



“Going Home” by Camaryn Rodriguez
3rd Place, Short Story 13-15

GOING HOMELIFTOFF

I secured my helmet and buckled my seatbelt. I radioed Headquarters and verified that I was ready. Ready for liftoff. I sat back and closed my eyes. I waited for a response or anything that would signify that I would finally be leaving this wretched place called Earth.

Growing impatient, I was about to radio HQ again until I felt a great rumbling beneath me. My eyes flashed open as the shuttle shook more and more with each passing second. Somewhere nearby, I heard a loud robotic voice that echoed in my ears.

"READY FOR TAKEOFF."

"Finally!" I exclaimed with enormous relief. I can't be here much longer. I need to be where I belong. I need to be with the stars.

"FIVE."

Excitement pumped through my veins as I eagerly awaited for the rocket to leave the ground.

"FOUR."

I flipped all the switches and pressed all of the buttons on the controls as I was trained to do. The inside of the orbiter lit up with flashing lights once I finished and I couldn't help but smile. It was pretty, but it would be extremely dull looking when compared to the beauty of space.

"THREE."

I happily sighed and closed my eyes again. It was really happening! I'm about to go to the place I belong!

"TWO."

"I'm going home." I muttered dreamily. "I'm finally going home."

"ONE."

I took one last look outside the window. One last look at the rotting society I lived in for 45 years. I grinned and thought about how I would never have to see this ruined world again.

"LIFTOFF."

The shuttle roared and shot into the sky. I cheered as it got farther and farther away from the ground. Outside the sky was slowly getting darker as the rocket kept going upwards. I could barely turn my head due to the force of the rocket flying so fast, but I didn't mind. I was one step closer to my home.

HEADQUARTERS

We all cheered as the orbiter, *Starport*, went out of the atmosphere and into the large expansion of space. I began to wonder what Luke thought of this. Luke Aberra is the astronaut that is currently inside *Starport*. He had always dreamt of leaving Earth and living among the stars. Before he became an astronaut, Luke was a professor that taught astronomy. When that wasn't enough to satisfy his obsession with stars and space, he changed careers and became an astronaut. He used to confide in me and always ranted about his views on Earth. He thought it was a corrupted, rotting, planet that he needed to get away from. He knew space was the

perfect place for him. "It's infinite beauty awes me and I can't help but want to see more!" He once told me.

At the time I thought it was a bit extreme, saying the Earth was decaying and such, but I knew it meant a lot to him, so I didn't mention it.

I picked up the receiver and held down the button before speaking.

"Aberra, come in. This is HQ. Sam Langston speaking. How are you holding up? Over."

The voices around me died down as my coworkers got serious and went back to work. I waited for a response as the sound of frantic typing and computer mouse clicking grew louder.

"This is Aberra. Everything is going smoothly up here, Over." Luke said with such forced calmness that I almost did a double take. Was something the matter?

"Luke, is everything alright? You seem agitated. Over." I asked, concerned. I glanced over at the map that had a red dot for the *Starport* on it. I watched as the red dot continued to move upward on the map, the map zooming out every so often to continue showing the dot.

"I'm *fine*. If there's anything else check in with me. I'm going to explore the rest of the ship. Over and out." Aberra growled sharply.

Stunned by his reply, I set the receiver back down and slowly got up to go check in with the rest of my coworkers. Luke will be alright, I reassured myself. This is his dream after all.

EXPLORATION

I ended the radio call and groaned. Now that I was in space I just wanted to be left alone to bask in its glory. I definitely didn't need any annoying distractions like Langston and the others down at HQ. I hurriedly stuffed the receiver back into its holster on top of my shoulder

and unbuckled my seatbelt. Gravity was lost here, so I began to rise and float in the ship.

Laughing, I spun around a few times and went into the main area of the ship.

I opened all of the doors that were in my way and glided around the interior of my rocket. I stared out one of the windows and slowly took my helmet off in complete awe. It was even better than I imagined! I craned my neck to see more of my new, midnight world.

“Wow...” I trailed off as I stared in wonder outside the small window.

A few minutes passed in silence while I hovered over the window. The small window. The incredibly tiny window. I found myself getting frustrated since I couldn't see very much of the nighttime universe I was now in.

After a moment, I reeled back with shock. With a sudden realization, I came to the conclusion that I wasn't *in* space. I was *in* this shell called *Starport*. *Starport* is trapping me from this infinite expanse of nothingness that I so longed for.

Feeling trapped, I scrambled for my helmet and swam back into the control room. I grabbed everything I needed and prepared myself to flip the switch that would open the main door outside.

A few seconds later, my shoulder buzzed and startled me. I hesitantly grabbed my receiver and listened.

“Aberra, come in. What are you doing? You're only supposed to go outside the spaceship when you're back on Earth! Over.” Langston said anxiously.

Rage washed over me and I found myself gripping the receiver harder than I intended. With a short sigh, I tried to calm my nerves and slowly replied to my friend.

"Sam," I said, "You don't understand. I need this. All that *Starport* is doing is trapping and keeping me from truly experiencing my dream." With no response my voice turned hard and cold. "Sam, I *need* this. You of all people should know. I'm going out there. Over and out."

PANIC

What? *What?* Frozen, I could only listen to what Luke was saying. I snapped out of my shock and began to panic.

"Aberra! Come in! You can't do this! The ship isn't designed for people to go out of it unless it's in the correct air pressure levels! Luke the ship will collapse in on itself and you will die! Do you hear me?!" I yelled into the receiver.

"What should we do? He's not actually going to open the door, is he?" Someone asked.

"You don't know him! He's going to do it! *He's going to do it!*" I yelled before trying to contact Luke again.

"Aberra come in! *Luke!* Answer me! You can't do this! Luke, please!"

My face grew pale while watching Luke press buttons and flip switches on the screen across the room.

"Luke, *PLEASE!*" I screamed in horror as Luke flipped the last switch.

Feeling sick with dread, I looked at the hollowed out eyes of my coworkers. They all looked back, and at that moment we all shared the same thought: There's nothing we can do.

HOME

I flipped the switch that would lead me outside. I didn't care what Sam had to say about the ship collapsing. I already knew that. Just like how I knew this was my destiny. To be out there in the sea of stars. To be free of the life I lived down below. To be *home*.

With screaming sirens and harsh red lights, I desperately threw myself towards the door. I kicked off of anything I could find with my feet and flew through all of the rooms in this pathetic egg. I was a chick being born. I knew it was my time to hatch and leave the warm shell of my egg.

Gasping, I finally broke free of the egg and found myself bathing in darkness. I tugged off the restraints that were keeping me tied on the ship. Airborne and laughing, I was able to see all of space now.

Suddenly, a dying wail pierced through the silence. I turned back and *Starport* was no longer itself, just floating pieces of metal. I was free of my shell.

With stars in my eyes and my shoulder buzzing constantly, I almost felt at peace. I just needed one last thing. I took off my helmet and closed my eyes as I felt the soft fabric of nothingness surround me.