

KAREN'S SPACE TRIP

DAGMAR FRAHME

THREE — two — one — zero — lift off!"

A large flame appeared on the TV screen and the Moon rocket streaked into space.

"Gosh," said Billy. "I wish I could be in there with Dad."

"I don't," said Karen, who was six, "and I wish Daddy weren't in there either. Why does he have to go to the Moon, anyhow?"

"What *are* you so scared about?" demanded Billy, who was eight and, Karen thought, not afraid of anything. "Didn't Dad tell you everything was OK? Astronauts blast off and go places all the time."

"But he was just saying that," said Karen, "like he says I shouldn't be scared of lightning or big dogs or anything. I just can't help being scared, and I wish that rocket would come back and Daddy would come home."

"Gee whiz," said Billy, thoroughly disgusted, "you're scared of your own shadow. Don't you know how famous Dad is? When he comes back he'll be a big hero and have his picture in the papers. What do you have to be such a baby for?"

Karen's eyes filled with tears and she went to her room so that Billy wouldn't see. She tried to tell herself all the time how silly it was to be scared, but she couldn't help it. It seemed as though something

frightened her every day, and the more scared she was, the more Billy laughed at her. She knew that Daddy got disgusted with her sometimes, too, although he tried not to show it and was always so gentle. She remembered how she had sat in his lap yesterday when he said goodby, and even though she tried to be brave she couldn't keep from crying when she hugged him and said, "I wish you weren't going to the Moon." And she remembered how, just as Daddy went out the door, he turned and gave her a very unhappy look, and said something to Mother that she couldn't hear, and then Mother looked unhappy too. How she wished she could be brave like Billy!

"Time for school, children," called Mother, and Karen wiped her eyes, blew her nose, and went to the kitchen for her lunch box. She was glad to go to school — Daddy was going to be gone for almost two long weeks, and maybe at school she would think about something else and not worry about him so much. Billy didn't want to go at all — he wanted to stay home and watch the Moon rocket on TV, but both Mother and Daddy had said no — life would have to go on as usual, and school was important.

Billy was arguing about it again and Karen heard Mother say, "You go to school now, Billy. Miss Miller said that she would put the TV on several times today and all the children will get a chance to watch."

Karen hoped that her teacher wouldn't make *her* class watch — it only made her more scared to hear about what Daddy was doing. She wished she could

just go to sleep for two weeks and wake up to find Daddy at home.

Karen and Billy went to school. The children in Karen's class *did* watch the rocket on TV, and Karen tried to shut her eyes but the children kept turning to her to say things like, "Gee, just think, your father is in there," and she just couldn't let them see that she was scared. As she went down the hall to lunch she passed some older children who pointed at her and whispered, "Her father is the astronaut," as if they were really impressed — and she couldn't let *them* see how scared she was, either.

At supper that night, Billy told about how he had spent most of the day telling other children what his dad was doing, and he even talked to one of the newspapermen who kept standing outside the house, although Mother had told him only to say polite things like "Good morning" to the newsmen but not to talk about anything else. It was almost, Karen thought, as though Billy were the astronaut instead of Daddy.

Karen didn't say anything, and after supper she played quietly with her dolls while Billy watched TV as long as Mother would let him. The TV announcer said that everything on the rocket was "A—OK," and that made her feel a little better. When she went to bed, though, she started worrying again. Mother gave her an especially tight hug when she came to tuck her in and said, "Daddy is going to be just fine, Honey." Even then, after Mother had turned out the light and shut the door, Karen could only think about some of the awful things that might

happen to the rocket. She closed her eyes tight, but didn't think she would ever go to sleep.

A little while later, she opened her eyes and saw a beautiful lady in a long white dress standing by her bed, smiling at her. Karen wasn't afraid of the stranger at all — in fact, she felt as though she knew the lady from somewhere, but couldn't remember where.

"Come with me, dear," said the lady in a soft voice. "I want to show you something."

The lady held out her hand and Karen, as if it were the most natural thing in the world, found herself gliding with the lady, right through the wall and out into the sky. She didn't think it was at all strange that she could go through the wall, or that she could glide. The stars seemed unusually bright and Karen slowed down to look around her in wonder. The lady let her look for a while, smiling, and then said, "We'll have to hurry up now, Karen. There's a lot for you to see tonight."

Suddenly Karen saw something streaking through the sky ahead of them. It certainly wasn't a star — it was — it was the Moon rocket! "Ooooooooh," Karen squealed, "are we going to see Daddy?"

"Yes, Dear," the lady said. "But you must remember now that Daddy will not be able to see you—he won't know you are there."

Karen didn't even think *this* was strange — she was too happy just knowing that she was going to see her daddy.

As they came closer to the rocket, Karen saw what looked like figures gliding alongside it. They were

surrounded with golden and rosy light, and Karen thought she had never seen such beautiful colors.

“Who are they?” she wondered.

“Don’t you know?” asked the lady, smiling again — somewhat mysteriously.

Karen looked at them again and tried to think. Could they be — ?

“Are they — they aren’t Angels, are they?” **she whispered.**

“Yes, Karen, they *are* Angels. Your Daddy and the other astronauts all prayed that God would help them on their long, hard trip, and so God sent His Angels to stay with them and protect them.”

“But — but Daddy never said he was praying about it,” said Karen, “and he never talked about the Angels going along.”

“He doesn’t know that the Angels are there, Dear,” said the lady gently, “and he doesn’t know that the other astronauts were praying too. But that’s not really important. God knows, and he answered their prayers, and the Angels will see that nothing happens to the rocket.”

Karen thought this over for a few minutes, as they came closer and closer to the rocket. They glided right past the Angels, who did not smile but had very tender, kind looks on their faces, and glided right through the side of the rocket. One of the astronauts was asleep (Karen thought this was rather funny but didn’t say anything) and another astronaut was looking at a chart with lots of numbers on it. Karen’s daddy was sitting in the front of the rocket **watching the hands on some dials moving around.**

She wished that she could let him know that she was there, but remembered what the lady had said. She watched him for a little while and then the lady said, "We'll have to go back now, Karen. It's almost morning."

Karen knew her Daddy wouldn't feel it, but she gave him a big hug anyhow. Daddy didn't move, but his face got all crinkly around the eyes, the way it did when he was happy, and he smiled a big smile as though he had just thought of something very wonderful.

Karen and the lady glided back out through the side of the rocket, and started down toward Earth.

When Karen woke up next morning she bounded out of bed and ran into her mother's room. She bounced on her mother's bed and said, "Mommy, there are Angels around Daddy's rocket. I saw them. They are going to protect him and he's going to be safe."

Karen's mother looked at her and hugged her very hard. There was a funny look on her face and she said, "That's wonderful, Honey."

Billy turned on the TV as soon as he got up, and they heard the announcer talk about an instrument on the rocket that didn't work during the night. She didn't understand it all, but she understood very well when he said, "The astronauts managed to find the difficulty and fix it."

"Whew," said Billy, "that was close." Then he looked at Karen, who was smiling, and said, "Weren't you even scared?"

"No," said Karen calmly. "I knew they'd fix it."

The Angels won't let anything happen to the rocket because God sent them to keep it safe."

"Huh?" said Billy, looking at her harder.

"She's right, Dear," said Mother. "We have all been forgetting about God when we should have been thinking about Him especially hard."

That morning Karen skipped all the way to school, and even Billy had to hurry to keep up with her. The day, and the next few days, went by very quickly. Every day there was more good news about the astronauts; sometimes television people took pictures of Karen and Billy as they went to school or played outside; there were many phone calls from Grandma and Grandpa and from friends who lived far away. There were lots of visitors, too, and the time went by so quickly that before Karen knew it, the day came when the astronauts were to splash down back on Earth.

That morning when Karen came downstairs she found the TV already on, and Mother sitting in front of it with tears in her eyes. Billy sat next to her on the floor, chewing his finger and looking as though he wanted to cry too.

"Contact with the astronauts has now been broken for over five hours," the announcer was saying. "Although Ground-Control has said that they have not lost hope, the official feeling here is one of deep concern."

Karen wasn't sure what all those big words meant, but she could tell that everyone was worried. She wasn't worried, though — not the least bit. She knew the Angels were taking care of Daddy and

that there was really nothing to worry about.

Then she looked at Mother's sad face and at Billy who was trying to wipe tears away before she saw them — Billy, who *never* cried — and she thought of something else.

“Daddy prayed that God should keep him safe, and that's why God sent the Angels. But maybe we should pray too so that God knows that *we* want Daddy safe, too,” she said, looking at Mother.

Mother looked at Karen and lifted her up into her lap. “Of course, Dear,” she whispered. “That's the *only* thing to do.”

So they all prayed together, and told God how much they loved Daddy, and asked Him please to keep Daddy safe and bring him home. Then they got up and tried to do the things they always did in the morning. Karen ate a big breakfast and Billy ate something, but Mother just drank coffee and every once in a while blew her nose hard. Karen knew Mother was worried, and wished so hard that Mother could have seen the Angels too so she would know that everything would be all right. Karen had told her many times about the Angels, and Mother always smiled tenderly and sometimes hugged her, but Karen had the feeling that Mother didn't quite believe her.

That morning, for the first time, Mother said that Karen and Billy didn't have to go to school. Karen wanted to go, but now there was a crowd of people outside — more television and newspapermen than ever, and other strangers too, and Mother said that until they heard from Daddy it might be better if

Karen and Billy stayed inside or played in the back yard.

During the next few hours there was a lot of commotion around the house. Neighbors came in and out, and one lady hugged Mother and they both started crying, and a man who worked with the astronauts came in a big official car and all the tele-



vision people took pictures as he came into the house. He talked softly to Mother for a long time, but Karen could only hear Mother say, "Thank you, but no. I'd rather be here with the children when you do get word. It will be better if I stay with them." The telephone rang all the time, and Grandma and Grandpa said that they would come down on the next plane.

Karen looked at all the worried people and felt very sorry for them. She tried to tell them that

Angels were taking care of her daddy, but they would only say things to each other like "Bless her heart," or "that sweet child," but none of them looked happy when she told them and one lady even started to cry.

Finally Karen went into the backyard and played by herself. Billy still was sitting in front of the TV, which now had its regular programs which the announcer interrupted every once in a while to say, "Ladies and gentlemen, there is still no word from the missing astronauts." Karen tried to get Billy to come outside with her, but he just shook his head and said nothing, and even Mother, for once, didn't tell him to stop watching TV.

Karen had been in the backyard for about an hour when Billy opened the screen door, yelled, "KAREN, C'MERE," and slammed the door before she could even look up. She ran into the house to find a crowd of people in front of the TV. It was showing a very blurry picture of water, with something big bobbing around in it that Karen couldn't make out. Everyone was talking at once, Mother was hugging Billy and this time Billy was hugging right back (Billy always said that hugging was "girl stuff") and for a minute no one noticed Karen. Then Billy saw her and broke away from Mother.

"Dad's down, he's safe, they splashed down and no one knew it because something didn't work and they couldn't tell anyone they were splashing down until they got there but the man on the ship just talked to them and they're going to be picked up. Dad's OK, he's OK!!" Billy began to jump up and down wildly.

Karen smiled. "I know," she said.

Billy stopped jumping and looked at her. "You really *did* know all the time, didn't you? You weren't making that up about Angels."

"No, I wasn't making it up," said Karen. "I really saw them, and they were very beautiful."

People turned to smile at Karen, and Mother came over and held her tight. Then people turned back to the TV and started to talk to each other again, but suddenly Karen remembered something.

"Maybe we should thank God now for sending the Angels," she said quietly. "They did bring Daddy back home safe, didn't they? Maybe God would like to know that we're happy."

Everyone in the room was suddenly very still as they looked at Karen again and then at each other. Someone turned the sound on the TV down, and then a man with a rather deep voice started to say a grown-up prayer. The people all bowed their heads and some folded their hands. The grown-up prayer was full of big words, and Karen couldn't understand it very well.

But then she smiled and shut her eyes and said her own prayer, very softly, so that only God could hear:

"Dear God, thank you for keeping Daddy safe and bringing him home. And please thank the Angels for me, too. And I'm going to remember to pray to you just like Daddy did, and I know you'll send the Angels to help me too if I need them, and I won't ever have to be scared again."

CHILD'S MORNING PRAYERS

EVELYN VAN GILDER CREEKMORE

I thank Thee, Lord, for sunshine bright
And for my soft warm bed at night,
For food, and clothes, and books, and toys,
And for my playmate girls and boys.

Dear Jesus, all this whole day through
I promise I will smile for you.
Thy happiness lifts up my heart,
And smiling, I will do my part.

Dear Lord, please hold my hand in Thine
And show me that all good is mine
If I just place my faith in Thee,
And look for good in all I see.

Dear Lord, this day please help me find
New ways in which I may be kind.
To every person that I meet
May I be gracious, kind, and sweet.