

Gravity

The tractor is big and carries its own atmosphere, complete with Dolby noise reduction.

I read sci-fi stories like a maniac in junior high, and one story I remember involved balloon-tired moon buggies, six-wheeling over craters and ash-grey hills, the blue eye of earth on the horizon and the dust they threw was barren and took days or weeks to settle like it just might escape the lunar pull, like it just might rise enough to give the moon a ring.

The tractor lifts black dirt and slings it high; it falls, especially after a rain, with a low thud or sometimes thick and cool like some woman's long black hair, light, but somehow heavy with an aroma that the farmer knows better than his wife's.

The moon was silent--- no air to make noise with, and the space Captain and his young Lieutenant whispered excitedly inside the bubble, occasionally bumping each other with the rocking motion of the buggy--- Do you think we'll see them... that anything's left? then the Captain's stoic--- Only way to know is for me to go out alone and check--- it was cramped and stars spread all around them on the outside.

At Big Red Cafe' the farmer takes breakfast with the other men at 5 am, and over eggs and coffee each one constructs short sure sentences: Yeap, that's about the size of it. Oh-yeah--- they'll be movin' in this week for sure. or So you see how it is... not so much to pass information as to connect with nodding faces, all in affirmation: We all fall into the same space--- we are more together than apart.

On the moon , the Captain slipped out of the buggy, a life-line tugging at the knit alloy of his suit; the young Lieutenant watched him disappear over the next ridge... two hours later the boy reeled in the tether, frayed on the end that should have held his mentor. Suddenly alone, he held his breath in the pale light of the setting earth.

Inside the bright John Deere, against the sky, the farmer listens to Tanya Tucker and Don Williams, in the stillness of the cab the farmer is dancin' and drinkin' and cheatin' and even catchin' a little Gospel and Bluegrass when the station goes dead and he takes her out of gear...

Nothing moves.

To his right the unbroken field is dusted with stubble from last year; to his left, it waits where he's laid it open already, waits for him to come back with seed. How many times has he made this trip back and forth and back and forth...? It seems he's always somewhere in the middle. He kills the engine and opens the door. The scent of soil floods the cab along with the low, uneven rasp of the wind. He hears the far off roar of a jet and thrusts his head out from the cab to search the sky. He's disoriented for a moment, then he sees it--- such distance--- the plane is half-a-sky ahead of its sound. I'm alone, he thinks, and not his wife or his breakfast buddies or even Tanya Tucker can do a thing about it. He fumbles for his keys and they slip through his fingers, striking the bright fender once before burying themselves in the loose dirt fourteen feet below.

And his profile seems to ignite as he tumbles out and turns his back on the setting sun, on the big wheels and plunges his boots one by one ankle deep into the ridge he's just exposed, losing balance and tripping like he can never escape this dirt and get back to earth.