

(Withheld) 1970

by Michael K. White

The Moon

The hatch of the lunar module hissed as it opened, a few puffs of leftover water vapor escaped toward them in a sparkling white cloud that rapidly dissolved like tiny fireworks in the vacuum of space. Astronaut (*Withheld*) was very tired. They had been on the moon for over two hours and it had been a surreal dream like experience. Astronaut (*Withheld*) wondered if there even was such a thing as reality anymore.

Astronaut (*Withheld*) had performed all of his mission tasks, working efficiently. He saw to some photographs, the core samples, rock collecting and setting up the seismometer, the ultra violet ray collector, the flag, among many other tasks. The Astronauts had to work briskly. This was the money time and they needed to go home with something to show for it. He was aware of what was happening and where he was, but it didn't really feel real to him. Astronaut (*Withheld*) wondered if there even was such a thing as reality anymore.

He could look up into the black velvet sky, a sky so black that he didn't understand the meaning of the word black until now. He would stare at the Earth, which looked like a drop of water suspended in the night, lit from within like a charming Christmas ornament. He tried to wrap his mind around the fact that he was outside of his planet. To him, it was all just what it was. He didn't try to understand it too much. When he went there, he felt his mind and soul suddenly on the verge of something very large and very scary, just beyond the point of what he was able to understand about

anything. Astronaut (*Withheld*) wondered if there even was such a thing as reality anymore.

He was concentrating on these final few moments on the moon, knowing that nothing like this would ever happen to him again in his life. He wanted to remember. He wanted to imprint everything he saw and felt in his mind so he could recall it perfectly when he got back. He didn't know then that it would be like trying to recreate the intensity of a dream.

He stared intently at his footprints in the ashy powder of the lunar soil. As his partner struggled up the LEM's ladder into the open hatch, Astronaut (*Withheld*), reached into his rock bag and withdrew his own personal treasure that he had smuggled all the way from Houston. It was a roll of Quarters, not shiny new ones, but old ones from all over. Astronaut (*Withheld*) did not like shiny new coins. He liked to think about the journeys that these Quarters had made and how he had extended their journeys far beyond that of other, unluckier coins.

Because it was impossible to bend over in his pressure suit, Astronaut (*Withheld*) knelt and carefully opened the top of the plastic tube that contained the Quarters. He carefully scooped some lunar soil into the tube, coating the coins within in a thin layer of gray gunpowder smelling dust. Astronaut (*Withheld*) wondered if there even was such a thing as reality anymore.

His partner was almost through the hatch now and soon it would be his turn. Astronaut (*Withheld*) replaced the dusty tube of Quarters in his rock bag. He could sell them for a thousand dollars each when he got back to Texas. Maybe even pay off his house and buy a new set of decent golf clubs. The gray dusty ash-like dirt was all over everything. Looking up he again saw the Earth, in crescent, and his heart pounded as if he had just seen his lover. Astronaut (*Withheld*) wondered if there even was such a thing as reality anymore.

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