

1994

Mark Murray

It happened about ten years ago. I'll never forget it. I was about three years old. Even though it has been a long time and I was very young, I'll never forget that one night. It seems like yesterday.

You see, this one clear, blue, night there was no moon. It was gone. The moon had disappeared! Nobody could figure it out. On TV that night Walter Cronkite, Jr., opened his national newscast by saying, "Ladies and Gentlemen, the moon is gone." That's the way it was. I mean, this *really* messed everybody up. It's pretty bad when we can't find the goddamn moon!

The effect of the moon's absence on the rest of America was not unlike the effect it had on my family. My father, a thoughtful kind of guy, was particularly upset about the situation. He was preparing to take some Kodak 35 millimeter color slides of the moon on the following night. *Now* he didn't know what the hell to do with the film. He said he would try to get his money back. That was important, money. The pictures were to have been for my history scrapbook.

My mother cried.

My brother was very upset about the missing moon. He was seventeen at the time; a high school student who was "concerned" about the world and would do whatever he could to solve the "situation." He never explained what the situation was, at least not to me or Mom and Dad. At the time I can remember wondering if the "situation" didn't have more to do with *him* rather than the externalities that he alluded to.

My brother's girlfriend was not affected at all. She was not a close follower of contemporary events. She was not a close follower of anything, except my brother. The girl was a real space cadet. She signed up for the cadets in high school. It was a special space cadet program called R-O-S-C: a reserve team, designed to allow high school students to pretend that they were important to our nation's defenses. The program provided the students with uniforms, prestige, shiny medals, and neat

things to say like, "March, two, three, four."

Then there was my white nanny. It was very fashionable at that time for a mother to employ a white nanny. Mine was named Fanny, Fanny Nanny, and I loved her. She was wonderful to me. She was very upset about the moon. She loved the moon. She also loved black and white TV, sales tax, and the smell of kitty litter.

Right after Walter Jr.'s, broadcast on TV, the neighbors came running over from next door to see if we had heard the news. This was especially amazing to me because our neighbors had never "run over" for anything before. They had lived there for fifteen years and never even borrowed the proverbial cup of sugar. All they could do was keep repeating, "What are we going to do without the moon? What *are* we going to do?"

"I don't know, but you always take something for granted until it's gone," my father said. He was always great with profound statements. I remember at the end of the third world war he said, "Boy, am I glad that's over."

This was a very special time in our country's history. People said that they would always remember the day the moon was gone. They would always remember where they were and how they first heard the news. After all, this is great material for grandma and grandpa stories. That is, of course, if anyone cared to listen to Grandma and Grandpa.

For about a week after the moon had gone, the radio and TV was just awful: nothing but moon stories, 24 hours. I got real sick of it. I couldn't even watch my favorite cartoons. At that time I thought the moon business was really screwing up my life. My parents sat there in front of the TV in a brainwashed glare for about fourteen days. It kind of bothered me to see them in such a trance. Everytime I suggested we do something else, my father would say, "Shut up and sit down and watch this. Can't you see this is important, son?"

One night the President came on the tube to apologize about not taking credit for the missing moon like all of the rest of the countries. The United States was the only nation in the whole world that hadn't said that they had kidnapped the moon and were responsible for the entire event.

The President came on the television and appeared very nervous.

Sweat was running down his face just like in the pictures of Nixon when he came on TV to lie. This guy probably had a right to be nervous, since he had only been President for four days. The other President, whatshisname, had been assassinated by Patsy somebody. This guy had been the next in line for the Presidency. He looked squarely into the TV camera and said, "Hey man, I'm sorry. We screwed up, ya know? I mean, how was we ta know that everybody would be takin' credit for da moon. Hell, I didn't even know the damn thing was gone 'till I read about it in the paper. So just get off my back! O-K? For sure."

My parents discussed the missing moon at supper for weeks. One night in particular my mother said, "How could something that we, as a *world*, looked up to every night be suddenly taken from us?"

"It's shocking and unexpected isn't it, dear?" my father said. "After all of these years it just disappears like that. A person could always have faith in the moon. It was just always there every night. What's left to believe in?"

Of course all of the good 'ol American songs with the word "moon" in them had to be re-written. "Moon" was substituted with geographically the next closest thing, "earth." So now we sang, "In the Misty Earthlight," "When the Earth Comes Over the Mountain," "Earth River," "Earth Over Miami," and in nursery school I was taught that the "Cow jumped over the Earth." It was a little awkward at first; but we all got used to it. You see, we weren't allowed to say any name for something that didn't exist. The "moon" was gone, so we had to strike the word "moon" from our vocabularies. It was the law: accepted, unquestioned, done. We were never allowed to say things like, "God." Heavens, no!

You know, I was starting to talk when I was around three years old; around the time that all of this moon business was going on. Sometimes, as with all small children, I had great difficulty in forming my words. My tongue would often get in the way. Unintelligent jibberish would flow freely from my small mouth. I remember that, at the time, my parents were trying to teach me how to talk about the moon, so I would appreciate and respect its absence, even though I was too young to understand it.

They would say the words for me over and over. I would try to repeat

them. It was sort of like training a Myna bird to talk. The bird doesn't have any idea what you are doing but mimmicks everything you say. Well, with me it was the same way. But I would often slur, slobber, and mispronounce the words. I didn't have any idea what my parents were talking about. They would tell me to repeat what they said about the moon. I tried, I really tired.

"See my moon," I would say.

"No, No, Mark," my parents would say. Then they would repeat the words and make me try it again, over and over.

"See my *moon*," I kept saying.

"No, No, Mark," they corrected, "It's *Sun Yung Moon*."

LINES OF SOLITUDE

Nathan Harter

The winds without which batter at my cell
And strive to fill the stagnance of this hell
Know no surrender as mine ears have found,
Long training, straining, for a gentler sound
Than prison's all-consuming solitude.
To these blind eyes dawn's rising would be rude,
But, O, that splendor to my soul is life
Without which mere survival proves a strife
Too dear for engaging. Brethren, we,
Who weep at chains and live for Liberty!