

FACT, FACET, FACE

He said, this is what I see: A small chunk of platinum that's ground spherical, pickled in acid, polished, then wired to a power source in basic solution. Bubbles of gas, electrolyzed water, cling to its surface; the sphere, after hours cycling cathode to anode, flaunts gray facets, brilliant cut but matte, by this quickened corrosion.

They were taking turns. She said, I will just tell you the bare facts: Of Neptune's two satellites, Triton's motion is retrograde, its orbit close to circular; Nereid's sweep more eccentric than any in the solar system, and inclined 28° to Neptune's equatorial plane. This, and 50 orbiting arcs, tell Neptune's dry story.

That night moons and precious electrodes talked past each other. As if there were no eye watching for shepherd satellites, no hand to weigh metal oxide flaking off. The tide took itself elsewhere — to where life's current's phased in, and laughter softly courses, where faces to each other incline. No apogee's as remote as not to come near.