

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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