

## The Traveller

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I set in the destination at random. All I need is to be anywhere but here. Away. Gone. I hear the gears grind, and the roar of the engine, but I might be imagining them. Everything feels numb, and all I can register is that I am shaking. Their face is burned onto my frontal lobe, full of callousness and ice. As if they had never cared at all about me. I had to go, get away. Escape whatever pity waited for me with those who knew us, escape the contempt I never imagined could exist.

I come back to my body eventually. It might have been minutes, it might have been hours that I spent staring at the hatch, the door that led back to some sort of reality. It's yellow, and I find myself wondering why I decided it should be. I don't think I ever liked yellow. Did they? Never mind. I stand up, and as my hips creak their disapproval, I reach for the handle and pull the door open. There isn't much light outside, and as my feet land on the sifting sand, I stagger before catching my balance.

There are stars, more than I've ever seen in my life—a rainbow of tiny sparkling lights shining down on me. I pick out planets. The moon hangs low, its face looking down in curiosity at this interloper. I used to love the moon and stars, but they remind me of them. We went starwatching once, in 1922, in the Atacama Desert. They fell asleep in my arms. I had felt so completely at peace then, and they had seemed more beautiful than the universe. What did they think of me? I had thought I knew.

I avert my gaze and look out at the expanse of land itself— for it is an expanse, vast and empty. Hills of blue-grey go on for eons, silent, watching me, mountains that blur into giants through my bleary eyes, looming large and wonderfully unfeeling. I am in a valley, I realize slowly, and I am far from anything but these dunes. I sit and feel the sand, hoping for comfort, but it is cold and hard, and I liken myself to it, feeling a companionship with this alienated strip of land.

At first, it seems as though there's an absence of noise. There is a quality to this

silence that I have never experienced—unending, an ocean of quiet. But as I lie down and close my eyes, I am proven wrong. The wind is here, and it sounds like the surf. In darkness, waves lap at some distant shore, or right in front of me. I can't tell. I open my eyes, and it dances away to hide between dunes, whistling an age-old song. Once I might have been put off by this eerie hum.

They used to look forward to the pictures I took of my trips, when they didn't come along. I showed them pictures of cities of ruby glass, of a newly carved sphinx, the skyline of a long-crumbled metropolis that used to be called... what was it? New Amsterdam, maybe? It didn't matter. The pictures never mattered to me. Weren't for me. They had always smiled, flipping through their history books to find their own reference, promising to frame their favourites.

I take out my camera and snap a picture.

