engaged the rockets to stabilize the ship into an orbit. He needed to prepare to separate the rocket. Robbie began his descent towards the moon. He knew this feeling as he had done this the night prior. He began locking items down and taking the items he needed for the trip to the dusty surface below. He paused to look out the window as his ship was now between the sun and the moon and took in the amazing view before moving the last of the equipment and preparing to depart. He sat down in the small chair, hit a series of buttons in a trained sequence, and waited for the muffled boom to echo throughout the cabin as the lander separated and began its descent. He turned and began to steer slowly, decelerating towards the surface below. He could feel his body jostling as the rockets burned away. The noise filled the capsule. The walls just thick enough to provide safety. He watched intently as the gauges moved lower and lower. His heart raced as he got closer to the surface. He moved carefully, his hands holding the controls as he ensured the surface stayed level. Robbie looked from the window to the gauges. He was nearly there! The rockets burned away just enough to slow him down.

With less than a hundred feet, Robbie checked to ensure the legs were extended and the gyros were steady. His radar ticked off the distance remaining as he increased the throttle on the rockets. Robbie felt his body sink into the seat as he drastically slowed down. Ten feet left. He increased the throttle until the rocket fell as slow as a leaf. Clouds of loose greyish white dust billowed and flew away. Suddenly, there was a soft but assuring thud as the shuttle landed on the surface below. Robbie expertly throttled down and kept the engines on standby. He ensured the lander was stable and cut his engines. He breathed a sigh of relief and exclaimed, “finally back.” Robbie hurried to get into his suit, his hands racing to ensure all equipment was fitted and sealed. He lowered his helmet, careful not to hit his face, and grinned as it clamped in place. He was one step closer to feeling the moon beneath his feet. Finally, his gloves were on, and he was ready.

Robbie remembered to slow down and take it all one step at a time. He turned the knobs and pressed the buttons with the precision of a real astronaut. He pumped air into the reservoir tanks built into the small lander as he danced in place, slowly shuffling from foot to foot as he listened for the air pumps to hiss. The sound slowly faded as there became less and less air remaining around him. Slowly only familiar silence remained. Robbie walked to the door and turned the large, heavy handles. He pushed them with all the strength he could muster. The doors slowly opened. He squinted his eyes, holding up his hand taking in the beautiful but lifeless vista before him. He remembered the sharp, uneven peaks that outlined the crests of the craters.

He took that first step out and off the lander remembering the lessened gravity as it seemed to make the small hop to the surface last forever. He felt he would float for an eternity until his boots came into contact with the ground below. The surface was airy with scant traces of grit. Robbie playfully kicked the surface, sending a small cloud of dust flying. The grit landed like small raindrops over the surrounding area. He took a massive step away from the lander and shut his eyes. Suddenly, he was back on Earth.

“Robbie, it’s time to wake up! You need to get up!” He woke again to his mother gently brushing the hair from his face.

The sun crept in through the blinds. He rolled out of bed slowly and watched as his mom turned on the lights and left the room. Robbie didn't tell his mom of his second trip to the moon. He remembered her words last night and felt she just would not listen.

As Robbie's room entered his room and began to strip his sheets, she caught site of something unusual. There, in the middle of the mattress – roughly where Robbie's feet would have been while he slept – was a dense patch of fine gray powder.

“Michael!” She yelled down to Robbie's dad who had just got home from work. “I need you upstairs. I need to show you something.”

“On my way. Just let me—”

“Michael, there is something you have to see,” she said pleadingly.

As Michael entered the room, he looked over to Beth who was leaning over the side of Robbie's bed intently examining his sheets.

“What on earth are you doing?” he asked her, perplexed by her odd behavior.

“Exactly, Michael! What on earth” she said as she pulled him towards the bed. “Have you ever seen anything like this?”

He knelt down towards to mattress gently so as to not disturb the pattern of dust that now lay before him. He lowered his hand slowly towards the sheet and gathered a small sample between his fingers. Beth now hovered behind him waiting for Michael to say something, anything. Michael looked to her with wide eyes realizing what she had already known.

“Is this what I think it is?” she asked Michael hesitantly.

“Yes, I think it might just be,” he responded as a small smile spread across his lips.

With moon dust still stuck on the ends of her fingers, Beth turned to see Robbie who had just opened his door.

“Robbie, you are amazing,” she shouted excitedly, while crouching down to hug him.