The Space Traveler’s Contented Moments

Think of the way your thumb held in front of you can cover the moon. Granted, humans have big thumbs and a small moon, but there you are: in a corn field, celestial bodies disappearing behind your digits. At some distance above the Earth (if you looked down) your left foot would blot North America. And farther up, the planet become so small you could stand on it only as a ballerina, aloft on a toe. A little farther, and you, human, would become a space traveler. So it is, sometimes, this ship displaces the universe around it: so far from all, the universe recedes into a tangle—a string of your Christmas lights balled up in a box to stow for next year. But lit. And here’s the odd part—it does that even though I’m inside it, a speck somewhere amid brightness and writhing wire. These moments are unstable; they puncture; are frail to corrosion by elements that would extend your periodic table into a lord’s banquet. But, human, more than once I have wished to take you up with me, to share how what startles with immensity can balance, cat’s eye, on the palp of one finger.

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The Space Traveler and the Doppler Effect

Because waves flatten as they move past, the falsetto spiraling down to a gravelly uttered base, I’m hard put to say how anything sounds—even the voices of those I know most intimately as we move toward or away from each other: approach and departure distorting the notes to birdsong or thunder. If two bodies were momentarily perfectly still, only then it seems could you have it: the actual timbre. I imagine the two of us on his floor, for a moment static—not so much as aging at unequal rates—and my body arced to receive every decibel, the full wood grain of his voice, so I could trace knots, the looser and tighter lines, finger years of drier and wetter weather. I said on his floor, but of course we’d be on a bed: drifting in the noiseless vacuum of space, undistracted even by each other’s eyes.

On his planet there’s no patience for such romantic claptrap; they never bothered to outlaw sonnets because the whole population simply lost interest in them—but I think he may be a closet heretic. I think he still remembers the day I crash-landed my ship in his drainage ditch, and he came out with a pailful of tools and never once appeared to notice that I was an alien. Later, on his dark patio, he took hold of one of my wiry appendages and told me that he loved me. But I didn’t catch the words. I didn’t need to. I was moved to perfect stillness by his tone of voice.
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