

Beyond the Earth

by Richard Elam

The rocket ship *Shooting Star* powered through the black deeps of space like a silver bullet. Inside a room of their parents' suite aboard the vessel, Ted Kenton and his sister Jill sat before a large window looking out at the wonders of space in the year A.D. 2003.

"It doesn't seem as if we're moving at all, does it, Sis?" Ted asked.

Jill shook her auburn head. "No, but it scares me to know how fast we're going!" she replied.

Ted straightened his sturdy young shoulders and shook strands of brown hair out of his eyes. It was natural that girls should be scared of things connected with space travel, he thought. "Thousands of miles an hour isn't much," he said lightly.

"But what if we should hit something!" Jill complained. "It would be an awful crash!"

"The only things we have to worry about hitting are meteors," Ted told her. "The *Shooting Star* has radar instruments that tell us when they're headed straight at us."

"Father says that sometimes meteors come so fast that space ships can't get out of the way of them," Jill returned, with solemn eyes.

In brotherly fashion Ted pressed the shoulder of his eleven-and-a-half-year-old sister, younger than he by a year. "Don't start worrying about everything that can happen to us, Jill. We've got a lot ahead of us on Mars," he advised.

"I—I'm not so sure I want to go to Mars," Jill blurted. "It's so cold and bare and lonely there, Ted. Why did Father have to sign up with the Martian Archeology Society?"

Ted looked at her with some surprise. "Dad talked this over with us. You said you wanted to go."

"It didn't seem so scary then, although I didn't really *want* to go, but out here in the dark where there's never a sunrise and everything is so still and quiet, I—I feel afraid!"

"Does Dad or Mom know you feel this way?" Ted asked.

She shook her head. "Father's counted so much on us going to Mars. He was so lonely there before without us. If he knew I didn't want to go, he'd feel he had to get a job on Earth. But you know his first love is excavation on Mars."

"You'll be all right, Sis, when we get settled in our new home. They've got it all ready for us. Think of the fun it'll be!" Ted said encouragingly.

Jill seemed to feel better and smiled. Both turned their attention to the wondrous misty veil of the Milky Way outside. It reminded Ted of a great caravan of countless tiny sheep trooping through the

endless black of space night. Each one of those millions of light points he knew to be individual giant suns. How frighteningly huge and marvelous was God's universe!

Directly in front of them hung the wrinkled gray face of Luna, the Moon, which they would pass before long. Ted shuddered at its forbidding deep pits and miles of barren, dead plains.

Jill leaned forward eagerly on the window seat on which they were perched, her nose almost touching the clear plastic window. "Ted!" she exclaimed. "What's that green ball below us?"

Ted looked, then grinned. "Don't you even know your own planet when you see it?"

"The Earth!" She spoke in awe. "Of course!"

Ted was not surprised that his sister had not recognized the globe, in so far as neither of them had seen it before from this dramatic position. Ever since their fire-off from the Arizona space harbor, the Earth had been out of their view, beneath them.

"Look!" Jill cried. "I can make out the outline of Africa! It looks like it's buried under fog. I didn't know before that you could actually *see* the atmosphere!"

"I knew it," Ted said, with mock superiority. "I bet you don't know it's hundreds of miles deep."

"You're not the only one who knows the answers, Ted Kenton, even if you are pretty smart," she returned. "I know that it's the lack of atmosphere out here in space that makes everything so crystal clear. That's why we can see so many thousands more stars out here than we can from Earth under a layer of air."

"That's not bad for a girl," Ted replied, with a tolerant grin.

She shoved him in playful displeasure. Although the push was not hard, it upset Ted's balance, and he slipped off the window seat and rolled onto the metal floor. Jill gasped in alarm and darted to his side. As she tried to help him up, she too lost her equilibrium and fell beside him. Ted looked at her and laughed.

Their awkwardness was caused by the fact that they wore magnetized shoes that were attracted to the metal floor of the space ship. Even when sitting down, they had kept the soles of their shoes on the metal of the seat. Ted got to his feet and helped Jill up.

"Will we ever get used to these funny shoes?" Jill complained.

"We'll have to," Ted said. "If we didn't wear them we'd go floating around in the air like a feather. That's another disadvantage of leaving Earth. We don't have any weight at all in space. If we wanted to, we could take off our shoes and stretch out in the air just like on a soft couch."

"It might be fun to swim around in here just like a fish," Jill mused. "I think I'll try it."

Ted knew he should stop her, but his curiosity to see such an experiment prevented him from giving in to the tug of his conscience.

“Be careful!” Ted warned. “Any motion you make will be hard to stop.”

When her shoes were off, Jill pressed gently upward from her toes. She shrieked in pleasure as she rose gracefully into the air. Reaching the ceiling of the room, she pushed against it and floated downward again.

“That’s lots of fun!” she said. “Why don’t you try it, Ted?”

“Uh-uh. Another time. One of us had better keep his feet.”

Jill tried other movements, whirling and doing flip-overs. Then she grew bolder, moving more swiftly. She teased Ted into trying to catch her, and he finally got into the game. He lunged at her but missed her fleet form every time. The game grew more active. Presently both of them were scampering about in the space-ship compartment, laughing and having great fun.

Jill paused in one corner beneath an air-vent box. “Try and catch me!” she taunted, her eyes shiny with merriment. “I’ll let you get real close.”

Ted glided catlike across the floor, his metal-soled shoes clicking at every step. Only when he was nearly upon her did she move. She flexed her knees and soared off above him, laughing. His hands raked the air but missed her agile form.

Suddenly Ted’s heart seemed to stop dead. “Jill! Look out! You’ll hit that air vent!”

She saw the danger too late. She screamed and crashed heavily into the metal vent, head on. Her head lolled in unconsciousness, and her body hung limp as a broken toy against the ceiling of the space-ship room.

Source:

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