

Charon's View

A short story by

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Charon perched on the scaffolding, cuddled in the environmental suit, and looked through the titanium lattice into infinity. In recent months it had come to frustrate her; out there, or rather, everywhere, was the infinite universe of stars, nebulae, planets, galaxies and great unknowns yet THIS was her universe. The finite, nay insignificant spec of spaceborn habitat that was all she had known since birth.

Her ancestors had lived on a planet, truly part of the universe and product of its wonder. Now every one of their surviving descendants inhabited these prisons of their own devising, kept at 'safe distance' from the awesome spectacles nature offered. Even the nearest star, a red dwarf, was a parsec away. The nearest blue giant lay far across the galaxy... That way, she thought as she pointed lazily.

Charon hadn't kept her thoughts entirely private, but more than one friend reminded her that their antecedents had dreamt of that which was now the norm. To them, modern humans lived 'in space' whereas they had not, had been confined to a planet...

...a planet bountiful of life. Even the water had played host to it and covered over half the surface, it was said...

...now they were free to travel the ellipse, connecting a nonillion people in the sweeping array of habitats. If she put her mind to it she may even find opportunity to visit a planet.

Although not a biosphere, that would be dangerous. Bacteria, even from utterly alien biospheres, were tricky.

Her visor misted briefly as she harrumphed. Last standard year habitat e190, or some-such, had been hit by a meteoroid storm and twelve people died. Could a cradle of life be more dangerous than that?

Her eyes scanned the starscape again and fell on a star that almost brought her to tears. She had pointed a datascope that way once and seen a red giant, invisible to the naked eye, just below. She asked later why they had not been taught that Sol was so easily found, they said it was not worth dwelling over, it was not as though Earth were still inhabitable.

Still, she thought, it remained. A charred pebble of a world it may be, but for now it was there. Right there. Where she could never go.

Reaching out as though to caress the unseen world she pondered what else the datascope had said. Sol was still parent to some cometary nuclei, in particular a binary pair once known as Pluto and Charon.

At least her namesake, she considered, could be near the home world.

Charon might be able to see it.

I might be able to see it, her mind murmured as she leant instinctively forward.

She never had bothered with the tether.

Hours passed, she knew they had done in that disconnected way the dreamer knows

she sleeps. Hours had passed since she set foot on the world.

How wrong they had been! She believed what they said, that Earth was charred and ruined, but they must never have checked! The ground was as green as lush as any hydroforest, the stream as full as its reservoirs.

The sky was pink though, she saw, with that huge red star, but birds flew still. Herds of them, sweeping and diving.

Charon ran through the grassy meadow and found herself in a patch of flowers, as multicoloured as ever she had imagined. Here flew what must be bees, she recognised the yellow stripes on their bodies and beaks. There was even a flightless bumblebee snuffling through the roots.

She took off her glove to feel a flower, yet her hand grew cold and numb. She could not think why, though wondered as she looked up if it was because Sol had shrunk and turned yellow again.

She smiled at it, giddy, and decided she'd try to smell the flower instead.

She took her helmet off.

Why, she wondered, was her breath so hard to catch, as the sweet fragrance flooded her mind.

The End

A note from the author:

It is my fond hope, like that of any writer, that you have enjoyed this story. If you have I ask that you share it with others whom you judge likely to appreciate it. Finally, it would bring me great satisfaction to hear from any readers, with comments or constructive criticism. To contact me please e-mail solar.granulation@gmail.com and specify "Short story comment" as the subject.