

## An Invitation to the Moon

By Katie Bateman

I was in the forest gathering. The early morning was still misty though sunbeams were beginning to stream through the canopy above. I was alarmed when a man slid out from between the trees to stand before me, although at a distance. I knew him instantly as the 'man in the moon' or so we called him. He had a bright blueish glow about him and wavy white, unkempt hair. His skin was pale and shimmery. His eyes-- a bright and startling blue. His brows were white also and his lips pale. He was beautiful in an unworldly sort of way.

He approached me a little but left a distance between us as though not wishing to scare me. He knew me and said my name. His was a pleasant voice of night dreams. He said, "Come to my home. You could do much good there for my people." He held out a hand as if he would have me place mine within. "You might find the change interesting and lovely" he added as if realizing I needed incentive. I questioned whether anyone had ever resisted him before.

Before I could respond, another being stepped from behind a tree. I wondered how many more beings were hiding in my forest today. The newcomer was closer to the 'man in the moon' than I. She was Lady Earth. While I had never met her, I knew her in my bones.

Her long wavy hair fell to the length of her knees and reflected varying shades of browns and reds. She was clothed in a dress of leaves and a crown of tree bark. Her feet were bare, like mine. Jewelry of living flowers encircled her neck and wrists. She too had a glimmer to her skin—golden instead of the white of the 'man of the moon.'

Her green eyes studied me for a moment, and I straightened. When she looked at the man in the moon she said, "Lord Moon, it has been many springs since you visited. To what do we owe this great honor?"

I tried to change my idea of him from 'the man in the moon' to 'Lord Moon' for Lady Earth would know his true title. He did not seem surprised by Lady Earth's arrival but...disappointed? Reluctant?

He sighed softly before gazing back at me. His hand was no longer outstretched to me. I shifted on my feet a little, the twigs rough on the bottoms of my feet. Lord Moon's gaze was almost longing, and I swallowed under his direct attention. Still looking at me he answered Lady Earth, "She would do well with my people and with...me. I would take care of her. She is powerful enough to..."

He didn't finish but cocked his head at Lady Earth listening to something I could not hear. I felt I ought to say something but found I was rooted to the spot—literally. Small roots had grown out of my feet and anchored me to the forest's soil. Despite the urge to speak, I was speechless. I could think of nothing to say to these great beings.

"She is indeed powerful. This is so because I breathed the breath of living things into her when she was but an infant in her mother's arms. She will always be an earth girl, Lord Moon. You should know better than to come here and seek her."

"Has she not choice?" he rallied, almost sternly. "She could be a Moon Lady."

This gave Lady Earth pause. They both turned to look at me again. Was I supposed to respond? I brought my basket in front of me, cradling it as a barrier between me and them. Lady Earth noticed my rooted feet and dimpled.

Lord Moon tried again, “Come with me, to my home. I will return you to your forest should you be unhappy.”

My feet roots went deeper and drank water to sooth my dry mouth. I found my voice—raspy, “And what is your home like Lord Moon? Why would you have me there?”

“Come and see its beauty” he said earnestly. His was a beauty so alien it terrified me and as he reached out his hand a second time, I felt something stir within me. I felt a reaching not just from him but another force, another entity tied to him. It was a distant cry for aid which I could not refuse.

Still clutching my basket to me, I ripped my roots from the earth and gingerly made my way to him. Lady Earth made a despairing noise, nearly a groan. I peered at her, and she shook her head to dissuade me, a tear trailing down her cheek. I found there was a mirror tear on my cheek. I didn’t understand.

When I was a foot from Lord Moon’s outstretched hand I said, “I will come to your home if you promise to return me here at my first request.”

“I swear it” he said solemnly. As his hand encircled mine, we were both filled with light. Like a shooting star, I clung to his hand as we made our way to the moon he called home.