



PIECES OF THE MOON

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Hello. As stereotypical it sounds, you don't need to know my name. You need to know what I do, for what I do is what I only know.

I listen to people's stories and quite literally store them. When a human needs to confide to someone some story or experience, they summon me and pour the dark snippets of their souls into me and then forget about it. As soon as the last word drips down their lips, their soul disowns a part of it and I carry it which flares, coils, disintegrates inside, like a disoriented channel that I never tune into but keep open all the same.

Tonight, the moon sighs with me, softly, as I make my way to my next guest. The previous one was a woman of thirty, scared of her own breath.

"He doesn't know that I know. He thinks I have no clue about it, that he has left no trace. But I know," she said, as if she was the one guilty of it. "And I can leave him, but I don't want to. I want to forget all that I know and start anew with him."

In my line of work, I don't ask questions and neither do I provoke my guests to say more nor do I feel anything for them. But when she said those last lines, I watched her eyes plead to me to judge her, to call her a monster, a coward.

I didn't.

I simply left when all she needed to forget was said and headed to the one who had summoned me then. I half expected it was her husband.

But my next client is a woman too. Younger, prettier and stranger. Whenever anyone needs me, I find them helpless of some sort. Yet, this one looks like she was waiting for me to come. Her bulbous dark eyes catch the glimmer in the chandelier

and they gleam with curiosity.

I take my place, sitting opposite her. We let the silence play its game as she expects me to speak. I don't. I can let the silence slice through the jangling cords of the stories I know in my head all day. But she won't.

Finally, she speaks, a laugh bouncing in between her words, "Hello. I have nothing to tell. I want you to tell me something."

Oh great, here we go again.

As I said before, most humans actually need me. But once in a while, some summon me just for the sake of their empty-headed interests.

"I know you talk. So you might as well think out loud."

"What do you want me to tell you?"

I rarely speak to this species. Oddly, the words stand tall in between us.

"You listen to everyone's stories. Do any of them include me?" her eyes gleam again.

I look at her, the shadows and lights playing over the planes and curves of her face. Whenever someone calls for me, I know their names. I already know hers.

Her name somehow glides itself knowingly onto the path of all the tales I know. It shifts through some other names and finally reverberates happily with its twin one.

"Yes," I whisper.

"Go on. I'm listening," she laughs.

"A girl once told me about you. How you peed in the sheets and blamed it on her. All the kids laughed at her, and taunted her for years. She could still smell your pee when she was saying it."

Her previous laugh now contorts into a face that looks like she could smell it too. She quickly regains composure though, "Funny. And?"

"You want more?"

"Why not," she shrugs.

Something about humans shragging

pisses me off for some reason. "Why should I tell you?" I get up to leave. I didn't need to be this elaborate but I knew there was something more to this woman who feigned curiosity.

"Wait! I have something to tell you too."

"Go on. I'm listening."

"You have to tell me first though. Please."

This time there's more than a request in her eyes. A kind of longing mixed with fear maybe.

I am tired of this already.

"Two years ago. Someone wanted to forget about you. Everything about you even," I recited the words I had been imposed to listen to. "Someone wanted to erase all traces of you from their memories. Who wanted to forget what the tea tasted like when you two stood underneath the downpour and joked about it. How tuneless and off-key your songs were. What your idea of a perfect breakfast was. How sometimes you looked like your feet were trapped in quicksand and you wanted to surrender to it. The streak of red, in your otherwise black curls which stretched down like bougainvillea, only showed up in the sun. The effect of your smiles, laughs, frowns. How unbearable your tears were. Should I go on?"

"Yes."

"How you chose your words like you were balancing some expensive crockery. Your words. Their syllables and fragments. The weight they carried. The ashes they left behind. The ashes *you* left behind as you disappeared like a puff of smoke." The words were finished, leaving a trail behind them upon her.

She was looking at me with profound attention. And after a while, she starts talking. Quietly at first, tasting the words to see if she can bear with them. But slowly her

voice got higher until she's almost screaming.

I know she's not screaming at me, but I also don't know who she's screaming at. Herself, perhaps. Either way, it doesn't bother me.

After she's done screaming she settles into a deep meditation again and without looking up says, "I'm done. Make me forget this."

"You just repeated what I said about you."

"Yeah, this is what I want to forget."

"You didn't remember all these before, did you?"

No reply.

"Very well." My job is fairly easy, just a bit of pull and slice of strings of memories and you're done. But even so, when I erase all her memories she asked for, I find something different.

Humans, after they've confided in me and forgotten about it, wake up from a heavy slumber. The kind of sleep that comes with a price. You might be able to erase something from your soul, but the gap's still there; a hollow over which other things might grow and hide it, but it'll always be there. In time, you start feeling the ache, the void and your soul gets turbulent for you to find the answer. But you don't.

In the gap I leave her with, there's wounds, deep gashes, rust and burn holes. A gap that's been again and again filled with and then emptied out.

After all, forgetting a part of you is certainly the hardest.

As I leave for my next guest, the rain that has been pouring for a while stops and I look at the sky just for a moment.

The moon has finally come full circle.

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