

The recording clicks on.

TOM

Are you there, dark void of despair?  
It's me, Tom.

There's a small laugh.

TOM

No, I'm sorry. I just couldn't resist  
a little one.

I'm still up here, still here, 7 more  
days to live! That makes it day 526 of  
this flight for me. God, seems like a  
long time, doesn't it? I mean, not  
even two years, though. Christ, I  
don't even have a sweater I've managed  
to hang onto for two years.

I mean, I've been with my wife for a  
lil' under 20 years now. Wow, that's a  
loong time, isn't it? Feels like just  
yesterday I first saw her.

The joking tone is gone.

TOM

God, I wonder if she knows. Would NASA  
have told her? Does NASA know what's  
going on? Have they given up? And if  
they do, have they given up? I know  
they can't get anyone to me in time, I  
don't really have that hope, but are  
they trying? Am I one of those  
astronauts that gets the whole world  
watching, "the astronaut who got

lost"? Or am I really drifting alone  
and no one will even know when I die?

But my wife. . . ugh, the idea of her  
down there in our house, just. . .  
making breakfast, cleaning up, going  
about her day, not knowing that I'm up  
here, dying, wasting away.

He speaks after a pause, almost breathless.

TOM

That's a hard one for me to think  
about. The idea that the person in  
your life closest to you can not know  
the most important thing about you.

Sometimes I forget, too. There should  
be a bigger difference between the  
days I know I'm gonna die and the days  
I don't.

He stops contemplatively. Moves on with the next train  
of thought.

TOM

Geez, do you think. . . I don't know.  
Do you think she would've married me  
if she. . . knew this was how it was  
gonna end? I mean, why would she have  
bothered? I don't know why she put up  
with me anyway. Why would anyone marry  
a guy like me? She was too nice, I  
figure.

She always was. She was quiet like me,  
too, but in a very different way. When  
we bought our home, we just sat in

opposite rooms on our lonesome after a while. But at first- see, when you move into a house with someone, it's weird, cause when you're dating, you spend all your time being in the same room with them, taking advantage of that time together. But once you get a place, suddenly, you have many rooms to be in and it feels weird to still not be with them in thier room. There was a lot of her peering around corners, goin' "Tom?", to find what room I was in and joinin' me. She was always trying like that, too, making sure I wasn't alone. She once did the peering around the corner thing and said, "Just making sure you didn't forget about me!" How could I forget about her, I wear her ring every day; but I didn't say that. I just nodded.

I didn't ever really give her back what she gave.

I think I already said this, but we met in college. I had switched, uh, Econ classes second semester and she was in my new one. She was this incredibly friendly girl, offered to sit with me on the first day and catch me up on anything I didn't understand, you know, during the lecture. I appreciated that, but I was so rusty, I didn't understand that she was flirting. I walked her to her next class to be polite and we moved on. But she sat with me every day in class, was always so helpful,

introduced me to everyone, and, well, I guess I finally got the hint.

I remember her saying once that she fake-yawned to catch me, cause if, you know, if you're looking at somebody and they yawn, you catch it and yawn too. And she wanted to know if I was looking at her. She says I yawned back, but I- I haven't told her this, but I think I must've just been tired, cause I don't ever remember looking at her in class beyond when I was talking to her. I would never tell her that though.

But nevertheless, when she asked me out to coffee, I got the hint. I wasn't that bad.

He laughs at how incompetent he was.

TOM

I was just horrible at dating. It was never a priority, so I got lost in the hints and games people played. I tried dating this girl in high school, but it went so poorly and, when I ended up breaking up with her, I forgot the date, so I dumped her February 13th. That is apparantly a quote unquote, "dick move". Or, so I have since been told. But that was pretty much my only real relationship before my wife, so you can imagine what she had to go through to get my dumb ass to look her way and make a move. Poor thing.

But we both stayed on campus over the summer. She was doing a poetry lab in Slo and wanted to stay, and I was working at an autoshop near campus, so kept my housing. It was just us staying from our group, so we ended up getting pretty close, and by the end of the summer, we were officially girlfriend/boyfriend.

I've never understood this, by the way: how two people can be dating and not be girlfriend/boyfriend? Why are those two separate asks? Why would you be going on dates, be exclusive, and not be boyfriend/girlfriend? What world do we live in where this is all so complex? We need to- we need to just move on from that drama. Here- here are the new rules: it's hooking up if you're not dating; if you're dating, you're boyfriend/girlfriend; and dating is always exclusive unless you get permission to not be from the other person. There. Easy.

Tom brushes his hand off with an air of finality.

TOM

Oh, and hooking up is a whole other can of worms. My friends in college used to say it all the time, and it never clarified anything, cause apparantly it can mean making out or full-on sex, and no one ever asks for clarification.

Do I sound like an 80 year old yet?  
It's allowed, I've recently seen how  
short life really is. Why do we spend  
so long tiptoeing around people we  
love, avoiding letting them see that?

He pauses, and when he speaks again, he's quieter.

TOM

I dated my wife all through college;  
we stayed on campus together every  
summer. Then, after we graduated, I  
proposed to her, and we got married  
the next year before moving into a  
house in Pasadena together, cause I  
had started work at JPL. The ceremony  
wasn't much, just a little courthouse  
affair. I'm not one for a big fuss, or  
churches, although I do think she  
wanted a bit of fuss. Which I kinda  
feel bad about. But I didn't have  
anyone on my side coming, so it  
would've been a little lopsided and  
awkward.

It was nice to belong somewhere,  
though. She really made me be a part  
of something, for the first time. I  
was one in a couple. How exciting for  
someone so alone for so long! And she  
had a great group of friends, that I  
hopped into sophomore year. They were  
all such nice people. I knew they  
loved me and I started to love them.  
Which was all very new to me.

But she was always making me do stuff  
like that, make friends, bringing

cookies to neighbors, get to know the names of people working in our grocery stores. She was just so friendly and she tried so hard. I always felt bad I never gave it back. I loved her, very much, and made sure that she knew and thanked her for all she did for me. But I just. . . I didn't have anything special I was bringing to the table. And I knew it, so it kept me quiet when I should've been a bit louder. But she loved me and I loved her.

So why wasn't I ever happy.

I know that sounds selfish and mean an- and it wasn't her fault, had nothing to really do with her. I couldn't understand how everyone around me seemed happy and I felt so different from them. Like, everyone else got a manual on what to do in life to make it good, and I missed that day of class, or slept in too late and never got it, and everyone else was following it except me. Is there something I missed?

When we moved for me to work at JPL, it was the closest I've come to being in a big city. And I remember one year, it was New Year's Eve, and my wife and I had gone into the city to see some friends and we left before midnight. We never seemed able to make it til then on New Year's Eve. So we were driving home in a cab and I was staring out the window and there was

this bar with a group of people standing outside, men in suits and women in dresses too short for the December air. And, in the city, you get distracted by the lights and you see these gorgeous shiny people and you picture them going home at the end of the night to sleep in their big beds in their big houses and apartments and you think, "How could they go to bed without a smile on their faces?"

I couldn't handle that.

But my whole life, I got the feeling that there was something more to it, something I wasn't doing. I think that's why I was never content, I just couldn't stay in one place. It's why I came up here.

There's a pause, heavy as the weight of what he just said. Everything becomes a confession when he says it.

TOM

There must have been something broken in me.

Cause I felt happiness, as a kid, but. . . it was like that valve shut off somewhere. And it wasn't fair to the people in my life who, by all rights, should've brought happiness. And I was aware of that, which made it worse. How could I be so selfish? I had a home, security, a job I enjoyed, a



future, a wife I loved. Why was it not enough? What would've been enough?

Deep breath in.

TOM

Looking back-

Deep breath out.

TOM (cont.)

-I know how poorly I must've treated my wife and friends.

I was never cruel. . . but not being 100% loving, after all they did for me, must've seemed cruel.

When I joined AA, I was about 10 years out of college, and I remember the catalyst for joining was my wife finding me a week before this first meeting in a haze and saying, "Is there someone I can call?" And the realization that she didn't think it was her, she didn't think she was enough to help me, was so heartbreaking, that I went and signed up immediately.

A lot of my decisions were made with guilt. I think that's okay?

Hmm.

I was so ungrateful. I know this. And I know how this must all sound to you, especially to happy people. How could

I have every component of a happy life and still be unhappy? And if you find the answer, let me know.

He laughs a bit dark, sad. Isn't everything, in space?

TOM

It worries me that I'll never figure it out. Especially now. I'll never know if there was more, if I could've been happy. I guess that might be my answer.

It's funny, though, being up here, and thinking about it all. I think I was happy, at least a few times. I just think I was thinking about it so much, it never stuck around. I thought so much about being unhappy and would worry so much when I was, that I forgot what being happy felt like, and lost it all somewhere. So that even when I felt happy, I didn't recognize it.

Or maybe that's just my fear.

Looking back, I think I remember what it was, though. And even though I can't get back to it now, I was happy. For a bit. Not for long enough, but for a bit.

Ain't that a bitch.

I guess I should leave now. I hate hanging up, it- it's always so sad up here when I stop talking.

I like doing this, I think. Maybe it makes me happy. Huh. I miss it. Bye.