

Moon Boy's Love

by John

Moon Boy sits atop the hill's crest and watches Moon Girl. She is, as always, dusting her crater, the gray plumes puffing up from under her broom. Moon Boy is in love with Moon Girl, as Moon Girl knows well. Moon Boy has told her many, many times. He has carved it in the dust, arranged moon rocks into words and shapes in a regular confession at the edge of her crater.

Moon Boy walks down the hill toward Moon Girl's crater.

"Moon Girl," he says upon arriving.

"Moon Boy," she says.

"Have I told you yet that I love you?"

"Not today, Moon Boy, but yesterday, yes, and the day before that, as well as the many before that."

"Well today then, I love you still."

Moon Girl rests her chin on the broom's handle.

"What to do with you, Moon Boy."

"You could love me."

"Could I?"

"I think so, yes."

Moon Boy believes himself to have many redeeming qualities. He is handsome, sweet and, also, the only other inhabitant of the moon. But somehow this is not enough for Moon Girl and today, like all other days, she sends Moon Boy away without her love.

At his crater, Moon Boy sits and dreams up new ways to make Moon Girl love him. Once, long ago, it seemed as though a little persistence would do the trick, but now Moon Boy is not so sure and the doubt gnaws at him. Moon Girl is playing more than tough to catch. Moon Boy considers that she might not be playing at all.

He watches comets shoot overhead and imagines lassoing one and taking Moon Girl on the trip of a lifetime, the comet's tail blazing behind them as they visit new galaxies, Moon Girl's arms

tight around his waist, her chin buried deep in his shoulder, the both of them glowing radiant with star dust.

And that night when Moon Boy sleeps he dreams of Moon Girl. She is dusting her crater and Moon Boy is holding the dustpan. They are a team. Moon Boy dumps the dust outside of her crater and when he turns around Moon Girl is there and she kisses him.

The kiss wakes him and above him is the dark sky and around him is the grey of the moon.

The next day, when Moon Boy goes to visit Moon Girl, he notices she is not sweeping, which is so unlike Moon Girl, to let her crater go dusty. Instead, she is sitting on the lip of her crater, watching Moon Boy approach, almost as though she has been waiting for him.

"Moon Boy," she says.

"Moon Girl," Moon Boy says.

"I was watching the stars last night, Moon Boy."

"I watch the stars every night. We could watch the stars together someday, Moon Girl."

"I was watching the stars and one of them fell and it went shooting out across the sky. Just like that, the star was done, after all those years."

"Things can happen suddenly," says Moon Boy. "Wonderful, unexpected things."

"Moon Boy, it brought my own mortality to light for me, that one day I too will fall, that what is left of me will drift out into space."

Moon Girl is a poet, is what Moon Boy thinks, and he is giddy with getting to add another item to the long list of why he loves her.

"Have I told you yet today—"

"Moon Boy, I am ready to try love."

And Moon Boy stops. A shiver crawls up his spine and shakes itself loose in his head. He looks past Moon Girl, away into the darkness. Moon Girl takes a step off the crater's rim toward Moon Boy. She reaches out and grabs his hand. Moon Boy smiles and laces his fingers into hers and then draws her close to him, like a new planet just realizing its gravitational potential.

And it is good.

Moon Boy arranges moon rocks around the edge of Moon Girl's crater to help protect her. Moon Girl points out to him the constellations she has created in the sky, the one of the broom and the other of the moon. In the afternoons, on long walks, Moon Boy says things to make moon girl laugh.

"I never knew you were so funny," Moon Girl says.

"I was too busy telling you I loved you to say anything else. Moon Girl, I have so many things to say to you still."

"I am all ears, Moon Boy."

So Moon Boy tells her: about the lassoing of the comet; about the way in which he has noticed the dust settles in swirling patterns across her skin; about how happy he is that she decided to give his love a try.

"If I had known it was this good, moon boy, I would have said yes a long time ago."

"I tried to tell you."

"You can't tell this, Moon Boy. You can only know this."

When a dust storm blows in, they cling to each other in the bottom of Moon Girl's crater, holding each other tight while the dust blows overhead. And in the morning, Moon Boy helps Moon Girl sweep up the mess. Moon Boy holds the dustpan. They are a team. Moon Boy dumps the dust outside of her crater and when he turns around Moon Girl is there and she kisses him.

That night he traces new patterns in the dust on her skin.

One morning, after many good days, Moon Boy visits Moon Girl's crater and she is not there. But Moon Boy knows she can be independent minded, that she sometimes likes to be alone, and so he goes back home, knowing the future will hold plenty of time for them together.

And she does come back, that night in fact. Moon Boy is resting in his crater when Moon Girl appears on its lip, startling Moon Boy. Moon Girl has never been to his crater and he has not dusted it in ages.

"Moon Girl, I'm sorry, I wasn't expecting you."

"Moon Boy, have you ever dusted your crater?" Moon Girl asks as she descends into it, her feet kicking up the dust.

"Yes, of course, I just—" and then Moon Boy pauses because in Moon Girl's eyes he sees something pinched and watery, new and scared. "Moon Girl, are you alright?"

"Moon Boy, I have seen something this morning."

"Something terrible?"

"Something wonderful. It came from above and it set down in the distance. After a time, two beautiful men emerged and walked about on our moon."

"How were they beautiful?"

"They were so full, Moon Boy. And their steps, oh how they leapt, like it was nothing, like they could just as easily have bound away from the surface as flown in their incredible craft."

"They sound magnificent," Moon Boy conceded.

"Moon Boy, I think I have made a mistake."

"We all make mistakes. I myself have made many mistakes."

"About us."

And this is one mistake Moon Boy knows he has not made. He has never been more sure of anything in his entire life than of his love for Moon Girl.

"I want to explore other possibilities," says Moon Girl. "What if there are other moon boys, other moons entirely."

"Have I told you yet today how much I love you?" says Moon Boy. Moon Girl starts to cry and then she turns and walks away.

Moon Boy dusts his crater with a zeal he did not know he could possess for dusting. He dusts it for days with no stopping until his crater begins to grow deeper with his exertions, until he is not dusting but digging. He is trying to keep busy, to tire himself, to stay away from thoughts of Moon Girl. He is, clearly, out of his mind with heartbreak.

When eventually he collapses from exhaustion, he falls onto his broom, which acts as a prickly pillow. Looking up at the stars, he

thinks of lassoing a comet and then almost begins to cry before falling into a fitful sleep.

He dreams of moon men descending ladders from far away moons, of a vast invasion of strong moon men, all lined up outside of Moon Girl's crater. And in their arms are incredible gifts from distant lands, the likes of which Moon Boy has never seen, the likes of with which Moon Boy knows he can never compete.

When Moon Boy wakes, he is okay and then, as he remembers Moon Girl's words, he is not okay at all. There is no more dusting to be done, no more anything to be done and so Moon Boy lies there, remembering the way Moon Girl laughed at his jokes, at the way she ran her fingers from his knee to the patient destination of his earlobe. He cannot shake the image of her slender figure bending to sweep the dust from every small crack of her home.

All of which makes Moon Boy incredibly sad. And then, as he remembers all the ways in which Moon Girl allowed him in, all the ways she opened herself and extended an invitation, Moon Boy finds himself angry. But a mad Moon Boy is a useless Moon Boy and Moon Boy values utility, so he gets up and decides that he will visit the moon men for himself, that he will judge, with his own eyes, those who have stolen Moon Girl's heart.

So Moon Boy walks toward where he understands the moon men to have landed. He walks in and out of craters, over low-lying hills. At the tops of the hills he looks out over the grey and chalky plains, but he does not see the moon men or their ship.

Eventually Moon Boy discovers a number of strange, heavily-ridged boot prints and he follows these until they lead him to a flag, lying half-covered in the dust. It has in one corner a number of pointed white shapes and across its surface run stripes of white and red. A short distance from the flag Moon Boy finds a place where it appears something might have touched down, the dust blown away in a rough circle. It is clear the moon men have left.

Then, a terrible idea comes to Moon Boy and he begins to run as fast as he can toward Moon Girl's crater. He clamors up the sides of craters and hills, kicking up dust so by the time he arrives, breathing heavily, on the lip of Moon Girl's crater, his normally pale complexion is even paler, a thin coat of dust covering his face and hands.

He is relieved to see Moon Girl there, on the far side of her crater, with her back turned to Moon Boy. But once Moon Boy is able to quiet his own heavy breathing and the deafening beating of his heart, he can hear Moon Girl's quiet sobs. He stands there a moment more, unsure of what to do, listening to the sobs catch in Moon Girl's throat and then shudder their way out.

Finally, he takes slow, measured steps down into her crater, and, still keeping his distance, he says, quietly, "Moon Girl?"

Moon Girl turns around, surprised. Her tears have carved dark little rivulets in the dust of her cheeks and she wipes at them, smearing their shallow banks.

"Moon Boy, what are you doing here?"

"I went to look for the moon men and when I found them gone I . . . I was afraid you might have left with them."

"I feel so foolish," Moon Girl says and she wipes at her eyes again. "They didn't even stay for the whole day. I thought I wanted to try more than your love."

"My love wasn't enough," Moon Boy says and realizes its truth as he is saying it, which causes a deep pain to flow from his chest to the rest of his body, so that his knees tremble and his hands shake.

"No, Moon Boy, your love was everything. And I was too greedy to know it. And now I have lost it."

The quivering in Moon Boy's body transforms itself, takes up a different cause.

"Have I told you yet today how much I still love you?" Moon Boy says.

A comet blazes by in the distance and Moon Boy considers the lassoing, the dream of Moon Girl's arms tight around him, her chin in his shoulder, their glowing. But then Moon Girl steps toward him

and wraps her arms around him and Moon Boy thinks, no, no need to lasso the passing comet. Right here is just fine, right here is good.

