

Years 11 & 12

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## My Moon Girl

Shut. Squint. Squeeze.

The moonlight filtered past my eyelashes and through the fleshy lids. It had been keeping me awake since one in the morning. That bright white light I just couldn't seem to escape. It was pure but it haunted me, had it always haunted me? The house was silent save for the creaking and groaning as the tin on the roof expanded and contracted. The lacy curtains swayed distantly with the breeze outside, and I decided I couldn't take it anymore. Either the moon was playing tricks on me, or something (someone?) wanted my attention. I rose out of bed in a singlet and ratty shorts, laced up my sneakers and took the back door out.

The house was a skeleton constructed from old bits and scraps of metal, each piece with its own history. I suppose that's what the market offers when your family decides to continue the bloodline in the middle of nowhere. The peace of it all turns to eerie silence quickly and soon enough you're standing in the front yard looking up at the moon, convinced it wants to tell you something. It peeks out from the top of gangly gum trees, hiding. I stare at it, and I swear it beckons me forward. I'm too intrigued so I follow the path leading away from our house.

The red rocks underneath my feet hurt to walk on, the soles of these shoes rubbed away years ago. The hairs on my arm stand up straight with excitement and I barely feel the chill in the air. My mind wanders to Mum and Dad asleep at home. Dad's breath is stale and Mum wrinkles her nose and rolls over. They're a typical married couple; they didn't plan on having an esoteric daughter. By 'esoteric' I mean socially inept and stuck in her head. Isn't that what happens when your closest friends are the insects in your backyard and your reflection in the mirror? I'm not surprised at the way I turned out; loneliness can do that to a person.

The full moon appears clear, nestled amongst the stars and the deep navy of the night sky. The shine at its edges is brighter now and its grey shadows seem polished. I look around to see I have wandered into a clearing. Behind me the red rubble path leads back into the thick of the bush. I trust my instincts and turn my attention back to moon.

*What are you trying to tell me? Tell me, tell me.*

I echo my inner monologue in forced brainwaves at the sky and something flickers back. That white sphere grows and morphs and am I hallucinating? It inflates into an oddly large star shape, solid and sparkly. Just looking at it I feel lighter, like I've swallowed my weight in helium. The ground becomes a memory; I watch it move further and further away. I am floating. I ascend out of the clearing and into the unknown.

I am an astronaut leaving Earth, traversing an uncharted sky. Some sort of current buzzes at my fingertips and I feel free. My knotty hair whips in the wind and it's the sort of messy that the right kind of person would find beautiful. I have no fear, even if I fall, I could at least die in the eyes of the moon and the comfort of the night. I think about the room I was just in half an hour ago. The torn posters and newspaper articles tacked to the wall. My journal with the broken lock, waiting to be read by prying eyes. The stale bed sheets smelling of night sweats and half-forgotten dreams. I think about the blurred days, the weeks that felt like years. I think about the

little life I never fit into. I love my parents, and I miss people I've never met before. In this moment, I'm about to meet the moon.

I fly higher and closer toward it, and it shapeshifts once again. The odd star-shape grows arms and legs that outstretch and a face that smiles. Her long, pale hair flows in a river down her back stopping just before her ankles. It curls in ringlets perfectly; they bounce in the breeze. She is barefoot and her skin reflects clearer than a lake at dusk. From afar her eyes appear ordinary blue. But the closer I look; the blue is speckled with greyish hues and browns. The colour of wet pavement after the first rain in months. It's like nothing I've ever seen. The dullness of my own eyes doesn't compare.

"You came," she says, and her voice is smooth like silk.

"You called for me," I whisper.

I am meeting the moon, and it feels like I know her. In past lives, she called for me just the same and every time I followed the red rubble back to her. The defining moment in my mundane existence. All my questions of the world outside, could she answer them for me? I want to reach out to make sure she's real but I'm too afraid. She beckons me forward and the clouds settle around us slowly. The cloth that clings to my sweat is paper thin and I am reminded of my Earthliness. The odd crooked tooth. The pimple that becomes a permanent freckle. I've never felt perfect, but her stare makes me feel as if I could be.

"I've been watching you. For quite some time really," she speaks softly.

"Me?"

"Yes you, silly. It's so lonely up here, you have such fun down there."

"I don't understand, don't you only come out at night?" I ask confused.

"No, I only blend into the day too well. And by fun, I mean the fun in your dreams."

She presses her fingertips to my forehead.

"What are you? What's your name?"

"I don't know, call me what you like." She throws her head back and laughs; I smile. So, I learn the story of the moon girl. We sit amongst the clouds, and she tells me all that she remembers. Alone, hidden by mist, overlooking the bush. A solitary existence but a happy one. As happy as someone could be by themselves. Born out of nothing, but she seemed to have seen everything. She spoke with a clarity I'd never heard before. Stories told as if she'd peeled back the skin of these people and lived their existence.

"And yet, out of all the people I've seen live, none of them have been quite as unique as you," she giggles.

"Unique? I'm the most ordinary person you could come by," I say.

"Ordinary people don't let their imaginations run wild the way you do."

"I have nowhere else to run to."

Suddenly, the sky changes and the stars zoom past overhead. The scrub beneath us turns into a bustling city with bright lights and tired faces. Screams and laughter blend into a constant stream of noise, and I immediately miss the quiet.

"Where are we?"

"The next city over. I know you want to see the world; this is it." She looks out at the sprawling skyscrapers.

The glow that emanates off the buildings and the people is unworldly. A far cry from the isolation I had always known. People's conversations seemed to bounce from wall-to-wall culminating into a chorus with a never ending crescendo. It was like something out of *The Great Gatsby*, something I'd only ever read about and dreamt I'd live to see someday. The movies and posters my parents had bought for me

every birthday couldn't prepare me for the visual I was witnessing. The moon girl waited beside me, her breath cool on my shoulder.

"So? What do you think?" she asks me.

I'm not sure what to say at first. The city is breathtaking; it's an entity, alive and breathing. But I was never one to be fooled by costumes and performance.

"It's beautiful, I've never seen anything like it," I reply quietly.

She raises a thin brow at me.

"There's something you're not saying."

I look down again at the scene below me. People huddle in groups that sway from side to side, focused on the journey home. But there are small pockets of people who move slowly, some who don't move at all. I see them crouched in alleyways and huddled on stained mattresses. I see them tense on the phone and exhaling shakily as they look to the sky. I wonder what they're doing in an overwhelmingly loud place like this.

"Do you see those people? The quieter ones," I say. She nods slowly.

"Why aren't they smiling? This place seems so happy," I ask.

The moon girl places her palms on the back of my shoulders, and we fly higher into the sky, faces blur and the chatter silences.

"Nothing is perfect except for in here," she presses her palms into my scalp, "and even then, we only *think* it's perfect."

I turn to her confused, "But you seem perfect. Your eyes, your hair. You've shown me this place, why?"

"Every night I've watched you dream for something more. A way out, an escape from what you have."

She smiles solemnly and the wind picks up; it howls like a heart broken. We return to the place above the clearing, and I don't know what to make of anything. The girl in front of me and the place we have left behind. It doesn't feel like what I thought it would.

"You've seen it now, not all of it but a little, isn't this more peaceful to you?" she stares at me waiting and I swear she peeks into my soul.

"It is," I say quietly, and she gently pushes me below the clouds without a goodbye.

My feet fall closer and closer to the ground until I am standing in the middle of the clearing alone. I desperately look to the sky for any sign of a glow or a girl, but it remains pitch black. The questions left in my mind manifest as tears. I don't know why I cry. Maybe I'm mourning her or the dreams I thought I could keep. I force myself to turn away and trek through the bush back to the tin scrap. The moon hides away behind the clouds, but I swear I see the stars twinkle as I fall asleep that night.