

THE SPACES IN BETWEEN
EP03 - MY LOWER BACK SEEMS TO DISAGREE

Written by

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Breathing Space contains mature content such as substance abuse, sexual situations, and violence.

FADE IN:

INT. STATION PERSONNEL BLOCK - DAY

AUTOMATED SYSTEM (O.S.)

The person you are trying to reach is not accepting calls at this time. Please record a message, starting with a two second pause. Say "send" when finished.

ANTON (O.S)

Hey kiddo! I was hoping to share some good news with you today. Looks like I might get a job near you! Well, not near-near, but only a shuttle ride away. I'm still waiting to hear back, but I'm hopeful they'll hire me. It'll be a late night shift, but I'm so tired all the time I won't even notice.

I think it went well, but even if I'm rejected, I won't accept defeat. I'll keep fighting.

Somewhere along the line I forgot about that. I was so lost, wandering around like I was some kind of ghost—I was running on empty. Didn't matter anymore that the metal floors I sleep on feel like home, no matter how much my lower back seems to disagree with it. I didn't have a destination, so I couldn't hope to fill the empty space in my heart. But now...I'm trying to be better. And to be honest with myself, I'm getting there. It might sound complicated, but one day you'll understand.

I can't keep doing this. Don't know why I'm still leaving these

messages. I've given up hope you'll even listen to them. Even if you did, would you reach out? At this point I'm only a voice on the line that you'll never answer anymore. I tried to convince myself I'm brave enough for this...

I...I just want you to know you're never alone, okay? Be brave for Dad. Please?

I love you, Aurora. I hope to hear back from you one day.

Send.

EXT. DELANEY SHIPYARDS - DOCKS - NIGHT

Footsteps on metal, ambient noises of working sounds.

STEP-OFF

...and that'll wrap up the tour of the area. You'll get used to everything pretty fast. The longest bit of all this is the onboarding forms. You handle all that?

ANTON

That's an understatement. Haven't signed that much stuff since my last long-term job.

STEP-OFF

When was that?

ANTON

Uh, years ago. Couldn't tell you exactly.

STEP-OFF

I guess the memory is the first thing to go when you get old.

ANTON

How old do you think I am?

STEP-OFF

50? 60?

ANTON

Oh, so that's how this is gonna be.

STEP-OFF

Better get used to it. But yeah, all the new hire stuff is relatively new with the SBBU taking over the shipyard. Guess it has *some* merits. Big hassle if you ask me.

ANTON

SBBU?

STEP-OFF

Ship Builders and Breakers Union.

ANTON

Gotcha. Is it really that much different than when the previous owners were running Delaney?

STEP-OFF

Loads. First off, the benefits are way better. Mostly because they didn't exist before, so throwing us a stale piece of bread would have been an improvement.

ANTON

Really? Not one benefit?

STEP-OFF

Not unless you count days off.

ANTON

That's absurd in a place like this.

STEP-OFF

Fuck yeah it is. Union changed a lot of things though. Health insurance. Life insurance. You sign up for the extra retirement stuff?

ANTON

Nah, don't know how long I'll be around.

STEP-OFF

Good. Don't let others control
your financial freedom.

ANTON

Okay...

STEP-OFF

Word is the shipyard is gonna be
running at a loss for a bit trying
to get all the employee programs
off the ground. You think they'd
be better prepared.

ANTON

Makes sense. Programs like that
aren't easy to get started.
Shocked they didn't wanna do a
staggered rollout.

STEP-OFF

Way above my head. All I know is
if it wasn't for the union, we'd
still be "independent
contractors."

ANTON

You seriously worked as
independent contractors?

STEP-OFF

Yea?

ANTON

Sounds like a serious gray area to
work in, if not a straight labor
law violation.

STEP-OFF

Heard it a time or two, mostly
from new hires or people trying to
stir up trouble. Anyone that kept
it up was soon found to be
unemployed. Serves them right for
running their mouths.

ANTON

Certainly everyone else is
appreciative of the changes then.

STEP-OFF

Uh, why would they be? We had control of our hours and didn't have a faceless corporation stealing our wages to pay for socialist trash.

ANTON

Like what, taxes?

STEP-OFF

Taxes?! You mean legalized theft?! Don't get me started. Do you know how much they take? That's on top of the money they make us give up for people skipping out on work. Sick days they call it.

ANTON

You sound like you want it to go back the way it was.

STEP-OFF

Fuck no.

ANTON

Then what *do* you like about the union?

STEP-OFF

Better wages. No more forced overtime. Injuries are treated seriously. There are safety inspections now. Welcome change according to management, but it's been a culture shift for people. Pony pushed hard on that, so everyone is willing to deal with it. More or less.

ANTON

Heh, as long as upper management is on board, it'll be good. That'll only keep as long as people are valued over money. Never lasts in my experience.

STEP-OFF

Fair bit of people agree with that. Healthy to, if you ask me.

ANTON

Prepare for the worst. Hope for adequate.

STEP-OFF

Thing is, the union charter should provide resistance to such things. All members are on equal vote footing for any changes. Not sure why we need it though. Didn't ask for a gaggle of loudmouths to dictate what I do with my life. What are you so jaded about it anyway?

ANTON

You could say I've dipped my toes in the corporate shit pond. Don't know if you've ever been so *lucky*, but when I was younger, I kicked off my working career at a rather large one.

STEP-OFF

Ah, YuKon?

ANTON

Close. How'd you know?

STEP-OFF

You have that air of bitterness.

ANTON

I'll take that as a complement.

STEP-OFF

You'd actually be surprised how many people around here have a similar experience. Lotta people are out there looking for work after the whole YuKon shit show.

ANTON

Isn't unique to the shipyard. Not one place I've been where people aren't looking to make ends meet. Lucky ones have friends in the right places to contact. After they've carried everything they could when walking out the door.

STEP-OFF

With all the changes, a bunch of people came to Delaney. Makes the place appealing for long-term work. Only so many slots though. You must have had some of those "friends" to get in here. Doesn't it bother you to depend on charity?

ANTON

Mm, maybe. Couldn't say honestly. Is the ordeal with the Hephaestus spill wrapped up?

STEP-OFF

People were on edge for a while. Didn't know if they were gonna be out of work. It was rocky.

ANTON

It was serious. News said at least two years until everything is cleaned up. People were displaced from their homes. Livelihoods disrupted. They had good reason to worry.

STEP-OFF

Not like it was their fault.

ANTON

No, but I understand the frustration. As well as being blamed for something I had no control over.

STEP-OFF

Sounds complicated.

ANTON

Very.

STEP-OFF

Alright then.

Ambient sounds.

STEP-OFF

So, you catch that P.G. match last night?

ANTON

The fuck?

Scene Break

INT. DELANEY STATION - PONY'S OFFICE

Knocking on door, metallic whirring in background.

BALLOON

(nervous)

Uh, you needed me, Pony?

PONY

(handwaving indicating he's deep in concentration)

Don't have time to go through them applications. Marked a few that might fit. Pick whoever looks good.

(to self, mumbling)

Traded a torch for a highlighter.
What the hell am I doing?

BALLOON

Uh, what do I look for?

PONY

You tell me. They're going on your crew, *shift lead*.

BALLOON

Okay, umm, we've got enough welders. Maybe some, uh, generalists?

PONY

Pick one who's got some experience at least. Save you trouble trainin' 'em.

Pages turning.

BALLOON

Okay, um. Mm.

More pages turning.

BALLOON

Huh. This one. Um. If you think he'll work. Please.

PONY

What's the name?

BALLOON

Proctor, Anton.

PONY

Proctor? Hand it over.

Footsteps. Ruffling papers.

PONY

This ain't one I pulled.

BALLOON

Um. Yes. I'm sure.

PONY

Ain't got much goin' for 'im.
Don't look like he's skinned
before. Got some time on a BRONCO
crew, so 'least knows his way
'round a ship, and prolly spent
some time exo. Hang on. He a CPA?

BALLOON

Uh. Y-yes?

PONY

Heh, CPAs are tough sumbitches.
You know this...Proctor?

BALLOON

Sort of?

PONY

Trust him?

BALLOON

Absolutely.

PONY

Why's that?

BALLOON

Um. My, uh. My brother. Died on
the job. The company, first they
said it was the workers fault, so
no pay out. Then he, uh. Proctor.
He kind of got blamed.

PONY

Don't sound like th' kind of man
to have on a crew.

BALLOON

No, no see, he...It wasn't his
fault. An' he probably could have
put his head down, an' let it roll
off. But he- he stuck around. Made
sure we got settlements. The
families. Of the people that died.

They weren't much, but...we had a
real nice funeral for Apollo. I
think it ruined his life. Saying
something. 'Cause after that he
was just gone. Didn't think I'd
see him again, but he's here, an'
he needs a job, an' he's exactly
the kind of man you want on your
crew. At least. I, uh, think that?

PONY

Now yer thinkin' like a shift
lead.

BALLOON

Heh.

PONY

I'll flag his application.

Papers being moved around.

PONY

Can't find shit in all this.
Where's my damn pen? Hey, don't
ever take a management job.

BALLOON

Huh?

PONY

Ah, forget it. Just make sure he's
here by next cycle.

Scene Break

STEP-OFF

Seems like we're not really
hurting for people. Really wish
they weren't all so damned green.
Think the Powers That Be would

want to bring on *trained workers*.
No offense.

ANTON

Not everyone in the upper echelons
has a clue. Might seem like they
have it all figured out, but run
away at the least bit of
resistance.

STEP-OFF

You got a chip on your shoulder?

ANTON

Why? Got some salsa you're hiding
from me?

STEP-OFF

How far south did it end up going
for you during the YuKon blow up?
Or did you retire before all that?

ANTON

Let's go with our separation was a
rapid unscheduled disassembly.
Retiring was never on the table.

STEP-OFF

Shame. There was a guy around
here, complete badass, that came
to work here of all places after
he retired. Did a bunch of math or
numbers shit before he came here.

So what did you do at YuKon?

ANTON

You might consider it numbers
shit.

STEP-OFF

Really? Did you know Sergei?

ANTON

Who?

STEP-OFF

Sergie. He was a CPA. From Luna.

ANTON

What do you think CPA means?

STEP-OFF

It means you do numbers shit.

ANTON

Right. No, I didn't know Sergei.

STEP-OFF

Damn.

Ambient noise.

ANTON

I was a regional manager when I separated.

STEP-OFF

A big shot then, eh? What did this big important work have you doing in the office?

ANTON

Logistics. I was really good at managing not only my time, but how all the teams I was on worked together. Contributed ways to making shipping centers more efficient, amongst other improvements, which of course my bosses took all credit for. I thought maybe I'd get some recognition for-

STEP-OFF

Ah, I see. Right. So you were like a CPA.

ANTON

I was a macroeconomist with business and industrial focuses, as well as, backgrounds in manufacturing and distribution, policy and supply analysis, and large-market network management.

STEP-OFF

So, yes? Could've just said yes.

ANTON

I chose not to.

STEP-OFF

You're not gonna be a CPA here are you? 'cause Sergei's got big boots to fill.

ANTON

I'm not legally a CPA. Long time ago I did sit for the testing and get the certification, but it's long since lapsed.

STEP-OFF

Uh huh.

ANTON

You have to stay up on training and earn education credits for upkeep.

STEP-OFF

You don't say.

ANTON

If it's something we need I can probably get it again.

STEP-OFF

I'm gonna stop you right there.

ANTON

Not measuring up to your friend, am I?

STEP-OFF

Not even a little. You're a bit over qualified to be down in the yard with us. How bad did you piss someone off?

ANTON

It's a long story. Suffice to say I've been looking for more stable employment for a number of years. Been moving around taking what work I can to get by.

STEP-OFF

Job hopping ain't exactly an easy life.

ANTON

Which makes a lot of sense why I was doing it.

STEP-OFF

You *really* fucked up then. Come on, spill.

ANTON

Maybe some other time.

STEP-OFF

Aww, that's no fun. Can you at least tell me what kind of stuff you ended up doing?

ANTON

Uh, been up and down the board. Station custodial engineering for multiple places. Pretty easy work to fall back on if you can't find anything else. No one wants to clean up after other people.

STEP-OFF

Because we're fucking animals.

ANTON

Not going to argue with that. Um, did around two years on a BRONCO crew. Interesting work. Keeps you busy, but even with a crew it can be pretty lonely.

STEP-OFF

Find it hard to believe you did that.

ANTON

And I find it hard to believe people can string together eight words sometimes.

STEP-OFF

Were you any good?

ANTON

Good is relative. Captain hired me after he saw me doing some haggling where I ran circles around the guy to double what he offered. Thought maybe I can help his ship earn a little more. My "numbers" history paid off. Difficult work outside of that,

but I got used to it. Captain gave me a decent bonus when I left.

STEP-OFF
Seems stupid to leave then.

ANTON
Em, likely given that money kept me afloat for a couple months.

Got tired of it though. Really, I think I was tired of not being around people.

Which, to admit that outloud, man.

STEP-OFF
Anything else?

ANTON
Bunch of really short-term stuff as I traveled around the system. Packing factory. Deliveries. Bio printer farms. Uh, scrap yard. Bunch of temporary farm picking. Disastrous stint as a line cook.

STEP-OFF
How many jobs have you worked?

ANTON
Hmm, you know, I really couldn't put a number on it. Stopped counting somewhere around 30?

STEP-OFF
You get around man.

ANTON
Funny. Your mom said something similar when I took her out to dinner last week.

STEP-OFF
What the fuck? My mom would—why you gotta—my mom is a fine lady!

ANTON
You can say that again. Wink.

STEP-OFF
Could you just *not*?

ANTON

I'm messing with you kid. I'm sure your mother is a wonderful, caring person.

STEP-OFF

Can we get back to it, asshole?

ANTON

Sure. Can't remember where I was going with the next one in the queue anyway.

STEP-OFF

'Cause, you're old.

ANTON

Damn. Got me there. Truce?

STEP-OFF

Fine.

You and that mouth work anywhere interesting lately?

ANTON

Oh come on! You can't agree to a truce and set me up like that.

STEP-OFF

Don't you dare.

ANTON

Let's see. Um, I was working at a warehouse on an abandoned YuKon orbital. Lots of shipping and inventory management work.

STEP-OFF

In your wheelhouse?

ANTON

It was stuff I was good at before, but on a smaller scale. Place was used as a central hub for scrappers to bring in items for quick cash from other stations. People with "abandoned" property. Uh, delivery personnel looking to offload things they were left with for cheap.

STEP-OFF

Sounds like a decent gig. Bet there are tons of people out there looking for an easy way to turn a quick buck.

ANTON

Kept me busy. Ever hear of a mystery crate?

STEP-OFF

No?

ANTON

You throw a bunch of things in a box that no one wants. Then you turn around and sell it for cheap enough that people *think* they are getting a deal but expensive enough you turn a tidy profit when you sell enough of them.

STEP-OFF

That sounds like you made a scam.

ANTON

How dare you accuse me of such a thing.

STEP-OFF

Calling it like I see it.

ANTON

That reminds me. When your dad called me last night, he mentioned he hadn't seen you for a long time. He sounded pretty upset. Asked me to have you call-

STEP-OFF

Would you leave my fucking parents out of this?

ANTON

Can you just tell me if you have any siblings? Grandparents? Girl next door? Pet gerbil? Uh, favorite ficus? I can keep this going.

STEP-OFF

I swear if you keep this up-

ANTON

You make this way too easy.

Sorry, I'll stop. Really. No more family jokes. It wasn't my intention to exasperate you.

STEP-OFF

This fucking tour can't be over soon enough. So how weren't your trash boxes a scam?

ANTON

I prefer "innovation" to scam. We used a workaround. Slap a warning on the box stating the value of the crate might not be equal to what it was purchased for. And then don't accept returns.

STEP-OFF

So you told people you were scamming them with a disclaimer? And people still bought them?

ANTON

I can't control what people buy. One person's trash is another person's shit to deal with.

STEP-OFF

I'm impressed. You can't grift someone if you tell them you're going to do it upfront.

ANTON

I'm surprised it even worked. Honestly, it's a little embarrassing.

STEP-OFF

If you say so. What made you leave?

ANTON

An automated freighter plowed into the station.

STEP-OFF

Say that again?

ANTON

Since all the nav data was wiped when YuKon vanished, there are ships and drones from its delivery fleet just floating out there with nothing to stop their momentum.

STEP-OFF

Crashing into a station though?
What are the odds-

ANTON

One in 70 trillion. Give or take a couple million. Really a rounding error at that point.

STEP-OFF

Uh, how did you... You know what, I don't want to know.

ANTON

It was going to take a bit to repair the station. Figured it was a good time to move on. I hitched a ride with a scraper shortly after. Ended up out here by recommendation.

Scene Break

INT. NOODLE SHOP AROUND THE CORNER - DAY

ANTON

Look, you aren't going to get the best deal on staples if you buy them piecemeal. Bulk is the way to go.

CAT

Bulk is the problem. Our margins are razor fucking thin already. If I buy a wholesale amount of cricket flour, I can't also afford meal worms or decent miso or stock powders. And I also can't continue to buy the lower grade shit either. It comes through in the end and people can taste it.

ANTON

And that's why you need to switch to scratch made on some of these. Cricket flour isn't all that hard to get out there right now. Facilities producing it are having issues selling.

CAT

And you happen to know this, how?

ANTON

Let's say I'm plugged in. If you're willing to do a little strategic traveling, you can stock up while still selling along the way. This thing is mobile, right?

HECK

When she wants to be. But I can pretty well fix things faster'n they can break.

CAT

Is everything all right? I called you fifteen minutes ago.

HECK

Sorry, I just was finishing the count. We're going to be out of mushroom bouillon soon. And, the freeze dried vegetable packets aren't far behind that.

CAT

Ugh. Shit. Just what we need.

ANTON

Here. I'm giving you a few names that will sell to you directly. Should have some stuff a restaurant needs to keep going. If you comm' ahead and see what they have in stock, you can set an efficient flight plan to get what you need with decent revenue stops along the way.

HECK

What are you two talking about?

CAT

This is Mr. Anton. He's been trying to help solve our stock problem. Unprompted at that.

ANTON

Merely offering some advice. It's up to you to act on it. Or not.

CAT

You seem too familiar to be "plugged" in. Why aren't you doing this anymore?

ANTON

I wanted a change of pace. That's why I was asking if you knew of any place looking to hire nearby.

CAT

Sorry, I don't. We only just docked.

ANTON

It's not a big deal. Not the first person to tell me no. Won't be the last either.

Oh, if you give these two my name, they might throw in something a little extra.

CAT

Hm, I'll think about it.

HECK

Cat.

CAT

Oh. Um, thank you.

HECK

Well, Mr. Anton, what kind of work are you looking to do?

ANTON

Something steady more than anything. I'm not really picky.

HECK

Ever been to Delaney Station?

STEP-OFF

And you came here without anything setup? That's stupid.

ANTON

Someone offered to help squeeze my application in. Figured if they were doing me a favor, I could shoot my shot. Aim's so bad I planned on ordering a couple after I missed.

STEP-OFF

Better than taking one in the face.

ANTON

Are you always a smart ass?

STEP-OFF

Nope. Sometimes I sleep.

ANTON

You should consider getting more then.

STEP-OFF

Oh fuck off.

ANTON

It's been surprising all these years how willing people are to give me a chance at work.

STEP-OFF

You sounded pretty fucking burnt out.

ANTON

For a long time. Can't say I'm fully over it either.

STEP-OFF

Well none of that matters here.

ANTON

Why's that?

STEP-OFF

It's all about living in the moment here. Anything else gets you hurt.

ANTON

Okay, good. Thought you were going to go philosophical on me there.

STEP-OFF

Deflect all you want, but you know there's nothing good about living in the past. Things change. People change. Sometimes it's good, but not always.

You have to accept you can only control what you can and there's no point in hoping things turned out different. You end up not enjoying anything.

That philosophical enough for you?

ANTON

I'll give you a passing grade. Just barely.

STEP-OFF

Are you trying to sound like my disappointed dad? Going to ground me for not getting high marks?

ANTON

Hell no. I claim none of *that* mess.

STEP-OFF

Definitely sounds like a dad.

ANTON

If the mag boot fits.

STEP-OFF

You know you aren't that funny, right?

ANTON

It's okay to admit you wouldn't know humor if you tripped over it.

STEP-OFF

Urgh. Ugh.

ANTON

Thanks.

STEP-OFF

Don't mention it. Seriously. It would be a major tarnish to my carefully crafted reputation around here.

ANTON

Major Tarnish reporting for duty.

STEP-OFF

Quit it.

ANTON

Would you like me to *resign* from telling any more jokes?

STEP-OFF

Can't wait to hand you off. Whoever gets stuck with you is going to be *thrilled*.

ANTON

Can't spell *thrilled* without tired.

STEP-OFF

What? That doesn't even work.

Construction ambient noise.

STEP-OFF

Here's where you'll be working from now on. Looks like we made it right in time. Second shift is finishing up.

ANTON

Didn't expect to be starting so late.

STEP-OFF

This ain't a 9-5. Think you can hack it?

ANTON

My knees and back might complain, but it's not like I'm out of shape. Feel free to let me know

how your body feels once you get to 35. Bet your ass won't be so hung up on it.

STEP-OFF

Ugh. Anton, this is Balloon. Balloon. Anton. What Balloon says goes. Make sure you listen. Might seem a little meek, but she's not shift lead for nothing.

BALLOON

It's nice to meet you. Uh, Mr. Proctor.

ANTON

Anything special to be aware of before I get out there?

BALLOON

We've got a double tether system for new hires 'til they get the hang of things. Step-off, make sure he is suited up properly and strapped to your belt.

STEP-OFF

Aww, come on! You're fucking with me, right? I thought I was only doing the tour! Make this guy someone else's problem!

BALLOON

Don't mind him. Come speak with me if you have any concerns or questions about the work.

ANTON

Understood.

BALLOON

We usually head to the Pilothouse when we're done. Also, a word of warning. Don't engage in any bets with Step-off.

ANTON

Okay.

STEP-OFF

Can you at least pay for drinks then? I don't want to be stuck to

this bad joke machine all day
without getting something out of
it.

ANTON

You shouldn't complain about it.
Don't want to be in bad *spirits*.

STEP-OFF

I will cut your tether if you make
another joke.

BALLOON

Go introduce yourself to the rest
of the team when you're done
getting ready.

STEP-OFF

Hold up. What's his name?

ANTON

Anton?

STEP-OFF

No, your *crew* name.

BALLOON

He already has a name! All rookies
get it!

STEP-OFF

Can't be calling you a retentive
name like Proctor around here.
Let's see-

BALLOON

Ugh.

STEP-OFF

Hawk? Nah, too easy with those
eyes. You certainly have a serious
look to you. Maybe iron something?
Hmm. That doesn't fit either. Old
dog? But can we teach him-

BALLOON

It's Balloon!

STEP-OFF

Nah.

BALLOON

What? Why not?

STEP-OFF

That's your name.

BALLOON

But, but, but the new person
always gets the name.

STEP-OFF

Since you said it smartass, it's
Major Tarnish.

ANTON

What? You can't use my jokes
against me.

STEP-OFF

Heh. Hm, how about Tiger? Has a
ring to it.

ANTON

At least, it's not-

STEP-OFF

Tony the Tiger!

ANTON

Is "Balloon" still on the table?

BALLOON

(simultaneous)

Yes!

STEP-OFF

(simultaneous)

No.

ANTON

I hate you already, Step-off.

STEP-OFF

You'll get over it.

Hey, how do you feel about
Fridays, Mr. Was-a-CPA?

Scene fades out

Thank you for joining us for
this episode of Breathing
Space.

This episode, My Lower Back
Seems to Disagree, was
written and directed by
Jordan W. Anderson and edited
by Jordan W. Anderson.

Anton Proctor is voiced by
Jordan W. Anderson.
George "Pony" Cheval is
voiced by Jesse Hall
Verner "Step-Off" Gil is
voiced by Ryan Astheimer
Delia "Balloon" Feelan is
voiced by Lafayette
Uttarapong
Heck is voiced by Amy Young
Cat is voiced by Ella Watts

Our theme, Blues for the
Black, was composed by
Michael Freitag with vocals
by Jeremiah and lyrics by
Scott Paladin.

You can find links to learn
more about our cast and crew
in the show notes and more
information about our show at
our website, breathing
space.law.names.com.

Breathing Space is a Law of
Names Production.