

Waning

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THE FIRST TIME THE MOON TOLD ME what to do I said no but the moon just went on and on, chatterboxing at me through the skylight, hanging straight over my face. 'Do it now, Eve, get up and go into his room, see if he's awake. He might be cold, you can keep him warm.'

'He'll be fast asleep,' I said. 'And he won't be cold, it's a roasting night.'

'My precious girl,' the moon said. 'There'll be consequences if you don't cooperate. Now get up and check on your twin.'

The landing was dark but not dark enough. I could see into the main bathroom so I walked sideways like a crab with my back to it, past the boxes ready for the move, past what used to be their room. Mum's breath made engine noises in her throat. She kept the pills that helped her sleep on the highest laundry shelf.

I pushed open Davy's door. Mum had unscrewed his desk and leaned the broken shapes of it against the wall. I crept over to his bed. There was nothing on his locker except his glasses and the sketchbook he barely used anymore, and the photo of our tenth birthday. The four of us, a year ago.

In the dark the photo was just a square of black but I put it face down anyway.

'Don't,' said the moon.

'I just did,' I said.

Davy's duvet covered all of him except his head. He moved on the pillow. He looked different asleep. People go on about us having the same eyes. I picked up his glasses, pulled out the skinny arms and bent them back the wrong way, stopped before they snapped.

‘Get into his bed,’ the moon said. ‘You’re dilly-dallying.’

‘OK, OK,’ I said. I lifted the duvet, got in and put one foot between his legs. I thought he’d be wearing pyjama bottoms but he wasn’t and my foot touched his slug.

His eyes popped open immediately. He looked at me as if he was trying to remember who I was. I moved my foot gently. He took a gulp of air but when I tried it again, he pushed me out of the bed.

‘Stop it,’ he shouted. ‘Get away.’

Back in my own room I told the moon I wasn’t listening to it anymore. ‘I’d hate to be you, Moon,’ I said. ‘I really would, you’re a boring, useless place. Nothing lives on you, not even weather.’

‘I control the tides,’ said the moon.

‘You don’t even shine,’ I said. ‘You’re just a mirror. All your light comes from the sun.’

‘Silence,’ said the moon and dropped a blanket on me and in my dream a hare with a human face kissed me even though I said no.

It wasn’t my fault, I hadn’t drunk water too late, but I must’ve weed in my sleep because the next morning Mum was patting me awake, pulling me up, ripping the sheets from the mattress saying, ‘You’re fine, it’s all fine, just have a quick shower.’

‘Don’t tell Davy,’ I said, but Davy was already at the door, staring at me through his glasses.

‘I thought she’d stopped doing that,’ he said.

‘Wait downstairs,’ Mum said to him and when he disappeared she hugged me close. ‘I’ll turn the shower on,’ she said. ‘But don’t stay in it too long or you’ll both be late for school.’

‘The shower in your en suite,’ I said. ‘Not the one in the main bathroom.’

‘I know.’ Her voice came out high and wonky. Her breath was cigarettes and mints. ‘Just two weeks, sweetheart, and we’ll be done with this house.’ She turned away from me and covered her face with her hands. I had to remind her to get me a towel.

The second time the moon told me what to do I said, ‘No way I’m going in there.’

‘C’mon,’ said the moon. ‘It’s not the Bogeyman’s den, just a silly room with a toilet and a bath and a sink and a shower and an empty chair. Leave your slippers off. You’ve such beautiful feet.’

I went onto the landing. Ghostly quiet. Not even Mum's engine snores. I stretched out my arm until my fingers were touching the handle of the bathroom door. My legs were wobbly like after an injection.

'Open it,' the moon said. 'Turn on the light, that's my girl. See how easy it is.'

In the mirror my face stared back at me like it belonged to someone else.

'I'm not staying,' I said.

'Relax,' the moon said. 'Sit on the chair and we'll have a chat. Tell me, Eve, what would you like if you could have anything in the world? A pet gecko, really? And, Davy, what about you? Will I tell you both what I'd like? When you were a baby, Eve, giving you baths was my favourite thing in the world. I miss giving my little girl her lovely baths. There's no need for anyone else to know. We've said a gecko and fair is fair and your mother is so preoccupied with that pro bono stuff, I'll win her round. Is the water nice? Davy, I'll show you how to find her button. No? All right then, you can just watch.'

My chest burned when I tried to breathe. I thought I might faint or puke. I stood up and turned off the light. Closed the bathroom door.

The next morning was Saturday. After we saw the counsellor, Mum brought us to the zoo. She told Davy she had his sketchbook with her in case he wanted to draw.

'I won't,' he said.

'You never know,' she said. 'You might feel like it later on.'

He pushed his glasses up on his nose.

'We definitely need to get them tightened,' Mum said.

In the reptile house, the python's glass cage was blocked by a whole load of kids and parents and buggies and a couple talking French and taking photos with a selfie stick, practising all their different smiles. Me, Davy and Mum stood there, waiting for them all to get bored and shove off to gawk at the T-Rex skeleton or West African crocodile. When they moved they all moved together and we walked up to the glass. The python was spiralled round himself so you could see his white underneath and his skin on top, black, green and smudged gold with bits of silver and brown. He knew we were there and lifted his neck and started to stretch out but something went wrong and he bellyfloppe down from the fake tree, landing in the tiny puddle. He slithered back up and flicked out his tongue, tasting the air for food.

‘He got a big fright,’ I said.

‘How do you know that?’ Davy said. ‘You don’t. Because you’re a human not a snake so you don’t know how snakes think or what they understand and even if you were a snake you might not know because we don’t know what they know about each other.’

‘Are we talking about anthropomorphism again?’ Mum said.

‘No,’ Davy said. ‘We’re talking about Eve pretending she knows stuff she doesn’t know. Again.’

I stared into the python’s eyes until all I could see were the two black pips and his green and gold skin colouring my brain. The glass between us had nearly disappeared.

‘I do know he got a fright,’ I said. ‘And I know he likes me.’

‘If I was him I’d hate you,’ Davy said. ‘I’d want to constrict you till your heart shut down.’

‘He knows I’m his friend,’ I said.

Davy snorted. ‘As though snakes have friends. Anyway, if you really were his friend you’d get a hatchet and smash the glass so he could escape and constrict what he wants.’ He turned to Mum. ‘I’m sick of her. Make her shut up. I don’t want to be her twin anymore.’

Angry bubbles fizzed up from my feet. I grabbed Davy’s glasses and threw them on the floor and stamped until the arms were banjaxed and the glass was nearly minced. ‘I’ve smashed the glass,’ I shouted. ‘So slither away and constrict what you want. Go and constrict an elephant. You’re not my twin anymore.’

Everyone went quiet in the reptile house. Tears leaked out of Davy’s eyes.

Mum put her arms around us both. She was shivering even though it was hot. ‘It wasn’t Davy’s fault either,’ she said. ‘Try and understand, Eve. It wasn’t your fault or his.’

The last time the moon told me what to do was the morning of the move. Mum said to finish our packing while she made us poached eggs and toast.

I looked out my bedroom window at the SOLD sign and the moon – there, but only just, like a sponge painting smudge in the sky.

‘You’re sad about moving, aren’t you?’ it said. ‘You don’t really want to go. Hide the car keys or when the removal van gets here, let the air out of the tyres.’

‘You’re weak,’ I said. ‘And a liar. In a few hours you’ll have disappeared.’

‘I’ll never disappear,’ the moon said. ‘You know that. Even when you can’t

see me, I'll be there.'

I closed the curtains and went into Davy's room. He was stuffing his duvet into a black sack but stopped when he saw me at the door. We'd barely spoken since the reptile house.

'Do you need help?' I asked.

He was a slow coach about answering. 'If you want,' he said.

The black sack made a sound like the sea when I pushed his duvet in. He put his pyjamas into the suitcase on the floor. There was hardly anything else left for him to pack, just the stuff on his locker, the sketchbook and pen. The photo he'd wanted to keep. He picked it up and sat on the bed. My heart was beating in my throat.

'Will you be glad if he goes to jail?' Davy said.

'Half yes, half no,' I said.

'Same here.' He turned the photo face down and started picking at the clips on the back of the frame. 'You've got longer nails,' he said.

I sat beside him on the bed. He put the frame onto my lap. The first clip went under my nail but I ignored the throb and pulled the rest of them up.

He took the back off the frame and peeled the photo away from the glass, keeping it face down the whole time. He let it skid to the floor. 'I'm leaving it here.'

Mum called us for breakfast.

'We should probably go down,' I said.

He stared at the empty frame and lifted the back part out again, the brown cardboard with the stand attached. He rubbed the smooth side of it.

'What are you doing?'

'Nothing.' He grabbed the pen from his locker. His hand twisted and twitched while he drew, and the black marks landing on the cardboard started to turn into something else. When I saw what he was doing, I smiled, hoping I was right.

He gave us both huge eyes and hair that covered part of our faces. He gave himself glasses with thick frames the same as his trendy new ones, and just when I thought he'd finished, he gave me a snake round my neck.

'A snake scarf,' he said. 'And it won't constrict you, you guys are very good friends.'

He heard me say thank you even though I said it in my head. You have those powers when you're a twin.