

HOMESICK!

HE COULD SEE THE SPACE-STATION NOW, FLOATING LIKE SOME GIGANTIC WEIRDLY-SHAPED LIFE-RAFT UPON THE BLACK SEA OF SPACE. HE COULD SEE ITS LANDING RAMP AND ITS MATCHES AND THE LAUNCHING AREA WHERE, ONE YEAR BEFORE, HE... DAVID TODD... AND HIS BEST FRIEND... LAWRENCE ARDSLEY... HAD TAKEN OFF FOR MAN'S FIRST TRIP TO MARS, AND A THOUSAND MILES BEYOND, HE COULD SEE THE GREEN SPHERE OF EARTH... HOME...

IT WON'T BE LONG NOW, LYNN, BABY! IT WON'T BELONG NOW! OH, HONEY... IF YOU ONLY KNEW HOW I'VE DREAMED OF THIS MOMENT!



YES, DAVID WAS COMING HOME... HOME TO LYNN ARDSLEY... LARRY'S WIFE. BUT LYNN WASN'T LARRY'S WIFE ANY LONGER. LYNN WAS A WIDOW! LARRY HAD DIED...

HELLO, SPACE STATION? HELLO... SPACE STATION! THIS IS COLONEL TODD ON MARS SPACE-ROCKET NUMBER X-2! COME IN, SPACE STATION? COME IN...



DAVID FLIPPED ON THE RECEIVER AND WAITED FOR THE SPACE-STATION TO ANSWER. HE THOUGHT ABOUT LYNN... BEAUTIFUL, DESIRABLE LYNN. HE THOUGHT ABOUT THAT NIGHT... THE NIGHT SHE AND DAVID HAD PLANNED LARRY'S MURDER!

IT WOULD BE SO EASY, BABY! LARRY WOULD NEVER GIVE YOU UP! BUT UP THERE... ON MARS... WELL... ANYTHING COULD HAPPEN...

OH, DAVID! I'M... I'M SCARED! WHAT IF HE SUSPECTS?



SUSPECTS THAT YOU AND I ARE IN LOVE? NOT A CHANCE! WE'VE BEEN TOO CAREFUL...

DAVID! CAN'T WE WAIT... UNTIL YOU BOTH GET BACK? PERHAPS IF I TOLD HIM I DIDN'T LOVE HIM ANY LONGER... IF I ASKED HIM FOR A DIVORCE...

HE WOULDN'T GIVE IT TO YOU, LYNN! YOU KNOW LARRY! HE'S TOO PROUD! NO! THIS IS THE ONLY WAY! MY ONE CHANCE...

WHAT WILL YOU TELL THEM? I MEAN, WHEN YOU GET BACK...?

I'LL TELL THEM THAT LARRY CONTRACTED A DISEASE... AND DIED THERE... ON MARS!

THERE WILL BE OTHER SHIPS, DAVID! OTHERS AFTER YOURS! YOU'LL HAVE TO MAKE SURE THEY DON'T FIND HIS BODY...

DAVID REMEMBERED THOSE TRIPS... THOSE REGULAR TRIPS UP TO THE SPACE-STATION TO CHECK ON THE PROGRESS OF SPACE-ROCKET X-2'S CONSTRUCTION...

SHE'S ALMOST FINISHED, DAVE!

ANOTHER WEEK AND WE'LL BE ON OUR WAY, LARRY...

THE SPACE STATION HAD BEEN STARTED BY THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT BACK IN 1955. IT HAD BEEN COMPLETED IN 1972. IN 1986, SPACE-ROCKET X-1 HAD SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED A TRIP TO THE MOON AND BACK. NOW, S-R X-2 WAS NEARING COMPLETION, MAN'S FIRST ATTEMPT TO REACH MARS...

LARRY! DAVID! TOMORROW YOU LEAVE! IT WILL TAKE YOU APPROXIMATELY FIVE MONTHS TO GET THERE...

YOU WILL STAY IN CONSTANT TOUCH WITH US THROUGH MICRO-WAVE RADIO SIGNALS. YOU WILL REPORT EVERY THING YOU FIND... EVERY DETAIL. IF MARS DOES HAVE A CIVILIZATION... AND IT PROVES HOSTILE... YOU WILL RETURN AT ONCE! MORE THAN LIKELY YOU WILL FIND NO SIGN OF LIFE ON MARS. EXPLORE! PHOTOGRAPH! NOTE ALL YOU SEE! GOOD LUCK!

THANK YOU, SIR!

AND THAT LAST NIGHT ON EARTH! DAVID REMEMBERED IT SO WELL! HE, AND LYNN, AND LARRY... TOGETHER... WISHING EACH OTHER HEALTH AND LUCK AND ALL GOOD THINGS... AND LARRY LAUGHING... NOT KNOWING THAT A WISH OF DEATH WAS IN DAVID'S AND LYNN'S HEARTS...

WELL! HERE'S TO YOU AND LYNN, LARRY! AND MANY MORE YEARS OF WEDDED BLISS!

TH-THANKS, DAVID!

HEY! WE'RE OUT OF ICE! I'LL BE RIGHT BACK!

...THOSE STOLEN MOMENTS TOGETHER... WHEN LARRY WAS OUT OF THE ROOM...

DARLING! DARLING! WHEN I GET BACK... AND YOU'RE FREE...

OH, HOLD ME, DAVID! HOLD ME!



...AND THAT MORNING AT THE ROCKET-PORT, WATCHING LARRY KISS LYNN GOODBYE, AND HATING HIM FOR IT...

GOOD-BYE, HONEY!

GOOD-BYE LARRY! TAKE CARE...



... AND THEN THAT LAST SHUTTLE TRIP TO THE SPACE-STATION...

YOU... YOU'VE GOT A WONDERFUL GAL THERE, LARRY!

DOWN! I KNOW IT!



DAVID COULD SEE THE LAUNCHING SITE ON THE SPACE-STATION AS THOUGH IT WERE YESTERDAY... CRAWLING WITH BRASS CAME TO SEE THE MOMENTOUS EVENT...

STAND BY FOR TAKE-OFF! COLONELS TODD AND ARDSLEY... BOARD SHIP!

WE'LL SO LONG, EVERYBODY!

SEE YOU IN A YEAR!

GOOD LUCK, YOU TWO!



THE SECONDS TICKING OFF... THE INTERMINABLE TIME UNTIL...

THERE THEY GO...



THOSE FIVE MONTHS ABOARD THE S-RX-2 WERE CLOUDED MEMORIES TO DAVID, NOW... A MIST OF HATE, AND NERVOUS PLANNING, AND HUNGRY THOUGHTS OF LYNN... BACK ON EARTH! AND THEN...

THERE SHE IS, DAVID! MARS...

STRAP IN, LARRY WE'RE PICKING UP MARS'S GRAVITATIONAL FIELD...

THE BLINDING PRESSURE OF LETTING DOWN... THE BLASTING OF THE ROCKET ENGINES AND THE SHUDDERING OF THE SHIP...

WE'RE GOING IN!

HOLD TIGHT!



AND THEN THE SILENCE. THE SILENCE OF MARS... ALL AROUND THEM...

HELLO, SPACE STATION! HELLO! THIS IS TODD ON S-RX-2! WE'VE MADE IT! WE'RE DOWN! STAND BY...

TRANSMIT THESE READINGS, DAVE! ATMOSPHERIC PRESSURE AT SURFACE...



A HUNDRED OBSERVATIONS... A THOUSAND DESCRIPTIONS... HOURS OF TRANSMITTING SCIENTIFIC DATA... AND THEN...

AND NOW... WE'RE GOING TO LEAVE THE SHIP! ANDSLEY AND I HAVE OUR SPACE-SUITS ON EVEN THOUGH THE ATMOSPHERE APPEARS ABLE TO SUSTAIN US!

TELL 'EM WE'LL TRY TAKING 'EM OFF AFTER A WHILE, DAVE!



... THEN STEPPING OUT ONTO THE BARREN RED WASTE-LAND OF THE RED PLANET...

THAT'S ENOUGH PHOTOGRAPHS, LARRY! LET'S TRY TAKING OFF OUR HELMETS!

RIGHT, DAVE!



AND THAT MOMENT... THAT LONG AWAITED MOMENT ARRIVED! DAVE SLIPPED HIS GUN FROM ITS HOLSTER...

IT'S OKAY, DAVE! LIKE BEING ON A MOUNTAIN-TOP... ON EARTH! IT'S... WHAT...

FOR YOU, LARRY! I'M GOING TO KILL YOU...

WHAT'S THE GUN FOR?



DAVID REMEMBERED HOW LARRY'S AMAZED EXPRESSION FROZE AS HE FINGERED THE TRIGGER...

HOW THE SHOT SHATTERED THE THICK RED SILENCE, AND LARRY PITCHING FORWARD...

... THEN... STANDING OVER HIM AS THE REPORT ECHOED BACK AND FORTH FROM ANGRY DUNE TO ANGRY DUNE...

SHE'S MINE, NOW, LARRY! LYNN'S MINE...



DAVID REMEMBERED HOW HE BURIED LARRY IN AN UNMARKED GRAVE...



THEN REPORTED...

THIS IS TODD, ON S-RX-2! WE'VE JUST COME BACK INSIDE! ARDSLEY DOESN'T FEEL WELL! WE...WE TOOK OFF OUR SPACE-HELMETS!



DAY AFTER DAY...

HE'S GETTING WORSE! THE DRUGS IN THE MED KIT DON'T HELP! HE'S DYING...



...UNTIL...

COLONEL ARDSLEY IS DEAD! HIS LAST REQUEST WAS THAT I JETTISON HIS BODY 'IN TO SPACE ON MY WAY BACK! I PROMISED! I'M... COMING HOME... NOW!



DAVID'S RECEIVER REMAINED SILENT! THE SPACE-STATION LOOMING LARGER AND LARGER NOW, DID NOT RESPOND...

STAND BY... I'M COMING IN!

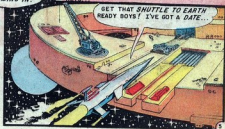


HELLO... SPACE STATION! HELLO... SPACE STATION! THIS IS COLONEL TODD ON MARS SPACE-ROCKET X-2! WHY DON'T YOU ANSWER?



THE LAST OF THE S-RX-2'S FUEL WAS USED UP IN SLOWING THE SHIP! IT DRIFTED TOWARD THE LANDING RAMP, SUCKED IN BY THE HUGE TRACTION MAGNETS.

GET THAT SHUTTLE TO EARTH READY BOYS! I'VE GOT A DATE...



A DEATHLY SILENCE HUNG OVER THE SPACE-STATION AS DAVID EMERGED FROM THE S-RX-2! THE STATION WAS DESERTED...

WHAT'S GOING ON HERE! WHERE IS EVERYBODY! THERE'S NO SHUTTLE ROCKET HERE!

DAVID DARTED DOWN A HATCH INTO THE SPACE STATION'S QUARTERS...

HEY! YOU KNEW I WAS COMING BACK! WHERE ARE YOU ALL? WHAT'S THE MATTER?



A LOUDSPEAKER BEHIND DAVID CRACKLED ON! A VOICE EXPLODED FROM BEHIND ITS GRILLED FACE.

COLONEL TODD! THIS IS GENERAL MINORLY, MEDICAL CORPS... ON EARTH! IT'S MY DUTY TO INFORM YOU THAT...

SINCE COLONEL LAWRENCE ARDSLEY CONTRACTED AND DIED OF AN UNKNOWN DISEASE WHICH DID NOT RESPOND TO ANY KNOWN EARTH DRUGS WHILE ON MARS... AND THAT SINCE YOU ALSO WERE OBVIOUSLY EXPOSED TO THAT DISEASE AND MIGHT AT THIS TIME BE A CARRIER OF IT...



...THAT FOR THE SAFETY OF THE TWO AND ONE HALF BILLION PEOPLES OF EARTH, YOU ARE HEREBY QUARANTINED ON THAT SPACE-STATION... FOR LIFE!

GENERAL MINORLY'S VOICE SOFTENED...

I'M SORRY, DAVE! GENUINELY SORRY! IT'S GOING TO BE TOUGH, I KNOW! BUT IT'S THE LIVES OF EVERYONE HERE AGAINST YOURS! YOU'LL FIND RATIONS... BOOKS...



BUT DAVID TODD DID NOT HEAR GENERAL MINORLY'S SOOTHING VOICE! DAVID TODD WAS CRYING...

THE END 6