

Death to a Satellite

by Becca Lee

It was a pleasure serving you, but I've done my time.

All these years up here, but I have never been alone like I am now. There is no one aboard my vessel. No one scurrying about. No studying. No discovery. It's much quieter now. I am sincerely on my own, floating in this abyss of darkness. It's an odd feeling, but I know it's my time now.

You can't imagine the things I've seen. I hope you got my pictures and videos. We took plenty. It's dark up here, but perhaps that's because I can feel my own systems going dark too. I'm afraid I'm not so steady anymore. I'm worried that I'll come tumbling down. My, what a view, if only you could see what I see now. Your whole world would change.

For nearly thirty years I've watched over you. And around you. Just above you, the stars lace into intricate clusters and weave into spectacular patterns. Can you see the universe's star-studded needlework from where you are? Do you see how they flicker? How can you look at the stars and not imagine all the lifetimes that came before you? How can you gaze upon them and not see the future? Look how they beam, to remind you that there's beauty in even the darkest parts. It's getting darker, a new dark I haven't experienced yet, and I feel myself growing dimmer too. At least I have the stars for a little while longer.

It's remarkable how this planet fosters unique life to thrive within it. From humans to animals to plants, look how it works with you. This planet, wild by nature, embraces you. It maintains a delicate balance of chemicals and climate to keep its life alive. It wants you here. And the moon, don't get me started. Look how the moon harmonizes with the Earth to create a natural rhythm for your life so you do not have to spend all your nights in total darkness. I've seen it all. But

oh, how I long to be among you. I long to join this planet that I've stared at for so long—it's just out of reach.

I wasn't always like this. I used to see things more analytically, and I was much more binary in my thoughts. I calculated this universe through ones and zeros. Now I pass days not by data, but by poetry. Astronomy is poetry, how can it not be when there's so much to be inspired by? I am surrounded by stars, galaxies, space, planets, darkness, and all the things left unknown. Tell me there's no prose in discovery and I won't believe you for I have seen it.

I've traced rivers to estuaries where the water meets the sea. I've seen the moon gently graze the Earth's indigo stratosphere. I've seen the glowing city lights puncture through the night bleeding gold grid wounds into space. Still, manufactured lights could never outshine the brilliance of the stars. I've watched growing grey plumes of smoke part the clouds as it billows from a volcano below. I've watched the green vermilion aurora borealis hover in the ether, looming over the northern hemisphere like a specter supervising its haunt. I've marveled at the marbled folds of erosion in deserts that warp into hypnotic patterns.

I've seen so much throughout these decades, and now time is wearing on me. I can't stop the signs of aging like the cracks in my armor or the fissures stretching across my body. I'm a winged angel watching over you ready to burst into flame. I am Icarus, only the sun will reach out to me as I fall and try to catch my flaming body before I plunge into the sea.

But not even the sun can save me now. It's my time.

I've always loved the sun—I saw 16 sunrises a day and still could never pick a favorite one. How could you decipher one wonder from another, a hundred times over? It never got old.

You all promised to help me down when it was my time. I want to land among the blue—it looks so beautiful from up here. If you must lay me to rest, if I must retire, let me land among the

oceans. I want to feel what cannot be felt by something like me. Satellites only know space, but I want to know sea.

When I fall, splintering pieces of incinerated debris, know I am happy to be returning home. Though my pieces were assembled in space, they still remember Earth. The blue is so close now. Let me join the graveyard of spacecrafts in the bottom of the ocean. We devoted our lives to exploration and now here is my final chapter. Did you get my pictures? We took plenty. Earth is so beautiful. My coordinates locked. It was such a pleasure contributing to science, a pleasure to help you understand the very planet you stand upon. Are you as inspired as I am? As we look at the same scenery, how can you not see Earth and think it is anything short of spectacular? Take care of it, please. Long after I'm swallowed by saltwater in the middle of nowhere, when algae grows over my rusted limbs, when barnacles take root on my body, when one day you miss my pictures; remember how beautiful it all is. Pick a pocket in the night sky and aspire to glow just as bright as the stars you see there. I bet you can. The whole galaxy is rooting for you, don't you know?

Nearly thirty years hovering in the ether, around thirty years grazing the edge of heaven. I wasn't designed to withstand forever—we're quite similar in that way. I hope you see what I have seen. I sent pictures. And videos. Take a look sometime. The world is much smaller than you think and the stars much closer than they appear. Reach out, perhaps you can touch one.

I certainly have.

Signing off.