

Daniel Altenburg

Apollo Mission

Esmé, give me the bodies, and you'll get a landscape.
The cockpit at dusk. The interior
of a mouth, another's,
that gallops in a tongue
to break one in.
A porch light through the horizon
golds-up.

Don't worry: Tomorrow,
you'll be a girl and I'll be a rabbit.
Tomorrow, you'll be a girl
and my wrist will still crane a snifter.
You'll be the girl tomorrow
out searching every hole in the oak
through the feather grass and cicadas, saying,
"I told you I'd be back."

But I'm now approaching lunar sunrise,
marching my mouth along its ridges
and eating her over-ripe nectarine.
Serene, I can no longer pull myself from this hat;
the flag doesn't flutter from wind
and there's proof. That Frank hadn't photo-imposed
crosshairs on you.

You say, "But you haven't a star
in the photo." 'Honey,
adjust your shutter speed.
They're there.' There, there. There

Clap for my disappearing man act. I applauded
your flight.

Through the static, Esmé, 'Yes,
I live you too.'

God bless all of you. All of you on the good Earth.

And I will end with a reading from Genesis.

Genesis Rock

I am the man picking up the teenage daughters
and murdering them by roadside.
I am the man disarmed
by the boys you've chosen over me.
Esmé, I've now read myself into this club song, cabin song;
there's the 60s sampling!
I'm sorry. I know you were asking of our NASAed planets.
But if you'd just help peel this flight suit.
But we've only just reached the moon.
But SOS is so unnecessary.
But our recovery missions are nowhere near as epileptic.
But *The most successful manned flight ever achieved*.
Impressive. But
say this through the breathing tube of an upturned glass.
Esmé, quit wriggling. I just want one selfish choke.
When I say, 'Esmé, die,' I mean
let's celebrate you like a severed teenage girl.
The s's sucked up in a smile like, yes,
something has been spilled.
Grin pretty your glimmer.
But restrict the air
to enrich the fuel-air mixture.
This engine has lasted for years.
But shaky. I choke my dick three times daily
and tell you.
Feel the dead technology.
Hear the bass bump superseding heartbeat.
Patrons cough on the exhaust and plug their ears
but not their other orifices.
But you wad your florals like I'm skipping through a forest.
I am the man pressing your best dress against spilt liquids.
I man my craft just fine, pull out in time,
and plenty of oxygen to kill off millions.
But I sell off my moon souvenirs to put my kids through college;
sustained the pride of our Anorthosite
(despite its faulty lineage).
I grin my pride into the girls at night,
hammered in the backroom.

But proved Galileo with a feathering towards vestige.
But planted our "Fallen Astronaut"
plaque and statue.
Aggrandized victim: these are not the men we've lost.
Eight American. Six are Cosmonauts
with two left off.
Just as equal, these are different.
My children hate your children.
We'll have it out in Hadley Rille.

Satellite II

Haven't touched your veggies yet,
my sweet.

 All things healthy reduced to their sex:
The Barramundi swim up your dress.
The Enceladians about your waist then neck.
And it's all sounding so good in blueprint.

In this transmission, you stop driving at what's killing you.
The gin down the drain, and drain

 not a euphemism.
 Pipe not the sly.

The meat fats a drip
 in the pan
 unclean
 and trashed.

You remark about your early morning beach run.
The shaved coconut.

 The names that remind
how well one can do as a non-malcontent. Your word,
sweetness, at least
 for now.

Inside this transmission, your oils run clean,
the earth, pure.

 Your god
 as something a part of you.

And the phrases vaguely aware of their correlates: *apart from,*
trashed before, shaved.

The beach runners note your eyes above the dusked up earth.
Everything reduced to its sex, the sperm

 that leaks in
and leaks out,
as these are separate instances.

Such actions, however, aren't a part of this transmission.
Every Apollo makes it,
takes you to dinner, the salads,
the one glass of wine, the taste
of dessert, the peck at your door. Names
that retain
 and retain, despite the weather.

Pajama bottoms on,
the Enceladians to cuddle up to.
Their care, like parents',
 build you a planet
only needing one Apollo.
And when they slip from your bed,
almost out the door, in dark, you beg
 to hear of your god again.

In breath: *If I recall, yes—
is good and strong
like gin*

Tarmac & Snow

The wet stamped shower rug.
The clutch of mango laundered into your towel.
Your morning coffee; drying fog.

Esmè, I'm trying to catch our history under glass. I'm sorry,
it left us
like the dust off a blade.

The prop spins clockwise. Your sweet face.
You've got pretty eyes.

I let go, the sound of birds.
No, I let the turbines
go churning their brothers along.

The resin stripe pulled up.
The blackened lost crowns of tread.
The teeth, the drinks swelter to cologne.

How can one describe curvaceousness
without first exploring how fat's stored,
the peopled ground?

Esmè, you can follow. You can follow
if you want.

Satellite 19

You light the rocket on the top, string the fuse clockwise down the mountain, and wait for hours. For night. As the rocket will know when to fly. Wearing something magnanimous and yellow, you're off to another sovereign moon, and tell me it's called a sundress.

In this last transmission, you decide which crew members are expendable. You have offed the ironic, terrified navigator; sent the sergeant out the airlock to conserve oxygen. Turned to him, just once, as he went airless. These acts, of course, are as dramatic as a plug of light. "I'm tired of asking you to keep your hands to yourself," you said. You said, "I'll turn this ship around." That's what I liked best.

"But," you ask a window, "what of my Apollo?" The SoCo and gin pulls from a medicine bottle, not as mockery but as a reminder that he is sick. Dying. Dead and aborted out the cargo hatch.

It would be fitting for this transmission to allow his name, just once, without your cutting out. But Saturn's far side, and you're still stuck knowing me, our exchange via oxygen mask.

In this last transmission, you've grown up. You can reach the throttle now; can understand if one Apollo goes, all capsules follow. So you think hard of how to create a new capsule of man, note a woman's mouth and man's are separate entities until pressed, bled. So that's just what you plan, and dress the capsule in intricate clothing with simple speech, as he will be a proper brainchild.

While he gestates, you find another window with your mouth and expel hot fog onto it. Draw a heart shape and initials. You ask the jet engines what they know of love and how much thrust they've got left. They don't answer, but your drink mouth radiates like it's nuclear. And sweet progeny, there aren't precipices in this space, just winglets and girdles and yes, another drink, thanks.

In time, the capsule births an Apollo. And you call him that to clear your head, only once considering some last name like *beta-test*. At first speech, his eyes entertain so much you neglect to correct your capsule's pronunciations, intonations, *Nu-clear*, and, at best, he sounds like an idling machine. But the man is kind, built, and oh god, handsome.

You return to the window and wonder if you're like me, out conflating *love* and *live* with your fresh-pucker, seeking something less common, less vulgar. You consider your now family, the capsule of perfect you intend to birth something with. There are planned children in your future. "Nuclear family," you chuckle. You have made it. But you pronounce it nu-CU-lar when you mouth it.

Upon landing, you say, "There's just something about the southern sky, something old." And your Apollo walks you off into the Saturnian sunset. In his mountain of arms, he asks if he may bed you, is genteel and ever-alluring like, yes, nuclear fusion.

But you roll your eyes like landed tires, already channeling a common tongue. Already corrected your own voice. "Simple fuck," you say, "It's nu-CLEAR." And doesn't it feel good to be right? Rather correct?

Ether

We are swimming in a lake on Enceladus, but the whole planet's a lake. Ocean, rather, is under ice, but we've found ice caves. And no, Esmè, we still have our clothes on in this dark cold water. But god, the ice is thinnest towards the southern roof, and I can just see the sweat off your eyelid, the light opaquing off Titan.

*

The Enceladians see you with your body shaking within the water. They've seen you light years out. They love you like the child they cannot have: our bias wet on their foreheads like a loosening kiss. But they love you, and will only ask to see your parts if you are so willing.

*

I have finally wrestled your top from you, and now you in chilling light. The word *erect* does not come to mind, the scarps turning dark in the ever-winter. And I do not care, and you do not care, splashing the child in me like a child, a child who has just learned how breasts function, and is rude.

*

You take off your clothes and show the Enceladians just everything. This is not sexual. You lay back against the rock formation that reclines comfortably, your feet even atop a wide ottoman, and let them open you up. Again, this is not sexual. You are the god in the lack of light, the hum of an overhead projector, explaining the crevices, the tubes, the ducts, the folds, the things that go unnamed in the dark. But the Enceladians, ever-curious, crane a naked bulb like a sun, washing you out with all their vitreous bodies, and blinks.

*

Esmè, I'd been floating on my back in the dark lake, squinting my eyes to make out the stars through the ice, the scrambled channels. And when I imagined Pleiades you were no longer treading. You've splashed out. You're at the shaved ice beach, bringing a towel to your chest like a child. In the most recent transmissions, you look back at me.

*

In this transmission, I spell *girl* with a *u*. I spill a girl's history onto you, and, in this transmission, the radio goes warm with handling. But the Enceladians have figured it out: birth out of sex and the whatnots of courtship, a pickup line, lingered stare, your rufied drink. Willingness aside, in this transmission, you're willing. They glance your whatnots as study, pointing at, as if at glass, your uterus, fallopian tubes, labia, and all the ovum, even your clitoris; the pleasure in this; the vulgar in the body. You confess your history, favorite drink, mother's maiden name, that you are a girl, written with an *i*. Unaware of its meaning, they appreciate this distinction, and you think: I really have yet to confess anything.

*

Esmè, I know you don't think space crafts as ships, but I have heard the sirens within the cave. Even on my back with my ears dipped, their voices reverberate like two pelvis bones striking. I know you think this is a story, but in this transmission, all the pain and tears and sex are real. Even the liquids. Esmè, I'm sorry, but I came in the lake, and now all the sirens are pregnant.

*

You thank the Enceladians graciously for their gentle hands, but not in a way any woman's ever thanked before, because on Enceladus they don't have sex; they gawk at the redundancy of the cumshot, the incessant hair-pulling, bodies rolled into brick or your mother's fresh wallpaper, how glue works between fingers, even strobed club walls coloring as easily as ice. You thank the Enceladians for their curiosity of the body, of the body that makes, of the difference between sex and fucking, because the Enceladians have never buried anything before, besides their dead, and so you cave when they ask you to lie back, once more, this won't even pinch.

*

Esmè, in this transmission, I've conflated the *ands* with *buts*. The sirens are actually nymphs with darling voices. They are not pregnant; they wail that they're from Venus, and take pills that kill semen. Esmè, this is good, but every time I dive underneath and a star shines up a gurl's body, I cannot help but think the loss of children. It must be something in the water, something slowly melting by the mounting heat of a star. And these nymphs now look like sisters, the seven of Pleiades. Yes, even the faint one.

*

You think about the Enceladians dying out like how gods die out. You mouth a most recent pickup line about heaven, but only the *did it hurt* part, and some Enceladians hum over your open mouth like a florescent, some by your legs, open as well, the projector's fan on. They say, *be calm*, and you mouth, *be calm*, but this is all coming out like a damn pickup line. And when you close your eyes, you feel the familiar push you equate to pulling on a t-shirt, but you've been topless from the get go. And you moan this concern nebulous. And this is everything swirled, and loved, and abandoned, and and, and and, and and.

*

Esmè, I hold my breath like a small child. I carry the water about my body. I try not to present myself as distended when speaking to the nymphs, who, in this transmission, tell me they *are* sisters, each glowing like a rave tube under water. Esmè, I'm sorry, I mean the flares that stay lit when wet, the stars that light, for years, even after death. What's it I fear, Esmé? I fear my shotless mouth. I float like a radio in water before the water finds its casing. This is not the case this time. I'm sorry, this time it is sexual.

*

The Enceladians introduce you to the being who was just inside you, the darkening shadow, who looks like me and feels like me, has my saliva's flavoring, but isn't. He kisses your forehead because that's what is expected. And sweaty Esmè, your green eyes dilate, heave, your nose itches with residual swells in skin pigmentation. The world so cutaneous, he kisses you again. And you're still, lying, hair at a static cling, still quiet like a blueprint, your daily phone alarm going off, and you, another orthotricyclen, another way out.

*

Esmè, the sisters've named me *nacreous darling* after my jawline, or semen, or rocket or soul, all in the depleting cave light, but I just can't seem to distinguish their tongues. I kiss one's forehead because I'm a nice guy, my finger still in her vagina. But they ask me not to term it that. Perhaps *cunt*. Perhaps just *inside her*, and wink. But this sister, the faint one, faints and sinks her abandoned hull to the bottom, and her sisters shriek to tell me it's because of my fingers: their work on the upturned rocks, on scarps, the faces touched with makeup, some mustard under nail, on a bus' handrails, your father's auger, your pet dog's

dander, the seatback headrest in the rocket, on the rocket, Nacreous Darling, pushing my world's names into her.

*

The experiment a failure. The Enceladians've confused *organism* with *orgasm*, and your 5th grade heart snickers. But you forgive them, kissing one on the forehead like a sister, as this is their first attempt at breeding pleasure out of sex. And you're off like a joke. You gather your things and catch the next shuttle to Earth, leaving a note that would explain the nature of fertility if their tears didn't freeze, weren't so cumbersome, if sterility and fertility didn't rhyme in this transmission.

*

Esmè, the sisters ask me if I've ever seen vitreous bodies like theirs before, but I know the joke and stare each in the iris. One gurl doesn't look back, but mourns the loss of her sister. One clears her throat and hums like a false moon. Four others join in in chorus, and the cave begins to shake. The ice coming down like decompression sickness. The last one, though, blinks twice, explains that though her sister's gone, she still won't use condoms, as the pleasure of being a woman is risk. 'I don't either,' I explain. But Esmè, in this transmission, I leave out the *i*, even pronounce it *ether*. The one, such a darling, replies: *When you are ready to blame your parents, just— Just fucking don't.*