

GOD SPEED, APOLLO

by

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CHARACTERS: GEM: Female, 15
DAD: Male, mid-30s+
JIM (voice only): Male, 30+
CHARLES (voice only): Male, 30+

SETTING: The living room of a typical early-1970s suburban home.

TIME: December, 1972.

AT RISE: Lights up on the living room. It is just past midnight on Thursday, December 7, 1972. GEM, 15, sits on the floor in her pajamas watching the television, she is bathed in the light from the TV. Voices from the TV are heard.

JIM

We are now at T-minus-8 minutes until the launch of Apollo 17, the final mission of the Apollo program. The launch is running about two-and-a-half hours behind schedule due to what we have been told was a minor malfunction in the Terminal Countdown Sequencer. Charles, can you explain to us what that malfunction was about?

CHARLES

Certainly, Jim. The Terminal Countdown Sequencer, or TCS, has several functions, but here the TCS failed to properly transmit a command to pressurize the Saturn rocket's third stage, or what is known as the S-four-B. The malfunction has apparently been resolved by bypassing a jumper, and manually pressurizing the S-four-B.

JIM

Any concern for the crew here?

CHARLES

Well, Jim, as you know there are no minor problems when it comes to manned spaceflight, but in the grand scheme of things this issue should pose no undue additional risk to the crew.

JIM

Speaking of the crew, let's give those folks just joining us a brief rundown of the men of Apollo 17, starting with the mission's commander, Eugene Cernan.

CHARLES

Sure, Jim. Gene Cernan is Navy Captain, and a NASA veteran. Gene was one of the pilots of Gemini 9 (*NOTE: pronounced gem-in-ee*) and the Lunar Module Pilot for Apollo 10. All told, Gene has more than 250 hours in outer space, but this will be his first time actually setting foot on the moon.

JIM

And what about our Command Module Pilot, Ronald Evans?

CHARLES

Right. Ron is a Commander in the Navy and another NASA vet, but this will be his first time in space. Ron was on the support crew for Apollo 7 and Apollo 11, and served as the backup Lunar Module pilot for Apollo 14.

JIM

And finally, Harrison Schmitt.

CHARLES

Jack Schmitt is not a Navy-man, but rather holds a doctorate in geology from Harvard, and will be the first civilian to go into space and, of course, the first civilian to stand on the lunar surface.

JIM

So you're saying there's hope for the rest of us aspiring astronauts?

CHARLES

Sure, Jim. Dare to dream big. Not sure when they're going to get the first newsman into orbit, but you never know. I know all of us watching tonight feel the same way, wishing that we were sitting on that launch pad.

DAD enters quietly and sits on the couch behind GEM.

JIM

We are now at T-minus-6 minutes and counting until the launch of Apollo 17. It is predicted that the flash in the night sky of the Saturn V rocket will be visible to a five-hundred-mile radius throughout the Southeastern United States and as far away as Bermuda. A status has just come in and reports that all systems are go for launch.

DAD

(this line is given on top of the last part of the voice-over)
A little past your bed-time Gem, isn't it?

GEM reaches up and turns the volume down on the TV

GEM

They're running late. Had a 2 hour 40 minute hold at T-minus-8 because the TCS failed to command the pressurization of the S-four-B L-Ox tank. But, they worked a manual override and looks like they're good to go. About T-minus-5 now. They're about to retract the gangway and start the automatic firing command sequence.

DAD

This is it, right? Last one?

GEM

Last lunar mission, yeah. Nixon's talking about a program with re-usable orbiters, "space shuttles." Be a while, though, I think, before we go back to space. But, yeah, that's it for the moon. For now at least.

DAD

How many is this for you now?

GEM

Well, the first manned launch I really remember is Friendship 7 where John Glenn went into orbit, the third of the Mercury launches. But I have it on good authority that I watched the first manned Mercury launch, Freedom 7.

DAD

Haha, yep. It was early in the morning and I woke you up and sat you on my lap and said "watch this, watch this because this is history, the first American in space." You would have been 4 or 5 I guess--

GEM

4. Almost 5, the launch was May 5, 1961.

DAD

You're amazing with this stuff. Anyway, you kinda got hooked after that, made me wake you up for the next one--

GEM

Liberty Bell 7, July 21, 1961.

DAD

If you say so. And I did, wake you up, and we watched that too.

GEM

The only Mercury launch I missed was Sigma 7 because I had chicken pox, and I watched all the manned Gemini launches.

DAD

Yep. You had the flu for one of them--

GEM

Gemini 8, Neil Armstrong's first mission.

DAD

But you watched anyway.

GEM

And I've seen all the Apollo's except Apollo 9 because of that stupid school trip. So this makes (*GEM thinks for a second*) 25 of 27.

DAD

So, what are they doing now?

GEM

T-minus-3. Should be preparing to transfer the launch vehicle to internal power about now. Looks like everything's a go. They pushed this one toward the back of the window; another hour and they would have had to scrub the launch until tomorrow night, well, tonight, technically, but you know what I mean.

DAD

How you feel about this one?

GEM

It's kinda sad, you know. End of an era I guess. But I suppose everything has to come to an end sometime. The world is changing, moving on sorta.

DAD

Speaking of the world moving on, you got a phone call today before you got home from your yearbook meeting. A boy. Danny?

GEM (trying to be casual)

Oh, yeah, Danny. What did he want?

DAD

Something about a basketball game, and pizza, and a dance...

GEM (still trying to be casual)

Oh, yeah, um, a bunch of us were going to go to the game on Friday. We play Central.

DAD

A bunch of you?

GEM

Yeah, you know, me, Sally, David--

DAD

Armbeuller or Morse?

GEM

Armbeuller

DAD

Ok.

GEM

What?

DAD

Nothing. Continue.

GEM

(suspicious) Ok... Um, me, Sally, David Armbeuller, Pete, Jennifer, you know, us.

DAD

And Danny?

GEM (embarrassed)

Yes, and Danny.

DAD

So you and this Danny...

GEM

DAD!

DAD

Ok, ok, I'm just, you know, trying to... You know, parent and stuff. If your mom were--

GEM (softly)

Dad, don't.

DAD

No, really, she'd... well she'd know what to say. How to... You're 15 Gem. Everything's happening so fast. The world is... Things seem like they're ending all over the place. And my little corner of it is... (beat) Well, tonight, my little corner of it is exactly how it should be, for T-minus-another-few-minutes, anyway.

GEM

I love you, Dad.

DAD

Right back at ya, kiddo.

GEM reaches up and turns the volume back up on the TV

JIM

And here we go. 10, 9, ignition start, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2 all engines nominal, 1, and liftoff of the final manned lunar mission, God speed Apollo 17, come home safe.

END OF PLAY