

Moth Man

by Katrina Dessavre

I don't wear a hat anymore, not because it would be as old fashioned as putting on tailcoat or dangling a watch from a suit pocket. No, I don't wear a hat because I don't want to spend my nights trapped underground, my wooly wings fluttering against the doors of passing trains as I wander through dark tunnels in fear of touching the third rail.

The first time it happened I was waiting for the local in one of those underground stations that lets a few rays of battered moonlight through the grates on cloudless nights. Trains came less frequently after midnight, so I stood on the platform right on the yellow tape, watching the light glide across my fingers.

Looking back, it took me a long time to trace back the catalyst for my transformation, but I am almost certain it began with the hat. The light hit the edge of that platform at such an angle that all of me, my whole shadow, was contained within the perfect circle that lay at my feet. Somehow, the hat had tucked in all of my limbs, smoothed all of my sharp edges, so that I became an inverted pin, my gaze magnetized towards the moon.

What I remember most was not how I scaled the faces of buildings, my shadow dragging behind me like the velvet cloak of an overdressed superhero. I did not think much of the slippery surface of windowpanes, or the smell of dinner escaping from a stranger's half open window. No, what I remember most vividly was my unwavering belief that the moon is a hole at the top of the sky, and that if I climb far enough I will be able to poke my head through that opening and drink in the moonlight.

On that night the kiosk vendor had no such illusions. "Step back, sir," I could hear him shout as I tumbled towards the ground, my tired wings fighting a losing battle against gravity.

"A pack of salted almonds and a water, please," I said and examined the faces of magazine cover models to avoid his gaze. But he had a flashlight and pointed it directly at me so that when I gave

him the money I thought, for a moment, that I was facing the moon, that I had come closer than I ever had before. He switched the flashlight off and left me blinking in a daze of pastel colors.

"Your eyes," he said. "They're black. The pupil, whites, everything."

He was still staring, waiting for an explanation, so I cupped my right palm over my right eye and handed over a tear, my only possession, as precious to me as a bee's sting.

"It's pure enough to drink," I said, and turned towards the approaching train.

