

The Moon's House
S. M. L.

He awoke in the heavy deep of night and frantically threw off the covers, reaching for a flashlight nearby. With one hand, he scribbled down lines, the etchings of a withered willow; with the other, he fumbled the flashlight, hands shaking with excitement. He had seen it. Or had he? Or was it a half a whole? He pondered these questions little and continued his sketch. Lights and leaves—the vivid dream quickly faded until memory hung by a thin thread, but he sat with pencil in hand and let out a contented sigh.

The dreams had not been nearly as frequent, and he clutched them even tighter than his flashlight in the dark. Hazy light flooded the room as he flicked on his lamp and creaked across the wooden floor, the icy chill running up his bare feet. Grabbing a tack, he pressed the page against the wall to join his collage of glowing starlight, branches, and an illuminated loch.

Merrick wore a face far too pensive for eleven years old, or so his teachers thought. “In a state of total recall, yet never recalling. Her parting did this to him,” he had overheard them say. “It’s already been six years.”

She was summer to him, lovely as a sunrise. Nostalgia may often cause reality to fade, but her memory to all was pure enchantment.

Six years without her, and Merrick could not shake his desire to go back. “The home of the stars and the house of the moon,” she had called it. He needed to find it; he must go back. It was theirs, shared with Andromeda, Pleiades, and on occasion, even Orion was allowed to enter in search of the Bear.

In the voice of a song, she would share their tales of valor and love and constant jealousy of each other. But among the bickering of the constellations for their own rightful space of blackest black, the moon had the final say. He could pull this way and that. After all, mother said, he had been there first.

At night Merrick was back in that secret, far off place alit with stars one moment and the next vanished, an illusion that grew and faded all at once.

Minutes passed as he gazed at the wall over his scraps of scratch paper all nearly the same yet distinct. He could have stood there for hours, as he had done many nights before frozen in longing and thought. A wind swept in through the open window and sent shivers down his spine. Scurrying over to stop this intrusion, Merrick reached for the sill and caught a glimpse of the ground below, the grass glistening with early autumn’s dew. The trees danced round the house as the wind roused them from slumber. The forest was calling.

Donning boots and coat with flashlight in hand, the young boy answered the call.

The woods had been a friend to Merrick in the daylight, but at night, they appeared all menace and terror. Still, he heard whispers, beckoning him forward. With a heavy swallow and a latch of the screen door, he began his trek.

Onward he journeyed through brambles and thickets, gazing up at the stars whenever fear came. He found himself staring up more often than not and soon lost all remembrance of the way he had come. But then it came. The clouds, once thick blots of ink against the already dark sky, thinned and revealed the moon, large and glowing low in the sky. How wise and stately it appeared hanging over the pines and oaks of the mangled forest. Merrick was comforted and drew a deep breath. After all, the moon was the final say in his mother's tales.

The moon soon led him to a humming meadow of crickets and tall grasses that hid the downs burrowed underfoot. He carefully navigated the lumpy ground all the while whisked quickly onward over the next hillock and the next, certain now that he had been there before. The stream flowing along the edge of the meadow seemed to swell into a rush of haste and expectation. Merrick found himself running up the next ridge. And then he halted, stunned in his tracks.

An unexpected tear slid down the boy's wind-burned cheek as he stood in admiration of the expanse below. It was real. It had all been real. His scattered dreams on slips of paper were memories of the truest kind.

Still and silent, a lake below filled the valley to the brim, a vignette of silhouetted willow trees surrounding it. Though the winds had been whirling round for what seemed like hours, all had settled and not a ripple in the water was to be seen. Instead, reflecting the deepest space above, in the waters appeared a thousand galaxies, with the fixture of the moon in the center of it all. Pleiades was there, Orion, and the Dipper ready to draw a long draught of water to his lips. His pensive face softened.

Her stories were there, still waiting for him.