planet Earth is blue (and there's nothing I can do)

by hakyeonni

Summary

taekwoon avoids looking up at the earth, because it just reminds him of everything he left behind.

Notes

suggested listening: hello earth by kate bush

See the end of the work for more notes

“Houston, this is Horizon, do you read?”

Taekwoon catches Hakyeon’s glance at him from all the way across the other side of the module and turns back to the comm panel. It’s not his job to be doing this—he’s trained in the radios, of course, is trained to do everything, but he hates speaking to Houston—but he’s the one who noticed the warning light, so it’s up to him to broadcast it.

“Horizon, we read you loud and clear.”

“I’ve got a warning light on the oxygen generator for the LM.” He narrows his eyes at the offending light and flicks it with a finger, but it doesn’t even falter. “It’s not the bulb acting up again. Looks like a genuine warning this time.”

Hakyeon—shamelessly eavesdropping, although it’s not hard to when the Horizon is as small as it
is—floats over to him, peering at the light and pursing his lips. His hair, which he wears relatively short, floats loosely around his head. Even though Taekwoon’s been in zero-g for a week now, the sight is still mildly amusing; Hakyeon, and Wonshik by default, always look like they’re underwater. He supposes he looks the same, but he tries to avoid mirrors. “Fucking budget cuts,” Hakyeon sighs, and Taekwoon looks down to make sure his finger is off the mic button and they’re not broadcasting. “Will we ever get a moment’s peace?”

Their mission’s been plagued with issues from the start—for the first forty-eight hours, the comm panel liked to light up like a Christmas tree with warnings for everything from their shields to their oxygen generators to their thrusters, and they’d come very close to aborting before Houston had sheepishly informed them it was the lightbulbs going haywire and that all their systems were actually operational. Hakyeon, as Commander, had been livid; Taekwoon doesn’t know him very well, but the way he’d gone a fascinating shade of red had been enough to tell. Wonshik had just laughed, and had floated to the end of the ship to tinker with the electrics; the issue had been fixed after that, or so they’d thought. Wonshik’s first expedition to the surface had been riddled with issues—the Lunar Module’s engines hadn’t wanted to fire to bring him back to the Horizon, and Wonshik had had to do a repair while still in his spacesuit. Extravehicular activity, or EVA, was strictly scheduled, and Houston hadn’t liked that Wonshik nearly ran his oxygen tanks empty trying to get back to the damn ship, but none of them had liked the fact that he’d nearly died. They still hadn’t aborted, because Houston had declared the problem fixed—and to be fair, the LM ran smoothly after that, and the last three moon landings had been a resounding success.

With a wry smile, Taekwoon points to the patch stitched onto the breast of their clothes, and shakes his head. “This is our mission motto for a reason,” he mutters. *Per ardua ad astra*—through adversity to the stars. Taekwoon had suggested *per ardua ad luna*, considering they weren’t even going to any stars, but Hakyeon had just rolled his eyes and said that he wasn’t asking NASA to change it.

“Don’t know who I pissed off in the chain of command to get stuck with *this* mission,” Hakyeon snipes, but before Taekwoon can react looks up and winks.

Their names will be etched in the history books forever, even though they aren’t doing anything particularly noteworthy—nothing that’s not been done before, at least. The *Kratos* program is the first in a two-program plan to build a base on a moon, and as part of *Kratos* 3 they’re the first people to set foot on the moon in sixty years; *Kratos* 1 and *Kratos* 2 had been unmanned supply drops. Because they’re the first, they are, of course, guinea pigs, and all the kinks that have yet to be ironed out are cropping up in force. Taekwoon has no doubt that from now on the subsequent *Kratos* missions will be less dangerous and less stressful, but some small, selfish part of himself wishes it wasn’t him that had to deal with it.

“*Horizon*, this is Houston, come in.”

Taekwoon pushes away from the comms panel, floating backwards, letting Hakyeon take over. “Houston, this is *Horizon*. Go ahead.”

“Uh, we can confirm that there’s an issue with the oxygen generator for the LM. It seems to be an electrical issue.”

Hakyeon hangs his head and closes his eyes, and Taekwoon curls his hand to his chest instead of reaching out to pat him on the shoulder in sympathy. If Taekwoon’s having a shit time, he can’t imagine how the others are feeling—Hakyeon as Commander, and Wonshik who has to clean up all of NASA’s messes. They aren’t that close, though, so he fingers a loose thread on his patch and says nothing.
“Wonshik,” Hakyeon warbles. To Houston, he says, “Roger. I’ll ask Wonshik to take a look and see if it’s something we can fix up here. Do you have the telemetry data?”

Pushing off the wall, Taekwoon floats down the ship, towards their beds—not beds at all but rather capsules that they’re strapped into—and the LM. Sure enough, he finds Wonshik munching on a muesli bar while reading a book and spinning listlessly around, and grabs his ankle to pull him in closer. “You’re needed,” he mutters dryly, plucking the muesli bar out of Wonshik’s hand and shoving the rest of it in his mouth.

He’s closer to Wonshik than he is to Hakyeon, because he and Wonshik trained together—as well as with Jaehwan and Hongbin, who got stuck on reserve—whereas Hakyeon had already been trained by the time they got there; this is his second mission in space. So when Wonshik pretends to punch him on the arm he does nothing except push him away, back down the ship, book still in hand. “Electrical issues again?” Wonshik calls, to either him or Hakyeon.

“Yes,” they both reply in sync.

Wonshik just rolls his eyes and throws the book gently back down the ship towards Taekwoon, who catches it deftly. “Let me guess. I bet it’s *Pathfinder.*”

This time, it’s only Hakyeon who replies—Taekwoon is too busy rifling through Wonshik’s book. “Yeah,” he sighs, and the tone of that one syllable says more than anything else.

Perhaps Taekwoon should be worried. Perhaps he should be riddled with anxiety, dreading what’s to come, because it’s his turn next to go in the LM down to the surface to collect data; he’s already been once, and hated every minute of it. But he’s not anxious at all. It’s not that he has complete faith in NASA, because he doesn’t, but moreso that he is engulfed in an apathy so broad in scope it’s what caused him to leave the planet in the first place. Whatever happens will happen, que sera sera, etcetera etcetera. Wonshik will get the problem fixed, anyway. He always does.

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Wonshik works through the night to get *Pathfinder* ready for his launch the next day, which Taekwoon appreciates if only vaguely. He wishes Hakyeon would just pack it in and abort the mission already. They’ve had certainly enough problems to justify it. It would also mean that he wouldn’t have to go down to the surface again, wouldn’t have to stare out at the vastness of space, wouldn’t have to keep his head down and try to ignore the Earth looming up in front of him. But when he clammers out of his sleeping capsule the next morning to float down towards where the food is stored, to find Hakyeon already there, staring out a window, he sighs inwardly. “Are we go for Lunar EVA?”

“Yeah.” Hakyeon raises one shoulder in a shrug. “Wonshik found the problem. A couple of faulty wires. He’s fixed it. Hey, have you seen this?”

Taekwoon deliberately turns away from the window and reaches up to pull out a pouch of breakfast food. “Sunrise? Yeah. I’ve seen it plenty of times on Earth, too.”

There’s a long silence before Hakyeon continues. “You don’t like seeing space, do you?” His tone is curious, but in a way that makes it clear he’ll shut up if Taekwoon asks.

“I don’t like… seeing what I left behind,” Taekwoon replies, before realising he’s said entirely too much and sticking a pouch of water in his mouth.

Being an astronaut isn’t easy, and the training weeds out many potential applicants. He’s never told
anyone why he decided to join NASA’s space program; it never seemed pertinent. The others all have their reasons, anyway. Some are chasing glory. Some are doing it for the fun of it. Some, like Hakyeon, bitch and moan but secretly love every second of being in space. Some, like Taekwoon, have their own demons that they’re trying to leave behind. He’s not sure if he can find the answers out here—doesn’t know if the empty void has what he’s looking for—but it’s a damn sight better than what he was doing at home. At least up here he’s managed to stop thinking of Sa—of the people still down on Earth, going about their lives.

He finishes breakfast in silence, and suits up for his mission to the surface, feeling strangely sombre. The others strap him into the LM and boot up the computers for him, fussing around the tiny cabin, tightening straps and doing last minute checks. The capsule was designed for one, but can really fit one-and-a-half, so they take turns to squeeze in and out. Taekwoon gets Wonshik’s foot in his face at one point, and reaches up to tickle it, and they share a laugh that bursts out of them with such intensity it surprises Hakyeon, who thinks something’s wrong for half a second. By the time they close the door after him, he’s feeling surprisingly optimistic, which isn’t like him at all.

He keys the button on his mic and adjusts his headset. “Houston, this is Lunar Module *Pathfinder* reporting ready to launch for Surface Exploration Mission 5. I’ve got green lights across the board.”

The reply comes a moment later. “*Pathfinder,* this is Houston. Confirm ready to launch for SEM 5. Cleared for detach from *Horizon.*”

This time, the voice over his headset is Hakyeon’s, warm and familiar. “Detaching from *Horizon.*”

With a thump from above his head—where the airlock is—the *Horizon*’s magnetic locks detach, and Taekwoon watches his screens as, slowly, the *Pathfinder* moves away from the bigger ship. The trip down to the surface doesn’t take long—only a few minutes—and all he has to do is sit there as the multi-billion dollar ship does what it is supposed to, for once. The nervousness that wasn’t there previously rushes back in waves, just as it had on his previous mission to the surface; there’s something about going down there alone that utterly freaks him out.

“Taekwoon,” Wonshik blurts over his headset, startling him out of his head and making him jump. “How are you doing?”

He rolls his eyes. “I’m fine. *Pathfinder* at a thousand feet above the surface.”

“Decent rate stable.” That one’s Hakyeon; he’s probably shoved Wonshik away from the mic.

“Eight hundred feet.” Taekwoon grimaces as the cabin shakes. “I’m getting some turbulence again. Houston, when are you gonna fix this thing?” It’s irrelevant, since he hasn’t keyed his mic and isn’t speaking to them.

Hakyeon snorts into the mic. “When they actually get a usable budget. Six hundred feet and looking great.”

“Four hundred. The computer’s adjusting my trajectory a little. We had some drift.” He leans forward, his fingers flying over the keyboard, eyes scanning the data. A year ago this would have all been gibberish, but by now he’s fluent in the numbers the computer is giving him. “That’s just atmospheric, though. Not the LM’s fault.”

“Landing gear extending.” Taekwoon glances out at the window to see the moon looming up towards him. “One hundred feet. Propulsion jets firing… now.”

He’s pressed into his seat as the rockets fire, bringing him safely down, and as the LM settles on the surface he sighs. His body is heavy once more, being dragged down by the moon’s (albeit relatively pitiful) gravity, and it’s a very strange feeling after so much zero-g time. “Houston, this is Pathfinder. Confirmed contact with Lunar surface. I’m down safely.”

In his ear, Hakyeon lets out a breath as Houston replies. “Pathfinder, glad to hear it. How did she behave? Everything working ok?”

“Still green lights across the board. I got some buffering on approach,” he replies, undoing his seatbelt and waiting for his body to float free before remembering that’s not going to happen here. “And some drift, but that was atmospherical, as far as I can tell. I’m suiting up now for scheduled EVA of five hours.”

“Roger that, Pathfinder.”

Getting dressed—even if it’s just pulling on the bulky white space suit—is harder than it looks, especially when his legs are all wobbly from the zero-g. He has to sit down for most of it, and almost wishes there was someone else to help him. He’s not sure why NASA made the Pathfinder a one-man craft. If you asked Hakyeon, he’d probably say to save money; if you asked Wonshik, he’d probably say to save on mechanical trouble (not that that’s worked so far). Taekwoon himself isn’t so cynical, and thinks that maybe it’s just because only one person is needed for the type of work they’re doing. The next program, Zelos, is going to have a different LM entirely, which means they won’t have to deal with the Pathfinder’s quirks.

By the time he’s suited up and ready to leave the ship, an hour has already passed, although he barely realises it as he glances down at the comically-oversized watch on his wrist. “Houston, this is LM Pilot Jung Taekwoon, about to leave the Pathfinder for SEM 5.”

“Go ahead, Taekwoon. Godspeed.”

Just like last time, passing through the minuscule airlock is a chore, but it’s almost worth it for the view he gets when he opens the external door. Almost. He’s never seen anything like the surface of the moon for as long as he’s lived; by the time he was born, Apollo 11 was practically ancient history. It’s nothing but grey as far as the eye can see, but an unfamiliar, foreign grey that makes it patently clear he’s somewhere he shouldn’t be. That’s not to mention the stars, beckoning to him, so much brighter than they are on Earth. Somewhere behind him is the planet itself, but he doesn’t turn back to look. Hakyeon says that looking at Earth makes him feel calm, but it makes Taekwoon feel like he wants to vomit most of the time. He came here to get away from Earth, anyway, so the last thing he wants to do is be reminded of it.

The first step he takes onto the surface is a solid one. Last time he’d fallen over the moment he’d stepped out of the LM, because in addition to being used to zero-g he was also very unprepared for the gravity of the moon. Here he only weighs about ten kilograms (although with his bulky spacesuit it’s probably closer to twenty), and that difference takes a bit of getting used to. This time, though, he’s prepared, and his first few steps away from the LM are wobbly but somewhat stable. In front of him, a few hundred meters away, are the basic materials for the base that’s to be constructed. Most of it will be done remotely, via rovers and drones that will be sent over the next few years. Kratos 3’s mission objective is to survey the site and make sure it’s suitable for a base, as well as collect samples and perform experiments back on the Horizon. The area he’s landed in is called Oceanus Procellarum, or Ocean of Storms, although what storms the name refers to Taekwoon’s not sure. There’s nothing as far as the eye can see except the materials for the base,
himself, and the *Pathfinder* behind him. He is utterly alone.

He takes his sixth step when it happens. He’s catapulted forward with no warning at all, like he’s been given a tremendous kick in the back. With the lesser gravity, he goes spinning and bouncing over the ground so fast he can’t even tell which way is up anymore. All he can see through his helmet is sky-ground-sky-ground-*Pathfinder* on fire-sky-ground, and the last thought he has before he blacks out is *why didn’t I hear anything?*

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“I killed him. I fucking killed him.”

“Wonshik, stay calm. That’s an order. You didn’t kill him. Houston, what the hell just happened? I’m getting no data from the *Pathfinder* at all.”

“*Horizon,* standby.”

“You’re going to have to give me more than that, Houston. What the *hell* was that? Is Taekwoon still alive?”

There’s a long pause, and Taekwoon takes a breath in, and another breath out. He’s alive. How?

“*Horizon,* as far as we can tell there was an uncontained explosion from the *Pathfinder* module. All systems are down. Repeat, all systems are down for *Pathfinder.*”

“Oh, god.”

He’s lying flat on his back. When he opens his eyes, all he sees is the stars. *Per ardua ad astra.* Huh. How fitting it turned out to be.

“Taekwoon, do you read? I repeat, Jung Taekwoon, do you read? This is *Horizon.* If you read, respond immediately. I repeat, Taekwoon, do you read me?”

Blearily, his first thought isn’t of Hakyeon or Wonshik, orbiting somewhere above him. Instead he thinks of Sanghyuk, of Sanghyuk’s smile, of Sanghyuk’s eyes. Inwardly he chastises himself. He’d been doing so well. “*Horizon,* I read you,” he slurs, closing his eyes. He almost feels drunk, which is probably a bad sign; he’s probably concussed. “I read you loud and clear.”

“Taekwoon, this is Houston. Do you read? I repeat, Taekwoon, do you read me?”

“I told you,” he says, struggling into a sitting position, “I read you.”

Another moment of silence where he can just breathe. Vaguely, sluggishly, he runs through a checklist in his mind of all his body parts: arms, legs, hands, feet, head. He’s fine. Lucky that his suit didn’t get punctured, or that he wasn’t thrown against a rock, but apart from his spinning vision he’s fine.

With the bulkiness of the spacesuit, it’s impossible for him to look over his shoulder, so with difficulty he shuffles around 180 degrees to look behind him. He doesn’t really know what he’s expecting to find, but what he sees makes him rock back on his heels, sending him sprawling backwards. Dread wreaths him as he stares up at the stars once more, glittering and sparkling bright, tempting him with what cannot be.

*Pathfinder* is a shell. A charred, blackened, burnt and empty shell of what it used to be. Uncontained explosion, Houston had said. What a gentle way of putting it. The ship is completely
gutted and unusable. There’s probably nothing even worth salvaging.

“He isn’t responding.” Hakyeon’s voice is faint in his headset. “Houston, I’m getting no reply.”

He rolls over so he’s on his hands and knees, peering up at Pathfinder, slightly in awe of the extent to which it’s burnt. It’s probably the concussion that’s making him so slow, because it takes him a few seconds to process what Hakyeon’s saying, and his heart nearly stops in his chest. There’s a radio receiver on his suit, but the uplink was wired through the Pathfinder—he can hear what Houston and Horizon are saying, but there’s nothing to transmit his broadcasts to them. “I read you,” he says again, more panicked this time. “I read you! Hakyeon, I read you!”

“Roger, Horizon. Standby for further instructions.”

“This is my fault,” Wonshik sobs, and Taekwoon feels his heart break. “It’s my fault. It was the wiring. I fixed it as best I can, but I bet it short-circuited. I never…”

When Hakyeon speaks, his voice is soft, gentle, softer than Taekwoon’s ever heard it. “It’s not your fault. Wonshik, it’s not your fault. None of this is anyone’s fault. Houston, do you read?”

“Er, roger, Horizon. We’re not getting any data from the surface. It’s impossible to say what happened.”

Taekwoon’s breath is laboured now, and his helmet is starting to fog up as he curls his fists and stares at his only way off the moon, a blackened and charred mess of twisted metal and plastic. “I read you,” he repeats faintly. “I read you, I read you, I read you, I read you…”

“But it’s safe to say that—that Taekwoon’s… That Taekwoon didn’t survive. He can’t have. Right?”

Sanghyuk, is what he thinks when he turns around to stare at the Earth for the first time since he landed. It’s huge in the sky, so much bigger than the moon is back home, and gorgeously blue. Just like always, he feels sick when he looks at it, but this time it’s weirdly comforting. Nausea, he can handle. Physically shaking, he can handle. What he can’t handle is the fact that he is entirely alone and about to be left for dead. His oxygen is going to run out in a matter of hours, and even if it didn’t there’s no way for Hakyeon and Wonshik to get to him, anyway. It’d be another week or more before NASA scrambled and readied the second Horizon.

He’s going to die here.

“I read you!” he screams, even though he knows it’s helpless. “I read you! Houston, I fucking read you! I’m down here!”

“Horizon… There’s very little chance he survived. Abort mission. I repeat, abort mission. Prepare for immediate departure for Earth.”

“Roger,” Hakyeon replies faintly, but Taekwoon can barely hear him. He’s too busy sobbing helplessly, staring up at his home, the place he can never go again.

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The first hour passes in a blur of tears and sobbing and eventual resignation.

He wants to mute the others, but he can’t bring himself to do it—they’re his last contact with the world, and this will be the last thing he hears, so he listens to their dialogue as he writhes and twists himself into knots. It’s not the done thing, he knows. All his training was to give him the skills to
cope with disaster. But being left for dead is not a situation they were ever prepared for, and all of a sudden he finds himself yearning for a planet he never really liked in the first place, with a fierceness that wracks him so brutally he screams for what seems like hours and hours. After the tears comes the rage, and that’s easier to deal with—anger makes him get up, anger makes him tear apart the remains of *Pathfinder* in search of something that can help him, anger makes him focus his hopelessness into something real. There’s absolutely nothing in the ship that he can salvage, which is extraordinary; he knew fire was deadly in space, but not to this extent.

By the time he resigns himself to what will happen, he’s exhausted and panting, and the oxygen levels in his tank have dipped substantially. What was initially a supply for five hours is now giving him three, and for some reason the concept of that is hysterical. People always want to know when they’re going to die, and now here Taekwoon is, with a countdown to his death strapped to his wrist. It’s handy, he muses, leaning against a large rock and tilting his face to the stars. All his achievements, all his training, all those times he’d fought with Sanghyuk over doing something as idiotic as going to space—it’s all come down to these three hours, ticking gaily away.

“Trajectory for Earth confirmed.” Hakyeon’s voice is soothing in his ears, and he knows he will not hear it for much longer. The further they get away from the moon, the harder it will be for the uplink to remain up. “Firing rocket boosters in three, two, one…”

He closes his eyes and resigns himself.

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The second hour passes in a flurry of exploration.

Pretty soon after he hears Hakyeon and Wonshik blast away from the moon, he gets up and decides to poke around his little corner of the Earth—or the moon, rather. When he’s walking around, he doesn’t have to look up at the Earth, and he doesn’t have to see everything he’s left behind and be reminded of how he’ll never see it all again. Walking also consumes oxygen, and while he’s not actively suicidal he doesn’t relish the idea of languishing, waiting for death; he’s always liked doing things, being proactive, and sitting back and watching the minutes tick by doesn’t sit right by him.

The oxygen generators—nor water generators, nor food supplies—haven’t been dropped off at the base yet. That’s a mission for *Kratos 5*, a manned mission whose purpose is to set up the base and make it as habitable as possible. All that lies at Taekwoon’s feet is the raw materials—giant sheets of plastic and metal that, one day, will become a base. The idea that sometime in the future, when Taekwoon’s long-dead, people will be living on the moon, going about their business like humans living on another celestial body is no big deal, is so foreign to him. If he knows anything about NASA, the space he’s standing on will probably be dedicated to him. The *Jung Taekwoon Lunar Base 1*. It’s a nice thought, but too little, too late.

He hikes over to a nearby ridge, and climbs it, although he’s not sure what he’s expecting to find on the other side. It’s just more nothingness, as far as the eye can see, and when Taekwoon peers out into the void he realises he is the only person around for thousands of miles. The thought is slightly amusing; he’d left Earth to be alone, but he hadn’t anticipated being this alone. Not that he really minds. The solitude is somewhat peaceful, which he didn’t anticipate.

When he turns his face back to stare at Earth, a remnant of a conversation long-gone flashes into his mind, before he can even process it properly.

“Don’t go,” Sanghyuk begged, stroking Taekwoon’s face like the more he touched him, the more likely he was to stay on Earth. “Please, don’t go. I don’t want you to… I hate the thought of you up
Taekwoon smiled, and caught a few strands of Sanghyuk’s hair between his fingers. “I won’t be alone. I’ll have my team with me.”

“Not on the moon.” Sanghyuk shook his head vehemently. Taekwoon could see tears beginning to form in his eyes, and the sight of it made his breath hitch in his chest. “You’ll be alone on the moon and I hate that. It’s not you. You belong here, with me.”

Taekwoon had never belonged anywhere, and the stars were calling to him, although he wasn’t sure why. It was too complicated for Sanghyuk to understand, anyway; there was no point trying to put in words how he knew he was destined for something greater than this, that he wanted to explore, to be a pathfinder in the name of science. “Sanghyuk,” he’d pleaded, because this was going to tear them apart if they let it.

He deliberately turns his face away from the Earth to survey the stars once more, feeling vaguely sick. Little did he know that the force calling him up here was the weight of his own death. If he’d known that, he probably wouldn’t have come. Probably. He and Sanghyuk had been torn apart anyway, not just by the distance but by the circumstances.

Ignoring the way his lower lip is wobbling, he turns to the right and begins to walk along the ridge, figuring he needs to keep himself busy. He may as well explore some while he’s here. He’s setting many records today—third man on the moon since 1972, fifteenth overall, first man to die on the moon—and it seems pertinent to add as many as he can. Going out in a blaze of glory doesn’t sound too bad.

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The third hour is quiet.

With half an hour left to go, he finds the spot with the best view—which turns out to be leaning against what’s left of the Pathfinder—and settles himself in. He knows what’s going to happen to him, and it’s probably not going to be pleasant. At least he can do it looking at home.

“Horizon, your trajectory is good. Emergency backup shields up and holding strong.” Houston’s voice is getting fainter and more crackly in his ear, but the human contact is comforting.

“Thank god for that,” Hakyeon replies, but Taekwoon knows he’s not speaking to Houston. “Without Pathfinder to shield us on reentry, that’s the only thing keeping us from being burnt up. And I’m still not confident they’ll hold.”

“This whole mission was doomed from the start.” That’s Wonshik, and he sounds a lot calmer than the last time Taekwoon heard him.

He isn’t wrong. Long before they even stepped foot in the Horizon, all signs were pointing to staying on Earth as the best option, for Taekwoon especially—Sanghyuk had begged and pleaded until he was blue in the face. He hadn’t signed up to be the boyfriend of an astronaut, he’d said. He hadn’t signed up to watch Taekwoon fly away into the sky with a very good chance of him not coming back. At the time, Taekwoon had never quite understood his protests; the mission was dangerous, sure, but not to the extent that Sanghyuk should have been worried about it as much as he was. Little did they all know. Taekwoon snorts and hangs his head. If the circumstances weren’t so morbid, Sanghyuk would have loved to know he was right all along.

Aimlessly, he digs his gloves into the dirt, coating them in that grey dust, frowning at it. He knows
he’s going to die here, he knows, but it’s almost like it hasn’t set in properly, like his brain is refusing to process the fact that he’s alone and he’s got fifteen minutes to go.

“Houston…” Hakyeon starts, sounding very faint indeed. “Have you told the family?”

Taekwoon closes his eyes. He doesn’t have much family to speak of—his parents passed away a while ago, and he hasn’t spoken to his sisters in years. Sanghyuk’s the only one who cares about him these days, and he’s not sure that still applies after what had happened the last time they spoke.

“I won’t do this.” Sanghyuk was sobbing, openly, and Taekwoon reached for him. Why? What about this mission made Sanghyuk so convinced they were all going to die up there? “I won’t stand by and watch you fly away without me. I can’t spend the next year, two years, worrying myself sick.”

Taekwoon tried to pull Sanghyuk closer, but he resisted. “What are you saying?” His voice was cold, even, too cold. He didn’t mean to be detached from this, but he didn’t know how else to cope with the horrible things Sanghyuk was saying.

“That I’m leaving,” Sanghyuk replied, wrenching away from Taekwoon and wrapping his arms around himself.

He waited for a moment, for Taekwoon to protest, but he didn’t even know where to begin. He didn’t know how to deconstruct Sanghyuk’s walls, to show him how ridiculous he was being. He didn’t know how to say I can’t live without you. He didn’t know how to say I don’t know why but I need to go. So he stayed silent, watched as Sanghyuk’s face fell when it became clear he wasn’t going to say anything, and he did nothing but stare as Sanghyuk turned away and walked out of his life.

“Horizon, ah, no, we haven’t. We’re keeping it quiet until splashdown and then work out where to go from there. All the media knows is that the mission was aborted due to an issue.”

His wrist monitor starts beeping at him, loud and persistent, and when he raises his arm he realises he’s starting to get sluggish, and the alarm screeching at him is an oxygen warning level. It’s begun, then.


He keys his mic, even though he knows they can’t hear him. “I agree,” he mutters, watching as his breath fogs up the bottom of his helmet. “Houston in the blind, do you read me?”

“We left him down there.” Wonshik’s voice is so devoid of emotion he sounds empty.

“No you didn’t,” Taekwoon replies. “No, we didn’t,” says Hakyeon.

“What kind of a conversation is this?” he asks them, staring at Earth like he can see them. “I’m just talking to myself, now. Houston in the blind, do you read?” The silence that comes through is deafening. “Houston in the blind, do you read me?”

Nothing.

The communications uplink is gone; they must have flown out of range. The reading on his wrist says five minutes as he gasps raggedly. He is alone. It was easy to pretend he wasn’t when there were voices in his ear chatting away. But now it’s patently clear. He’s the only living being on this damn rock, and he’s going to die here, and he’s never going to be able to touch Sanghyuk’s face again. Stupidly, that’s what he thinks of. Not of all of Earth’s wonders, not of the sunrise or the sky.
or the feel of grass underneath his feet—no, he thinks of Sanghyuk, and forces himself to look up at the sky. If only he’d listened.

“Houston in the blind,” he starts. His heart is pounding, now, which is one of the first signs of carbon dioxide inhalation. Four minutes, his wrist reads. “Don’t… don’t let Hakyeon blame himself. Or Wonshik. It wasn’t their fault.”

He looks off to his right, at the unforgiving, harsh landscape of the moon, and sighs. “We don’t belong here. Nothing superstitious… But this isn’t our place. It’s pretty clear it wasn’t made for us. Wasn’t made for me.”

He’s gasping, he realises. Oh. The oxygen in his tank must have ran out, so all he has is what’s left in his suit, which isn’t much. Elevated heart rate, rapid breathing, fatigue. He knows all the signs of carbon dioxide inhalation—they all do—but to recognise that he’s in the midst of it is another thing entirely. He could panic, but he doesn’t have the energy.

Oh, god. He’s going to die here.

“Houston in the blind.” His voice sounds a bit faint, now. Three minutes. “Sanghyuk—he’s listed as my next of kin. Tell him…” The Earth looms in front of him, so blue, so very blue. “Tell him he was right. I should have listened. I didn’t…” He coughs. “I didn’t know it was going to be like this.”

Two minutes. His breathing is ragged, now, and he feels incredibly nauseous. He knew it wouldn’t be pleasant.

“Houston in the blind. Tell him I…” He’s wracked with a round of coughs so violent he nearly throws up, but he manages to keep his breakfast down, with strength he didn’t even know he possessed. “He knows, but tell him anyway. Tell him I love him.”

One minute. Things are hazy, now, as he coughs and coughs and coughs. There’s no air, there’s no air, he can’t breathe. All he sees is the Earth, blue and huge and looking for all the world like it’s going to swallow him up. He wishes it would, even as he begins to slip away, his vision going black around the edges. The universe lied to him, he realises belatedly. All he was destined for was to die here, like this, coughing and entirely alone. He doesn’t have the strength to mourn the life that could not be.

The last thing he sees is a swimming sea of black and grey, a mirage of what he cannot have, Sanghyuk’s hand reaching out towards him like he’s really there. With a gasp and a twitch and a shudder, he closes his eyes and lets go.

End Notes

I am a big gay sad nerd who watches way too many space movies
also I wanted this to be like 1k and now here we are

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