

## **Moon Rocks At Large**

“The moon rock had been missing for about 30 years, and it was just one of about 180 moon rocks that are currently at large.”

“Ark. Archivist Finds Missing Moon Rock.” *NPR*. 26 September 2011.

And the moon rocks? Where are those moon rocks? Det. Bryson just put out an APB on 180 missing moon rocks.

During the Nixon years, a single rock dazzled an astronaut’s eyes on that waning gibbous terrain. He brought it back — CHECK OUT MY MOON ROCK — for NASA to slice up and ship out to heads of state.

Now their snapshots are stamped onto milk cartons, and line convenience store windows. Beat cops search beneath soda shop barstools — FBI agents bust down doors all Hollywood style — even his mother called in a tip, but it was just a piece of her cat’s dried shit.

Last week as Det. Bryson drove through his suburban neighborhood, he swear he saw a father and son playing catch with one.

Once he pulled into the seclusion of home, his uncle John rang him up to insist he stare down the barrel of my eighteenth-century muzzle-loaded musket — he’d just woken from a dream where a moon rock was fired as a bullet during the Siege of Boston.

He did as he was told, but soon enough his son Keith started crying. As he bathed him in the kitchen sink, his mother pounded on the front door. She grabbed him by the collar, announcing a sizable lot are buried beneath the black-eyed Susans in the heart of his garden. He dug up the roots, but only found the toil of diligence.

On a weekday night like any other, Det. Bryson closes the case file in the solitude of the Boston Police Station, and drives without the radio on — the silence serves him well while rushing back to sing to his son the Bryson Family Lullaby. He stampedes through his front door where Maddy blankly states that she put him down only a few minutes ago. At the dinner table, he knows he’ll need to replant fresh seeds before another New England winter freezes his soil and skin.

## Plasma Twister

The walls, the doorframe, the baby room  
praised by a radiant Papps . . .

newscasters swarm in on helicopters  
to report another breaking story.

*Back to you, Suzanne. Thank you, Larry.  
Let's check in with our five-day forecast.*

My knees buckle in the swathe of wreckage.  
Eyelids blink, pupils fail to register  
my Nan-in-law's blood along the curved spine

of the cul-de-sac. Microphone cables snake  
through the front lawn where I pushed Keith  
on his swing after Jacob sawed the wood

for the seat now flung into a mockingbird's nest  
across the town dotted with roofless homes,  
besieged faces. Desperation is spelled across

the blacks and blues of their irises. *What a great human  
interest story.* A television crew steps on broken glass  
to document the lines of foreign faces

feeding back to tornado alley earthlings  
swatting at the power button. *These roots once dug  
into photosphere depths,* the attractive reporter

tells her viewers. She leans in to let me speak:  
*Yes, when we first immigrated to the sun,  
Abigail Bryson planted a lemon tree on this sunspot —*

*but when the twister came, she was killed  
in her sleep before it uprooted her tree.*

She nods, thoughtfulness glazed on.  
*So touching, sir. Your heart must break.*  
I stare into the red blinking light, of course agreeing.

After they wrap up their cords, a helicopter  
gains elevation as the blades slice  
into an explosion of wind over my ancestral self.

## The Moon Water Case

*Bryson, before you go back to your family,  
go fetch a gallon of moon water.*

As the sunset coats a parched topography,  
Det. Bryson grabs his trench coat and a bucket.  
He drives through the Vallis Alpes Valley

that once bubbled in rivers of lava. Fast-forward  
to the solidification of now, a throng of schoolchildren  
skip across the pedestrian walkway.

He soon speeds ahead to the cold trap craters  
strewn across the north pole. Since Maddy said  
*they're a chilly -400° F, Jacob,*  
he slips on a sweater and kicks up  
a plume of billion-year-old dust because he can.

Minus an atmospheric shield, the particles  
take flight into that dark dark space  
like the paper airplane his son once folded into shape.  
Keith snapped his wrist and it glided  
into a starlit Brighton night.

Now under a mountain of constellations,  
Det. Bryson digs and sweats where the headlights  
of his Plymouth floods the dethroned shadows.

At last, his shovel gives way into a stream's flow.  
He bends down to splash the familiar across his face  
like a Frog Pond awakening under a ruthless Boston sun.

But he has to force his mind back, collecting himself  
as the man he is within that lunar landscape

before heading home to kiss Maddy's strained face,  
wolf down his Monday night pot roast,  
and hand in that moon water the next morning.

Det. Bryson scans the skyline, lighting a smoke  
at the window's feet. The boastful sun  
rises high and mighty as his foot crushes the stub.  
*Remember now, it's only Tuesday.*

## **The Moon Country Museum**

Charlie Bryson died in a hospice  
on the moon. Before he went,  
he told his son of his cattle rancher's tradition  
while working in the lunar highlands:

*I stood at the rim of the Peary  
and let the Peak of Eternal Light  
coat my body in some damn fine light.*

Jacob's paternal ancestor, head of the Bryson line,  
herded cattle across the Peary Crater to a shipyard  
in the valley. Only then would he be paid in full.

That constructed image of his Papps  
is why the Moon Country Museum exists.  
Once the B&B Café closed up shop,  
he bought the building and is now

showcasing the organs of the past in glass cases.  
On permanent display, a boot maker's tools  
and a cattle rancher's rope hangs on the far wall.

He looped it on a nail, encircling a bullet hole  
in the wood. He'll run his thumbprint over the relic  
while imagining Marshal Raymond Lewis  
collapsing to the cigarette-strewn floor.

The outlaw's face is lost to History,  
but we know that he fled south  
past the Apollo 11 landing site.

Charlie and the rest of the locals  
fed their rabbit-hunting dachshunds meat scraps,  
loaded their Winchester M183's,  
and searched for a ghost in the South Pole-

Aitken basin — galloping in the ancient crater  
on horseshoed mustangs. As earth glowed  
blue in the backdrop, the No-Name  
met his end in the Shackleton Impact Zone.

When they returned, a shot of Tanglefoot whiskey  
was poured for every throat.

Now ten solar orbits on in Jacob's  
metropolis along the north pole ice caps,  
he flips the 'closed' sign to 'open',  
waits for customers to step  
through those batwing doors.

And after the last straggler leaves  
at the workweek's end, his eyes  
soon find themselves staring into the barrel  
of a five-shot Paterson revolver.

Later, his hands rediscover the notches  
in the bar's carefully preserved surface.

## The Restaurant in the Center of the Universe

When Elizabeth, Keith, and I first moved into our Victorian home, built within earshot of Al's Big Bang Grill, only Al's hands cooked his signature hamburgers for the community. After I left my office at dusk as a detective for the police force, I always headed over for a slice of blueberry pie and conversation.

I can recite the menu like Gospel if you wish, but I no longer hang out at that now infamous destination. So many posers from parallel universes storm into my reality to be in the center of my everything.

The grease fumes seep into my bed sheets, my Rottweiler, my thumbprint.

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It's impossible to find a window-side booth during a supernova explosion. Everyone wants to experience the local gamma rays while sipping their mocha lattes, and discussing the fiery destruction to the Library of Alexandria.

Even without the death of a star to pick up sales — I'm currently on the hunt for a black hole ripping through the vast vicinity of my cul-de-sac — intellectuals, know-it-all teenagers, and blue-collar regulars all bustle in. Orders are constantly rung up for the planet dust chili and radioactive breadsticks — far superior to anything found in your paltry Local Group.

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Of course, there's a grand gift shop with declarative clothing, personalized license plates, and Carl Sagan quotes stenciled on the walls. An eighteen-wheeler arrives from another dimension to dump off the merchandise. It's apparently cheaper to outsource the factory labor. When I need a space to escape, I'll visualize alien hands gathering the cotton for a rich customer's shirt.

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After I toss my badge and gun on the dresser with a snapshot of Maddy on prominent display, I always become convinced that the clocks have stopped, that Time's neck suddenly snapped — but with a few deep breaths to gather myself, I realize the cashiers' *ding* is not invading my consciousness. I see Al zip past. He's turned off the fryers, flipped the 'open' sign to 'closed' so he can walk into his wife's arms, read his son a lullaby. I know my parallel self isn't clogging up the galactic parking lot where I first taught Elizabeth how to drive a stick.

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Just yesterday, I rallied against my typical bitching and squeezed myself into the out-of-towner crowd. Susan was my server — she's a college senior now. I can still remember her as a five year old jumping up and down for a space rock I held in my hand. She wanted to bite into it as if it was one of her mother's walnut cookies.

She's going to work at the Xenon Observatory after graduation. Don't be surprised when you look through your telescope one day soon and see her staring back. How will it feel to be the subject of her study?