



## Life on the Moon

### a short story by Tony Daniel

#### ***The Big Empty* by Henry Colterman**

If I ventured into the Big Empty,  
a smaller movement between hard and fast stars,  
if I ventured to the moon, and the dust of the moon,  
and to those smooth ceramic halls, those lustrous and benign  
spaces,  
or to the evaporated surface,  
the empty mineral stretch and score,  
would I find you?

Are you still in the valence between spaces? I would kiss the  
fall of your hair; I would lie  
beside you in the silence,  
and trace with my fingertip your lips' surge and fall.  
I would pull you gently from the undermass,  
the crystal and stone, like a spiderweb from foliage, like breath  
from a sleeper.  
If I ventured to the Big Empty,  
I would never stop looking for you, Nell.

Nell was skinny and wan. Her hair was brown, darkening to black, and her eyes were brown and sad. Henry did not understand why he loved her, for he had always considered himself a shallow man when it came down to it, with a head turned by shallow beauty and flashy teeth and eyes. Nell was a calm, dark pool. She was also probably the greatest artist of her generation, though, and when one had the extraordinary luck to claim such a woman's regard, one made exceptions.

They met at a faculty mixer in St. Louis. Henry was a visiting poet at Washington University's graduate writing program. Nell, already quite famous in her professional circles, had given a lecture that day at the architecture school-- a lecture that Henry had studiously avoided. Nell had not read any of Henry's poetry, for that matter, but few people had. If anything, twenty-first century poets were more obscure and unknown than their predecessors had been.

But both knew the other by reputation, and, being the only people at the mixer who were not involved in the intricacies of academic policy skirmishes, the two of them ended up in a corner, talking about corners.

"Why do they have to be ninety degrees," Henry asked. He leaned against one wall, trying to appear nonchalant, and felt his drink slosh over his wrist. For the first time, Henry regretted that he was not a man brought up to be comfortable on the insides of buildings.

"They don't," Nell replied. "But there are good reasons they mostly are." For some reason, Nell's face seemed lacking in some way, as if the muscles and tendons were strung out and defined, but weren't really supporting anything of importance. Odd.

"Structural reasons?"

"Why are there laps, when we sit down?"

Henry knew then that he was going to like her, despite her peculiar

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