

7:59

Did you know it takes eight minutes
for light from the sun to reach the Earth?
Neither did I until fifteen seconds ago,
when the sun exploded.
The afternoon man on the radio interrupted
Aerosmith to announce an “act of God”
in a quiet and quavery baritone
and then KROQ cut out for good.
The first thing I did was check my watch.

I’m sitting in a lawn chair in the backyard,
listening to static and enjoying the weekend.
The lawn is freshly mowed, and the weather
is warm and pleasant for September.
Seventy degrees with a slight breeze.
The gutters are clogged. I really need to clean them.
And Nancy asked me yesterday to sweep the garage.

Six minutes to go, more or less. I figure
it took a minute to get the news to the radio stations.
Most folks will not have heard. A jogger in blue spandex
waves at me as he passes, and I raise my beer bottle in acknowledgement.
Five minutes. I feel like I’m wasting time,
but honestly, what can I do?
Some people daydream about their
penultimate twenty four hours.
But I’ve only got five minutes.
Four minutes, forty five.
Forty four.
Forty three.

I stand up and stroll over
to the gate in our chain-link fence.
I walk through and close it behind me,
so Boomer doesn’t get out. Then I wander
to the driveway. I sit down, cross-legged
on the hot cement, and watch a jeep
roll down the street and take a left on Centennial.

Three minutes. Little chunks of concrete
are scattered on the driveway, remnants
of the hole I dug to sink a basketball hoop for Logan months ago.
I pick up a few now, and build a pile.
Or a tiny fort. A last safe place for tiny people.
With two minutes to go, I thread a convenient twig
through an elm leaf at two points

to make a flag. There, the fort is done.
The last safe place.

Something uneasy is blurring the edges
of the tiny disc that is the sun (to us).
People are beginning to notice. The Johnsons
have come out in their yard and are pointing
up at the sky. I wave, but they don't see me.
One minute, thirty. I sip the last of the warm beer
and try to savor it.

I lie back, lie flat and close my eyes,
half in the shade of the garage.
Boomer barks at one of the backyard squirrels.
The hiss of the wind through summer trees
and the murmur of neighbors
blur into a nice, peaceful hum.
My legs, exposed to light,
are warmer now than a minute ago,
but my mind is cool here in the shade.

Probably thirty seconds to go, give or take.
In the distance a siren begins to wail.
Car doors slam.
Tires squeal.
But it is hard to hear them through
the swelling roar of wind in trees.
I'm not so big after all, compared
to the wind and the sky, to the endless other.
With my eyes closed, I can imagine myself
a speck. A tiny person. Small enough
to slip between the concrete walls
and take shelter
in the last safe place.

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