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A TRIP TO THE MOON

Dillon Knuffke

From the way it appears from Earth, it wouldn't seem like the moon is very far away at all. But it is, and this should be understood. There are hundreds of thousands of miles between our home and the long-romanticized rock that revolves around us. It takes *days* to reach the shimmering face that has looked down on us from the sky for so long. And, what you may know from an elementary education: days break into hours, hours break into minutes, and minutes break into seconds. This basic fact must be understood in order to empathize with the anguish of a moonman.

Seconds. Tick, tick, tick. I swear the fucking hand on my watch mocked me the entire journey. It screamed out to me from my wrist, as if saying, "Did you catch that, Atticus? That was another second! And another! And another!"

Needless for any explanation, I no longer wear a wristwatch. Nor do I count time by any means. I just let it pass and try and focus on the big picture.

The big picture? Before leaving the comfort of my atmosphere, I thought the big picture was the moon. I thought getting there was all that was important. Hell, I had been working toward that gleaming globe for my entire life, so, rightfully, I was pretty adamant about reaching it and pressing my footprint into its surface. My entire life had been spent training for the moment that I would walk on the moon. Actually, from what I've heard, it isn't much like walking at all; it is more of a step forward, and a deep prayer that your foot comes back down to the ground.

Now, the funny thing is that, for the entire trip, I was humming that old David Bowie song, "Space Oddity." I guess I found myself very much in Major Tom's shoes, or tin can. That feeling of helplessness that comes with the weightlessness of outer space is almost as gravitationally depressing as if I were back on Earth, having one of those nightmares where every movement I make seems to take an infinite amount of work and force.

I reckon that it was about the second day when I started to talk to myself. It started out as a simple "how are you," but progressed into rather in-depth conversations where feelings and emotions were at-large. I quickly became my only comfort and relied on myself for amusement. This is when my watch started growing in amplitude until I shattered the incessant piece of shit against the window of my prison cell.

You've never seen a sunrise or sunset from space because, well, they don't exist. And if they don't exist, and if I broke my watch against the win-

dow, was there any way of knowing what time it was? No. So time stretched endlessly, and the number of things to fill that time slowly became more and more sparse. I started to get into arguments with myself about foolish subjects such as this fun bit of schizophrenic irritation:

“Why’d you break the watch, you piece of shit?” I would ask as the deafening silence pressed on my eardrums.

“Because it was getting on my nerves,” would be the smug reply that comes from the reflection on the window.

“You’re gonna get us killed!”

“Relax, man, we’re gonna die regardless of what I do or don’t do. And nobody would have any knowledge of what led up to that death. Oh, and buddy, don’t act like you don’t want to die. There’s a revolver in the compartment next to the toilet.”

Toilet. That reminds me of the fact that, in a fury beyond my own will, I broke the suction tube, so I was left with my feces in plastic bags. Oh, David Bowie, it wasn’t just a tin-can-of-a-spaceship. It was a toilet bowl.

How long ago was it that I passed the moon?

Well, if the calculations of those earth-bound scientists were correct, that would have been on the third day. And it definitely wasn’t long after that when my billion-dollar capsule bumped into some space rock. In the moment, I wouldn’t have perceived this abrupt jostling of my vehicle as a gift, or even a miracle. But it was. For when I hit it, the capsule began to spin, and the sun would rise and set in a matter of seconds through the view of my window. Rise. Set. Rise. Set.

Nine thousand, five hundred and sixty-seven.

Nine thousand, five hundred and sixty-seven sunrises, matched with the inevitable sunset that would come as the capsule spun and the sun disappeared from the view of the window.

So it had been some time, I figure. Some time since I flew completely adjacent to my destination. And it will be some time until the gun next to the toilet seems like something to cherish rather than fear.

Until that moment when I choose to pick up arms against myself and the horrors of my existence, I try to console myself and find security in the untethered, unbounded flight of an American astronaut. That is, an American astronaut whose scientists tragically miscalculated his route. Was it a mere unit of measurement inconsistency that brought me to my terrible position?

Was my destination the moon at all? Or was it someplace else in the system? Yes, yes. Perhaps it was Mars. There’s been talk for some time about the exploration of Mars. I think I’m supposed to go to Mars. The Red Planet. And when I streak past that terrestrial being with a renewed dumbfoundedness, I’ll look to Jupiter as my lord and savior.

Until then, which will be millions of sunrises away, I’ll try not to consume myself with the terrifying truth that rises up in my gut. The terrifying realization that I left everything behind when I thought I was heading to-

ward everything. Since I am truly headed nowhere, the unavoidable conclusion is that I did indeed leave everything behind. And with this understanding, my truest feeling of loss is found.

Oh, how I long to feel my back against the bark of an oak, my toes slipping underneath the water of a creek, a soft breeze kissing my face. Oh, how I yearn for the smell of lavender to float into my nostrils. Oh, how I tire for the chance to hear the patter of rain on my window.

“Thanks for breaking the watch,” I say after possibly days of silence.

“You’re welcome,” replies the bearded madman in the window.

“I would’ve killed myself a long time ago if I knew how long it’s been since...”

“I know.”

The moon is pretty far away from Earth. Mars is further. Jupiter, much more so. My food won’t last much longer. My water’s absence will come sooner. Should I let nature take over and wait for starvation to kill me? Or should I have mercy on myself at this moment? Ah, I’ll save that philosophical debate for another day when hell’s mouth opens to accept yet another sorrowful man from nowhere, who was heading nowhere, and in no distinct measure of time.