

The recording begins differently than the other ones: with a sound check to make sure its working.

TOM JACKSON

Check, check. Haha, it's like-
(starts beatboxing, stops immediately)
-no, god, no, I'm just messing around.
Umm. Uh, yeah, Tom Jackson here again.
It's now day 529 in space. 4 days
until I die up here from lack of
oxygen. Haven't started to get loopy
yet, though!

Oh, shit, the beatboxing.

Oh, am I? Maybe it's all getting to me
more than I realize.

Tom starts to panic, spiraling more than he's let
himself before.

TOM

Christ, are there really only four
days left for me? Oh god, okay, hoooo-
this is all going way too fast.
Hooooo shit, I'm dying, okay. Umm,
ohh, I can't believe it: I'm really
gonna die. No one's coming to save me,
I don't get some miracle. Yeah, no,
no, of course. Why would there be?
It's just. . . oh fuck, I don't know
if I can handle this. I mean, I know
it's what I wanted but I don't- I
don't know anymore.

And I keep thinking of- trying to
think of things to do, things to say.
But no one's here to say them to. And

so I'm trying to say them, here, now, but I keep- I just- I- it just has to be perfect. Because if it's not, then it's just me, and that's inexcusable.

4 days.

When I was younger, I would look at the sky and wish I was there. Like, I couldn't think of a place on earth I wanted to be so I had to pick here. But now I look down and think, 'I wish I was anywhere but here.' If I could just be. . . somewhere. But instead I'm dying in nowhere.

And I'm angry about it. You know?

It's just. . . I had so much more to do. There was so much life I missed out on, so much shit I did wrong. I know people at the end of their lives, uh, will always say, you know, "Oh, I don't regret anything. Everything turned out the way it was supposed to be." But oh my god, do I regret pretty much everything.

He seems to calm after admitting that, just a bit. The panic is placed with a yearning, so intense that he quiets down.

TOM

I regret leaving home so young, I regret never going back, I regret never seeing my parents again and how that all ended. I regret leaving my wife alone, I regret so much of how I

spent our marriage, how I spent my time. I regret sayin' I wouldn't-.

He sighs heavily, catching himself. Not yet.

TOM

I haven't really, honestly, lived in so long. But I- I was still hoping maybe I would one day. Now, how can I go on not living, knowing that there's no hope I never will?

When he speaks again, the impact of that question hits. How *is* he going to do this? He sounds on the verge of tears. His arms wrap around himself, holding him up.

TOM

I don't understand why this is happening to me. Is there someone up there deciding that I deserve this? Is this punishment for something I did? Or for something I didn't do? Surely I was the best that I could be. Couldn't everyone see that? Couldn't everyone see how hard I was trying? Is there. . . anything more to give, can I- try something else? Let- Let me go back, let me just be back and I can do something differently, uh, be braver, be more honest, or maybe lie more, maybe I didn't lie enough. I- I don't know what I should've been, but I can be-

He swallows hard.

TOM

I could be it- if I could just. . .
start again.

I could've changed. I could've done so
much more.

There's a long pause here. When he speaks again, it almost feels like he's. . . deflecting. And he feels it too: he laughs at himself after the first line. Or maybe it's out of sheer relief that he stopped the train of thought.

TOM

I could've travelled. I never saw anything beyond Missouri and California and the drive between. I always- I always wanted to hop in my car and just drive. I would be driving the 210 home from work and I would think. . . what if I didn't stop? What if I just kept heading east? I don't need much sleep, I could drive clear through for a few days. Maybe I'd- I'd hit the edge of the country. Would I keep going then? Would I turn around, satisfied at what I'd seen? I always wanted to leave the country, too. Maybe go to Scotland, see the cliffs and fields, see all that green. Or Iceland. See the Northern Lights. I wanted that so bad when I was a kid. Why didn't I do that? Why did I stay still? And why, even though I never went anywhere, could I not manage to stay anywhere for long? Where was I always running to? What the fuck did I think I'd find? What did I want to

find? Would I have gone further if I'd just stayed?

I could've been a teacher. I wanted that once. Before all of this, I thought I was going to teach physics or something, just settle into some local high school and become a fixture there, someone people knew and saw every day. To have coworkers and a schedule. And students, kids to teach. Kids to watch over, inform, prepare for everything I wasn't prepared for. Kids that could be better than me. Can you imagine the feeling of all those students of yours graduating and walking past you on the stage at the end of the year to get their diploma, knowing you had a hand in that, that you left a mark? That people will remember what you taught them?

I'd want to have summers off. I want to just live in my house with my wife and come home every day to her in the California dusk and grade papers over dinner. Maybe I'd teach physics. I could go back to school, get a job anywhere, somewhere, it wouldn't be hard. Or maybe I could teach mathematics. David would-. I could do it, too. I know it, I'd even like to go back to school, I think.

Maybe I'd be the baseball coach at the school, I don't know.

The anger is back.

TOM

How could all of that be taken from me?

And, just as quickly, it's gone again.

TOM

I could've had kids. My wife and I talked about it a lot. It was something we were thinking about for years and years, all of our marriage. I think I was just scared; I could never pull the trigger. I- I knew that upset her, you know. She never let on, but I knew she wanted kids. Maybe I would've changed my mind, if I'd- if I'd been given more time. Maybe I could've changed, could've been able to be better for her. She would've liked that.

We could've had kids. We could've had kids. I could've been a dad, a good dad. I would've given them haircuts on the front porch, taken them to 7-11's to get slushies after games, I would've embarrassed them on parent-teacher nights. I could've done it. I could've fixed everything that wasn't ever fixed for me, that I didn't even know was broken. I could've let them know so early how loved they are. I just. . . couldn't. And now can't.

A smile comes into Tom's voice, but somehow, it doesn't feel happy.

TOM

And maybe I could've gone home. Even once.

I- I- I could've seen my old house again: the sycamore between our houses that sounded like rain when the wind blew through it; the rocking chair on the back porch we were all scared to sit on cause the wood was so moldy. The corn fields in the summer. I could've smelled the summer rain on the hot concrete, just one more time.

There is the sadness of a lost child now, in his tearful voice. He almost sounds like he's saying goodbye.

TOM

I could've seen my mom. Asked her if I could stay with her there, for a month, maybe longer. I could've said sorry. And she would've held me and said it was alright and taken me in for supper. I could've seen my dad, asked if he ever regretted not saying goodbye, asked if he wanted a second try or if that one was fine. I could've seen them together around a kitchen table in the low light once more.

I could've tried to make it all a home again.

I could've had a home again.

I could've seen it again, seen his house. I could've tried to find him, he'd be there, I know it, I swear he would be waiting, just there, like he always was, standing with that big grin, hair glowing in the sunlight and his stupid denim overalls. We could've run again, down to the creek, even past it, kept going, who knows. He- He would've waited for me. He would've done what I couldn't've. And we could've done it all again, kept it safe, kept it all together. And I would've found him.

Can you imagine?

There's a laugh.

TOM

I would've found him.

You know, I had a future before this flight. All those things I said- I could've changed, could've been better. I could've been something more than I ended up. Couldn't I have? B- but now it's all gone to shit, it's all fucked up, and I'll never get to be anything more than this. And every day that passes, I forget more and more what I lost and when I decided to lose it.

How could this be what's supposed to happen, be my destiny or whatever bullshit? I'm still young, I had a

whole life. Why wasn't someone else chosen for this?

I don't- I don't know if there's a god or if there's any kind of higher power because honestly: what the FUCK. I want there to be one. I want him to be real so I can make him see what he's doing.

The panic is building, the anger is building.

TOM

I feel like there's this huge balloon expanding and expanding in me and I can't do anything about it and I'm just gonna scream, why won't it- it won't go away oh my god oh please g- please go away please make it all just go away because I can't even think about it I can't handle it right now, and I need something and I don't know what and it's clawing at me to get out and I don't know how to let it out and I don't think I'll be able to in time and I think it's gonna eat me.

He takes a heavy, shuttering breath in. . . and a shakey one out, punctuated with:

TOM

Oh god.

I can't help this anger. How could I? I'm dying and there's no one to know, no one to care. Living this way was one thing but dying with it is way harder.

It'll never be different.

He knows it now.

TOM

I can't change. I wouldn't have changed. There was no way to prepare for this.

I couldn't have done anything. I wouldn't have done anything. Even had I known.

What a fucking awful thought.

Why the hell is this my burden? What am I supposed to learn from this? Whatever it is, I refuse. I don't have to learn anything from a failure that's not mine.

And I'm not sorry I've been angry today. I think it's finally, finally allowed. I'm dying and I'm angry about it. Can I be any more honest?

I'm leaving now. Please don't forgive me, I couldn't stand it. Goodbye.