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Title: Beyond the Window

Beyond the Window

by Tucker Cornell

A Science-Fiction story incorporating the lyrics of the song,

“Space Oddity”, written by David Bowie

Breathe. Breathe Tom.

Breathe, her voice is saying. It is the sweetest and smoothest song, sung in a simple word. Breathe. I need to breathe.

“Ground Control to Major Tom...” a voice cuts out and then there is the sound of static. “Ground Control to Major Tom...” the man says. Breathe... breathe. Just breathe.

“Yes.. yes I’m here.” It’s all I say. My throat feels as if it’s collapsing. I need to breathe.

“Take your protein pills, and put your helmet on...” The man says to me.

“Right... of course.” I put on my helmet, it makes a smooth sound when it shuts. I look to my left. The pills are a bright orange color. Just like my wife’s hair. Except the pills are too bold, it’s not as soothing. It’s not right.

“Ground Control to Major Tom... “ The voice says once more. I swallow the pills quickly.

“I’m here... I’m ready.” I say to him. My voice sounds confident, but I don’t believe it. I do not want to leave, but what would my life be worth if I gave up now, gave up everything I’ve worked towards and trained for.

“Commencing countdown.” Static.

“Engines on...” More static sings as I flip a nearby switch.

“Check ignition....” Static. I tell myself everything is fine.

“...and may God’s love be with you.” The deep voice pleads and then there is silence.

“And may God’s love be with you...” I whisper to myself. “And may God’s love be, with you...” I touch the photo of my wife that is hung in front of me. I took the photo last winter. We had gone to the beach in the middle of the night and she had told me to bring my camera before we left. It was freezing cold and salty everywhere, but she said she had something to show me. It was the stars. They looked amazing. They looked like jewels hung up in the sky. Pearly and milky white. They made me feel at peace. She was so happy, she knew how much it meant to me. I took a photo of her after we made a bonfire. She wanted me to take pictures of the stars, but she didn’t understand that they would last for years and years while nothing was for sure about her. I wanted a photo to make a mark in time, to make her a

little more permanent. Her hair was brilliant with the fire framing her face and the flash of the camera and the stars. It all shined so bright and wonderfully. Everything was beautiful.

“Ten...” My mind is brought back to focus. “Nine, eight,” The voice says to me. “seven...” Breathe Tom. “six...” Breathe...”five, four, three, two...” I can’t hear the man say one before I feel the lift off. My head starts to feel like it is being pushed into my neck, as if it is being stretched and compacted into a swirl body of it’s own. My body feels tense. It is frigid; frightened, hot, due to the pressure and force moving around me. I see flashes of her. Flashes of black and flashes of myself turning knobs and flipping switches and the sounds of myself shouting to the rest of the crew. It’s as if a disco ball has been placed in the middle of my mind and now all I see are glimpses of earth, space, fear and controls.

It takes seven days; 12 hours, 27 minutes and 32 seconds to reach the moon. Seven days; 12 hours, 27 minutes and 32 seconds of flashing lights and control. Seven days; 12 hours, 27 minutes and 32 seconds of stars and planets and the picture of Earth’s face from far above. Seven days; 12 hours, 27 minutes and 32 seconds of thoughts about my wife.

I turn my head to look out the window, the Earth is large and blue and right in front of me. Just like it has been since we left. It is not any less amazing of a sight, but it leaves an unsettling feeling in my stomach.

Earth has never felt like home. At least, not since the day my mother left dad and I. I can still remember that day. It was cold out, early in the morning. We lived in Iowa then. I almost didn’t wake up to see her leave, but we lived in an old house and every move you made was broadcasted through the rickety floors and had woken me up. When I saw her glowing white hair outside in the gray sky, I started running. I knew there was something wrong. My fathers enclosing arms wrapped around me, preventing me from running to her. She turned back once and smiled. She then blew me a kiss, I caught it and placed it on my heart. She laughed at that, a really quiet and sad laugh. Her piercing black eyes darted away quickly and I never saw her again, the last memory I have is an image of her walking into the corn field and leaving forever.

I do not miss the Earth. I do not miss the house in Iowa, but I do not want to be stuck out here in space for much longer. I feel empty and alone in this vast darkness. I’m just a face in a small window looking out, into a void of unknown blackness flowering like poison ivy in an abandoned play ground.

One of the men in my crew yells at me, we are getting ready to land on the moon. I secure myself in my seat and turn a knob. It is completely automatic; when I think about the action too much I can’t remember why I did it in the first place and so I do not to think but instead I keep moving. I move my hands, shout, focus on the controls and my crew until we are ready. We are landing. Landing on the surface of invention. I feel different this time. Different than I did during the lift off. I feel the anticipation of the landing and the force of everything around us. It gets hot again, but we are slowing down. The surface of the moon gets closer and closer. I can see marks and crevasses and what looks like gray desert and hills. I can see small details of the patchy ground and I hear silence. We did it. We have landed.

“This is ground Control to Major Tom...” A familiar voice says to me. “You’ve really made the grade!” I blink once or twice while my crew shouts and sings. I turn around and smile.

“Do the papers want to know whose shirts I wear?” I say to Ground Control and jokingly to my crew. They smile and laugh, I feel their excitement rushing through me. We are all screeching like children over the static and occasional sounds of voices shouting on the radio.

“Now it’s time to leave the capsule...” The deep staggering voice says to me. “...if you dare...”

While my comrades are laughing and excitedly moving behind me, I put on my suit. All I can hear are the words that deep voice just said to me. I now realize that I have worked my whole life for this moment and now I am here. I move over to the door. Slow and patiently. I see my left foot move in front of me and then my right. I am walking towards the door of beginning. I am the star man. I will open the door to a new day. I look up and there it is. I am in front of the door that separates the gray hills from mankind and it’s future. I place my hand on the lever. Slowly the door opens and everything is silent. There is nothing between myself and the moon now. I walk outside of the capsule, and it is glorious.

“This is Major Tom to Ground Control...” I stammer. “I’m stepping through the door...And I’m floating in the most peculiar way...” Images of my wife flash through my mind. “And the stars look very different today...” I tell them. I see my mother here, the gray surface reminds me of the fog that surrounded my mother the day she left. “For here I am sitting in a tin can... Though I’m past, one hundred thousand miles,” I look around at the moon. I step on the grey bindings of the moon's surface. “I’m feeling very still...” I am crying. “And I think my spaceship knows which way to go.” I am crying and laughing at the same time. I can feel the tickle in my throat and the salty tears on my face, it drips down to my mouth and I taste it to remember what the night at the beach felt like. But to remember something so human now feels unnatural. Even the memory of my mother feels unhuman. This gray ocean feels safe and comforting. I have no doubt of the mission anymore, I miss my wife but that is okay. I need to share this amazement with my friends.

“Tell my wife I love her very much...” I say. “She knows” But I do not think I will be the same once I get back to earth, the ground and the sky won’t look as special. The only comfort I’ll find will be in my dreams. When I dream of all these stars and dream of my wings. And I will fly all the way back to this day, again and again.

“Ground Control to Major Tom...Your circuit's dead...” the man says, but he doesn't sound familiar anymore. “Theres something wrong, can you hear me Major Tom?” I feel the air rush out of my mouth in a small gasp. “Can you hear me Major Tom?” I turn my head slightly to my side and imagine my comrades following behind me. “Can you hear me Major Tom?” I begin to look back, I can still feel the smile that was stretched across my face. “Can you...” The voice of the man begins to disappear. I look back and the door to our capsule is open, but no one has followed me.

“Here I am floating...” I say to myself. There are only blue and disoriented mannequin like people inside the capsule. Cold and un-expecting. “Here I am floating round my tin can...” I feel the tears begin to form in my eyes once again, but they are bitter this time and I don't like the images they form in my head. My comrades are sitting still strapped to their seats, bitten with death and touched by the unmerciful wrath of this cold place. Touched by my simple mistake.

“Planet Earth is blue...” I whisper, “...and there’s nothing I can do.”

“Planet Earth is blue?” An angelic voice sings behind me. I look back and in the dark shadows of the moon there is a womans face, for some reason my heart seems to sigh in relief. I glide over to the

glowing silhouette, flying into the summoning darkness. She has jet black eyes, I can see myself inside them. Her hands move towards my helmet, I feel the warmth of her touch through the barrier. Her eyes shine into mine and her white silk air engulfs me.

“Planet earth is blue...Where have you been?” I ask her. She smiles slightly at my question.

“Welcome home, my love. I’ve been waiting.” She sings and as she takes off my helmet I take a breath.

