

Missed Memories

It was Christmas Eve and Jake lay in his bunk, staring at the small Christmas tree on his bedside stand, wondering if his wife would return the message he had sent earlier in the day. After his last mission, he had promised Sally it would be his last trip to space. He would finish his time at NASA behind a desk to devote more time at home with her and the kids. It took three months before he broke his promise. She'd been angry and hurt that he would do this to his family again. To break yet another promise. The fight had been vicious with both lashing out at each other and saying hurtful things.

"If you leave, I don't know if I'll be here when you get back," her words honest as they were brutal.

He couldn't understand why she wouldn't support him in this. Didn't she see how important this mission was? This wasn't a trip to the moon to gather rocks or count grains of sand on Mars. They were going to Mars to set up the central habitat that would become the core of the first human colony on another planet! They were making history! How could you even begin to compare that to something as mundane as a holiday, birthday, or even a wedding anniversary? This was his chance to make it into history books, have statues made of him, even have a school named in his honor. Why couldn't she see that?

So, despite her warning, he had accepted the mission. During the first training session, everything seemed ok. As training became more intense and time consuming, she became more distant. After he informed her the final phase of training would be starting in a week and required him to be at international training facilities, she quit speaking to him all together and even moved into the spare bedroom. But he had convinced himself that it was worth the risk and that she would eventually understand, so he ignored the warning signs and continued.

Which is how he found himself staring at a foolish use of his allotted seven cubic feet for personal items. Foolish because it used a large part of his space, but it also made him think for the first time since taking this mission that he might have made the wrong choice. He looked at the clock on the

wall. Eleven pm, one hour till midnight and the start of Christmas Day. Forty minutes or so left to receive anything on Christmas Eve.

The rest of his crewmates had received their videos hours ago and afterward had sat in the galley, singing Christmas carols and drinking incredibly bad eggnog made from powdered eggs and milk. They invited him, but he turned them down as his mood had been progressively worse ever since he had put the tree up. They knew what was going on as he had unconsciously dropped hints during the mission. Besides, everyone in this business knew how hard these trips were on a marriage and this was by far the longest ever undertaken.

They were almost nine months into an estimated twenty-two-month trip and video messages were allowed only on special occasions. Other crewmates had already received birthday or anniversary messages. His anniversary was January 18th, so if hers did not come soon, it was a good bet he would not get one in January either. He ripped his eyes away from the tree and clock, both doing nothing but making his mood worse. Instead, he focused on the rest of the small room, realizing that what had looked like something out of a science fiction story now looked cold and clinical. Pictures taped to the walls now looked out of place and only served to emphasize the cold look of the room.

Shortly before midnight his comm light lit up showing a waiting message. Hands shaking from nerves, he pushed play and her face appeared on the screen. By the time the video stopped, he was much more relaxed. Things weren't good but were salvageable. He would be part of future memories. As he started to play the message again, the ship shuddered violently, and alarms began to blare. He headed for the habitat wing exit, but the hatch slammed shut just before he reached it. He watched through the portal as a meteorite pierced the corridor, separating the habitat from the ship. As it fell away, he realized he would make no more memories.