

Fall 12-1-2006

Senior Moon

Mardelle Fortier
College of DuPage

Follow this and additional works at: <http://dc.cod.edu/plr>

Recommended Citation

Fortier, Mardelle (2006) "Senior Moon," *The Prairie Light Review*: Vol. 27 : No. 1 , Article 46.
Available at: <http://dc.cod.edu/plr/vol27/iss1/46>

This Selection is brought to you for free and open access by the College Publications at DigitalCommons@COD. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Prairie Light Review by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@COD. For more information, please contact koteles@cod.edu.

Senior Moon

Mardelle Fortier

When I finally got my medical degree, some 27 years ago from Johns Hopkins, I never would have imagined myself being given a tour of this biospheric lunar retirement community. We were tooling around in a golf cart on magnetic rails under an artificial sky as Malcolm Soanes, Director of Serenity Lunar Living Center, showed me the habitat, courtesy of Biospheric Development Corporation. The crewcut, orange-suited executive spread his immaculate hands. “This retirement center is one of seven we have constructed at Mare Serenitates, which as you know is to the east of Montes Caucasus.” Soanes spoke earnestly, turning to look at me from time to time as we bounced along. “Somehow I will convince you, Anthony, to leave your position as Chief of Medicine and become our new Director of Geriatric Medicine.” He must have known how proud I was of my job in Community Hospital outside of Chicago. I smiled noncommittally as I focused on my surroundings to control my worries.

We pulled up to a long one-story structure with a moon-rock façade. As we walked along a magnetized pathway, which stabilized us in our magnetic shoes, we passed a rock garden of bluish-gray stones and dust with a modern sculpture in the center. Soanes appeared pleased when he noticed my interest.

“Our rock garden,” he explained. “The Moon is covered in very fine dust called regolith. Eons of meteor impacts made it by pulverizing the rocks. Some of the pieces are shaped like droplets. These are rocks that have been melted at various places on the surface.” We entered the air-conditioned residence and walked down a brightly decorated corridor, and stopped to watch some oldsters in a recreation room. Several bounced across a mat while other elderly people lifted weights which would have been impossible without the Moon’s 0.17 surface gravity compared to Earth.

The Director laughed. “I can never pass this room without getting a kick out of it. Of course, the gravity disparity was what first gave the developer the idea that the Moon might be perfect as a site for retirement communities. Previously, the moon was mostly considered a space base for flights to other planets. Lower gravity, however, is an excellent environment for older folks—easier on heart function and walking, letting them lead more active lives longer. As a geriatric specialist, I’m sure you are well aware of its benefits.”

I nodded. It was a fact more prominent in my mind than even Soanes could appreciate. “I do hope your wife is enjoying her tour of our hospital,” Soanes said. My brain focused on my wife. When Laura began her surgical internship at Community Hospital, I was a senior resident. I am 54, while she is an active 50. If we took the positions offered, we would be leaving high-powered and lucrative practices at the height of our career success.

“You know,” I frowned, “if we come to the moon, my wife would be engaging in a family medical practice; she would not be doing surgery.”

The Director smiled. “That’s perfectly acceptable with us. We need family physi-

cians here and other medical generalists. We do need a decision soon, however. As I explained, because of the stresses of space travel, we encourage both residents and staff to come to the Moon before they are age 55. In your case, Doctor, you have less than a year to make the change.”

“I understand.” While striving to remain calm, I could feel my blood pressure rise.

Soames and I walked through the building where he showed me the indoor swimming pool, tennis courts, and 18-hole golf course, and learning center, where residents and staff enjoyed various classes, including astronomy, for community college credit. Taking an elevator to a lower level, we entered a spacious mall with a variety of restaurants, movie theaters, and shops. “You certainly have everything here a resident could want,” I told Soames, hoping that Laura was as impressed as I was.

“Thank you. We try. We want a happy community of retired people. We carefully screen our residents. For some, the new environment is very stimulating and they thrive. Others, of course, are too attached to memories of the past. The absence of familiar Earth sights is alienating and likely to be too upsetting. Most of our residents love the Moon and often go on our lunar rover bus excursions, or sign up for our space-suited moon walks.”

“And the biospheric dome can withstand meteor showers?”

“Absolutely”—the Director nodded vigorously—“the Lunar Biospheric Development Corporation holds the exclusive patent on the metallurgical process securing the Dome. We are well aware that this technology is necessary for any real Moon investment. We have reduced the risk of meteor showers to almost nil, and built into the biosphere back-up systems in the rare possibility of a Dome breach.”

A petite woman, in dark slacks and a blue-patterned blouse, came up to us, straightening gray hair. “Anthony,” she touched my arm, “they have the most wonderful hospital facilities here. State of the art, with cutting edge technology.”

Would she make the adjustment? My heart leaped. When Laura had heart bypass surgery last year, it had become painfully clear to me that she could no longer continue her high-stress surgical practice.

“You will lack nothing, doctors.” Soames observed Laura, who watched with lines of strain around her large, caring eyes. “All seven retirement communities pool their resources. We constantly keep our supplies up to date. Since we’re 238,850 miles from Earth, we know the importance of logistics. Perhaps you two would like to talk it over in our lounge. I’ll get you both some coffee. Cream and sugar?”

“Please,” Laura replied.

We entered the lounge and sat in plush red velvet chairs. On the walls hung oil paintings of Earth scenes: mountains, lakes, forests. Could Laura give up the attachment to Earth, and to our children? Of course, they had grown up and married. Laura did gaze at a large painting of a cobalt-blue lake, shimmering in the sunset.. “I could be happy here,” Laura ventured. “But could you give up being Chief of Medicine? I’ve been worried about your blood pressure—but you are at the height of your career.”

I sipped coffee, realizing that she was just as concerned about me as I was about her. “I believe I would be happy.” I did not mention my enjoyment of the golfing

on the greens near our beautiful home. If she could give up the peace of lakes, I could sacrifice a trivial game. “I could practice medicine again, instead of dealing with a mountain of hospital administrative problems.”

“Do you want to think about it some more?” Laura asked.

No, I didn’t want to second-guess ourselves. On any day, her fast-paced surgical practice could kill my wife. “If you’re agreeable,” I said, “we should simply accept the positions and remain here. After all, why go through the Earth’s G-forces once again.”

Sighing with relief, Laura put down her coffee and squeezed his hand. “Your job has too many headaches and your cholesterol count concerns me. Well! Here’s to general family practice and life on the Moon!”

Soames returned and sat on the sofa. “We’ve decided to accept your generous offer, Director,” I told him.

“That’s wonderful, simply wonderful. Your residence is all prepared.”

“Do we need to return to Earth and bring up our possessions?” Laura’s mouth tightened.

“Your personal things can be brought up from Earth while others can be sold by our company and we’ll provide you with the proceeds in a check. I hope you enjoy your first night sleeping on the Moon. Frankly, I was expecting a tough sell, Doctors.”

“You did an excellent job, Director,” I replied. Smiling at Laura, who now leaned back with relaxed arms, I raised my coffee in a toast. “Here’s to Serenity Lunar Living Center and its new doctors.” I was certain we would both live long enough to retire as old folks ourselves.