

The Heart of a Poet

I think with the mind of a blacksmith.
I depend on the tangible, the physical.
I need answers that can be plunged into the forge,
then emerge malleable and ready to be worked.

I see with the eyes of a painter.
The stunning colors and forms of everyday life
call out to me, masterpiece landscapes
and poignant portraits aching to be remembered.

I hear with the ears of a bat.
I call out into the darkness,
waiting to hear sounds to guide me
and help me find my way.

I taste with the lips of nature.
I have simple tastes and
plain penchants,
with cravings straight from the earth.

I feel with the heart of a poet.
I can only dream and hope,
desperately searching for
a free and joyful world.

The Golden Scales

A small golden shiner
is caught by a little boy
with a bamboo fishing rod.
“Oh look, Daddy! Oh look!
Look at its golden scales!”
he cries, the fish reflecting back
blinding rays of light.
“Oh, think not of it.
See how the scales come off in your hand?
They aren’t to be admired,”
quips the father smartly.
A little of the fish’s shimmer
is lost from the boy’s eyes.
“Oh but, Daddy!
It must be the most beautiful fish
in the pond!”
the boy exults.

“Oh no, son! Oh, no!
It lives in schools.
There are probably
a hundred in this pond,”
the father returns.
The scales dim to a murky yellow.
“Oh, Daddy! Oh, can we keep it, please?”
pleads the boy, aglow with anticipation.
“Oh no, son!
This will be good bait
for a fishing trip another day,”
answers the father decidedly.
The boy now sees
a dull, grayish minnow in his hands,
as common as the freckles on his nose.
The last gleam of its golden scales
floats away on a lazy summer wind,
as the golden shiner
becomes just another catch.

The Forget-me-nots of the Angels

The man stared blankly out the window as the stars swept passed. For six solid months he had seen much of the same: stars, always stars, rushing past in lines of light outside the small porthole; an occasional nebula appearing as a cloudy murk, obscuring the streaking stars. The one truly intriguing event had occurred a few weeks after their launch when they had passed a star system with a big, gorgeous blue star surrounded by much smaller, iridescent planets making wide, loping paths around it.

It was all so beautiful and menacing, familiar and exotic, exciting and austere. He had been born to do this. Ever since he was a little boy, the stars had captivated him and drew his gaze upward. He had dreamed of becoming an astronaut or studying the stars. Everything in his life up to that point had directed him towards the outer reaches of the universe; he could not get away from it or forsake it. When he had finally been accepted into the NASA astronaut program, his dreams had finally been achieved. He could now actually go to space, the object of his lifelong fascination. His first journey to the moon settlements had marked the physical realization of all those nights imagining himself skipping along in the one-sixth lunar gravity. How could he have known the extraordinary opportunity that was to present itself but a year later?

This journey was to have been the pinnacle of all his spatial desires. He remembered vividly the day they had “officially” announced the mission (everyone at NASA had known about it for months), his elation and eagerness, and then his conversation with his wife.

“How long will it be this time? I hope it’s not much more than a couple weeks. The boys go absolutely crazy when you’re not here,” she told him, turning away from the stove to glance at the two young children playing with space-themed Legos. Immediately his burning desire turned

to ice in his chest. He remained silent, unable to tell her the details of the mission. He watched her stir the simmering sauce as the boys giggled and made explosion sounds behind them.

“Well? Aren’t you going to tell me how long it is?” she snapped, putting down her spoon. One look into his eyes and she knew exactly what held the words within him. “Greg, tell me how long and where you’re going.”

He hesitated but finally released the devastating answer. “Five years,” he whispered softly. “To Luyten 726A.” An uncertain silence hung in the air like a wintry fog.

“Five years?” she repeated at last. It was another couple minutes before she could say anything else. “Show me. Let’s go outside, so you can show me.” She strode towards the door, but he remained frozen to the floor. “Greg, come show me!” The tears started to fall from her wide, terrified eyes.

“I can’t show you. You-” He faltered in the enormity of what he was trying to tell her. “It can’t be seen from Earth without a telescope.”

“What?” she screamed at him hysterically. “You can’t even see it? Greg, you can’t do this to us! You can’t go there! I won’t let you. No, no! Don’t touch me!” she yelled at him as he tried to comfort her. By now the two boys’ imaginary space battle had abruptly ended as they observed the struggle between their parents. “Look at our boys, Greg. Look at them! They are only 5 and 7 years old! They’ll barely even remember you when you come back! *When* you come back: what am I saying? *If* you come back. And me – do you really want to leave me all alone to take care of our boys and our house and everything else? I – I-” Her sobs finally overtook her as she sank to the floor from the force of her emotions.

He went to her almost in tears himself; the only thing he could think to do was just to hold her. With her cheek pressed against his chest, she whispered, “I can’t do this without you. I love you so much. If you didn’t come back, I wouldn’t make it. I know I wouldn’t. And then what would happen to our boys?” These final sentiments tore at his heart and squeezed his lungs.

He had felt heavily the innate contradictions of this mission. On the one hand, he was fulfilling his destiny, answering the call of the multitudinous stars. He could not ignore this aching pull at him: it had held a fierce grip on him for many years. How could he have abandoned it then, with all his training and the products of his life’s ambitions dragging him away from the gravitational confines of Earth?

On the other side stood his wife and his sons. Sure, he would be able to speak with them for a while and then exchange letters and pictures, but he would be leaving them alone. He would not be able to physically touch them, to kiss his wife or to tousle his sons’ hair, for five, long years. Their lives and his would change dramatically when he left for deep space; if he returned, it would never be the same between them in their small, close-knit family. Regardless of these bleak facts, he was meant to take this journey; he had been created just for this purpose. And that was why he had taken the mission six months ago and left his family behind.

As the days had turned to weeks and the weeks to months, he had tried to keep his mind focused on his mission because thinking about his forlorn wife and the faces of his children as he entered the shuttle all those months ago made his soul ache. He now sat on his small bunk at the base of the ship staring out the window to the depths of blackness without, his thoughts turned to the mission. As he envisaged his first steps on the alien planet and the wonders that would engulf his senses, a smile crept at the corners of his lips, and his heart leapt for joy.