

There's a click as a tape recorder turns on. Tom Jackson had started his audio log. His voice is shaky and hoarse after all this time, but sure of himself. He doesn't stutter anymore. How could he waste time on that now?

TOM

Hey everyone. This is Tom Jackson. Still here. It's my 522nd day in space. My last day. So let's do this.

It's so late. I'm so thirsty, I feel a tightness in my chest, like somethin's is sitting on it. I haven't been able to really breathe for a bit. I can tell I'm lightheaded and I'm not gonna make it much longer. Life has already passed me by, sometime last night, I think. Granted, I'm still alive, but not for much longer.

There are no lights on. There's no noises going. There's nothing left but me. And even that's on thin ice.

Tom laughs, but it turns into a cough. That kind of hacking cough that only dying from lack of oxygen can give you. You know. That kind of cough.

TOM

I've been thinkin'. Even if people find this somehow and they listen to this, years down the line... well, they're not gonna get it. Not really. And I don't mean that like "Oh, I'm so deep, no one understands me", I just mean I don't have anyone to tell my story to. It's just... mine. I'm the

only one I'm tellin' it for. There's no one out here with me, nobody anywhere else went through the same thing. I'm the one that's hearing me say these things. I'm sorry, but I'm alone. I love you but I'm alone.

And that's... okay. That's okay.

There's a pause.

TOM

(with wonder)

A thing like that.

You know when you turn a really bright light off-

He coughs.

TOM

-and it's been on for a while and after, for a moment, you can still see the light when you close your eyes for a bit? I don't wanna live in that moment anymore. I wanna open my eyes and just be in the dark for a bit. I don't wanna chase a light that I turned off.

The week after David left, I was sittin' in a bath. I'm layin' in the hot water and probably crying. And, for some reason, we had this little window in the shower, for steam or something, I suppose. But anyway, I heard the sound of rain against that window, and so I stood up and opened

it. And when I sat back down, the cold rain came into the little room and began falling on me, and I remember just lifting my face up and feelin' the droplets sting my cheeks. It wasn't enough to be surrounded by water, I had to drown from above as well.

I've always wanted that. More, more than what I have, more than what I'm allowed. I want... so much. I want to sit down for a moment. I want to wait outside someone's house in my car for them to come out and go somewhere with me. I want to be able to borrow someone's coat when I forget mine. Well, I want to be able to forget my coat because somebody will give me theirs. I want this ending to feel like a new beginning instead of just an ending. I want to see the leaves change in Katy Trail and walk home under a sky I know. I want there to be a fire in the fireplace at night and for someone else to light it for me on winter nights. I want to go to church even when I don't need it. I want someone to hold me, put a hand on my hair. I want my cheek cupped, I want hands to brush away tears. I want someone to tell me when I have something in my teeth or a leaf in my hair. I want to feel cold and have my teeth chatter. I want to feel hot and come inside to A/C. I want to come home. I want someone to know what I want for dinner. I want someone to sit

on my couch with me after the movie's over and talk about whether we liked it or not. I want to open the door to someone I love. I want to be seen, known. I want people to hear me and not allow me to disappear after. I wanna not be allowed to disappear.

Tom lets out a dry, heaving cough. It doesn't stop him.

TOM

I wanted more than this. I wanted more than all of this. Is that a sin? To want more than what I have? I guess so. I think it's a couple of sins. But I prayed for it anyway. I prayed for all of this. And when I forgot to pray, I still prayed, didn't I? Wasn't that enough? But I also know that I could've had all that. And that I didn't let myself. I wanted so much that was already mine; I just didn't know it. Now I do. I've been given so much.

Here's what's left, what I'll leave you with. It's all I can do, the battery on this thing is runnin' low. My name is Tom Jackson. I am [static] years old, I'm from a small town in Missouri. I was a mechanic, then a specialist for NASA, then an astronaut, I've loved twice in my life, neither was enough. I've spent a little under 2 years in space and after all of that, I'm dying today.

I always knew I couldn't come home after this. How would I talk about it? What could I say? I had to stay out here. Don't don't ever let me leave here. Don't let me unwrap myself from these stars. I can't leave them. I can't. I can't go back, cause- I'm stayin' here. I'll do it all again, I'll break that circuit again, I know I will. I'll break it... again.

Dead stop. And there it is. It's out there, finally: Tom broke the circuit that stranded him out here himself.

TOM

(pleading)

You gotta understand, I didn't- sweetheart, I just needed time. I needed everything to just stop. I didn't mean for it to shut down everythin', I- well, I- I did, but I didn't know you'd come back. I didn't know I would find you again out here, I didn't know, I didn't know.

But now I can't leave you. You're out here with me. It's the only place I can- I can be with you and still hold onto the memories. I have to stay here. I want to stay here.

It's you isn't it? And were you always... or did I just...?

Dance with me, oh please. It's the edge of everything and, well, there you are! And when you hold my hand

like that. Now, why did I. . . was there anything more. . . no, I don't suppose so. And will you wait just a little bit longer for me? I have something more to say.

A long inhale. He is lucid again.

TOM

I've given a lot of thought in these 10 days to dying well. I wanted to die well. But now I know I can't. No one can. Dying is messy and awful and we leave everything behind. People say that everything will pass, but people don't tell you that that's the hardest part. I want something that stays, something permanent. I really do. And the only thing I could do was break that circuit and decide for myself what that was gonna be. I'm sorry.

I love you. I'm sorry.

It's just... Can you imagine with me for a moment?

"David's Theme" begins to play softly.

TOM

One day, you find a cat. Maybe it's a stray that's been wandering the neighborhood for a week or so, gettin' into fights with the fat old cat next door and pissin' off the neighbors. When it comes to your back door, the parents turn it away. They think it's dirty and covered in fleas, but you're

not sure how they can tell that from behind the screen door. Well, you've never liked the neighbor's cat anyway, so when the new cat shows up stratchin' at your back door to come in one night, you look to make sure no one sees and you let it in.

And it's a good cat.

It doesn't mind that you keep it hidden in your room, that you don't mention it to the people you love. It's content to be your cat and your cat alone. It, you know, curls up in your lap in the evenings and wakes you up in the morning. You take care of it, it takes care of you. It needs you there and you have purpose. It makes itself heard and seen by you and teaches you to see the love that's inherent in that. In fact, it's the best thing in your life for a long time.

But, of course, one day, it will either be discovered and you'll have to get rid of it, or it'll die, and all this will end. And you know this. And so you are always just a little bit sad because of it.

And one day it does. Die, that is.

And you'll always feel a little bit guilty about the feeling of relief that it died before it got found out.

You don't want to think that way. But, well, it's just easier.

Tears come into Tom's voice, but again, he doesn't stop.

TOM

You bury it in the backyard in a cardboard box that you bought sneakers in for back to school. It'll stay there for as long as you can tell. Your parents notice the sadness a little bit, but they can't figure out why. So they get you a dog. And you love that dog. You're not lonely. It plays in the backyard where the cat's buried. And life goes on.

And maybe you get a few years where the warm weather holds. But then you get called back.

And you remember everything and you start to hate the dog for not being the cat, which it never could've been, so you hate yourself for being mean and cruel. And you try to dig the cat up but you forgot that it's gone now. And then you forget and remember and forget and remember for the rest of your life. And one day, you remember. And it's too much.

But... it's also not enough. And it's also just right. And you don't forget ever again. And you make sure you don't.



I'm sorry this is ending. I'm sorry there's not a happy ending. I'm sorry no one is listening. There's- there's nothing I can do.

But I'm not sorry for leavin'. It's time for me to go. I want to go home.

It's nice to be coming home to you, [static]. I'm sorry I made you wait all this time. Everything I said here, well... I said it for you. It's always for you. And when I'm gone... please... please... [static] don't you forget this.

Contemplative pause. Sharp inhale.

TOM

I think... I think it's time for me to go now. I'm going to... I'm going to- I'm gonna take my own death back and step out of the door now. I want to see it all from above again one last time. I want that floating, I want to see all of the stars look so different than I remember them. I want to remember.

Goodbye. Thank you for allowing me this. Thank you for my life. Thank you for everything after. Thank you. I love you.

And if anyone hears this, anyone, tell [static] I love [static].

And that I'll miss you all. I don't know if I can miss something when I leave, but, anyway, I'll miss everything and everyone. Say "goodbye" and "I love you" for me. Always. Always.

A heavy sigh. He speaks. For the final time.

TOM

This is Tom Jackson, signing off. Thank you. Thank you. There's nothing more I can do. There's nothing I can do, there's nothing, there's nothing, there's nothing...

It fades out. The final noise is a door closing. Then there is simply silence. Tom Jackson has left the capsule.