

## The Man on the Moon by Becky Bunting

A butcherbird moon am I, I am. I steal light from the sun and love from the man. When evening falls, it is I who makes the sun trip. And when that man, that humble man, that sweet old man, ate his humble pie and cleaned his humble home, when he bowed his humble head by his bed in prayer, he asked for the humblest of blessings. He asked that his flowers would bloom. I waited and watched. Waited for when he slept, and when the hand that held hers relaxed into a gentle release, that she could be mine in these stolen hours. She had been mine for seventy-nine years and his only for sixty-three. But he could love her in ways I never could. The Man on the Mound. That Humble Man on the Mound.

That night I was anxious to see her. The treatment had been hard on her, and I trembled. I wished myself fuller, brighter, that when I peeped through the window she left open for me my half-light would not throw her figure into such ghastly mimicry. Yet still, I did my best that night.

I tucked her in with a coverlet of light and hummed as I spread silvered hair onto her chilled scalp. I climbed higher in the sky, and it was just as I was turning back to find her again, that she awoke. And so I danced for her.

Her faded arms reached up to dapple in my gift as I played the leaves to send leaping light and darkness through her hands. Her beautiful face became a smile. She pulled back her blanket that I could dress her all in silver. She beamed. She tried to get up, to come to the window, to dance. But her tired arm crumpled and she fell back. Perhaps we all knew then. My princess, me and the Man on the Mound, woken by the gentle fading of the woman he loved. His bleary eyes shook themselves to alertness, and he and I, rivals, lovers, we both looked at the woman we loved and we feared then.

He took her in his arms - what cruel barbarity of fate would leave strength in his arms and yet rob hers? - and drew her away from the window. I raged then. I feared he had taken her where I could not reach her, had taken her into darkness. And my love, my aching love could do no more than burn with the fire of a thousand suns, and never be seen by her, never warm her.

The door to her house creaked open. I faltered. The Man on the Mound inched across the porch, hesitated on the steps and finally brought her to the garden he had grown for her. He set her down and covered her in the blanket he had tucked under his arm, then slowly lowered himself to sit by her side. She leaned against him. He looked up at me.

"Please," he said, a gentle crackle of a voice, "make her garden bloom."

And so I dropped a shining tear on each dozing bud, cast sprigs of light where growth was not. Upon the scarecrow presiding over the vegetables, I fashioned a gown like never before. For I poured my wanting into it, begrudged the Man on the Mound his humble prayers, and wanted only miracles where he wanted marigolds. How pitiful roses when he could demand rosy cheeks! Yet more painfully, how helpless then was my love? I was but a waxy coin banked in a dark sky.

She shone like never before, surrounded by the love of the Man on the Mound and the Man on the Moon.

Then, I understood. With trembling hand, I fashioned a silver crown upon her sparkling brow. She smiled at me, a smile of years and lingering seconds. Her eyes closed. As the Man on the Mound's tears began to fall, I crowned him too.