

Moon Watcher

No one ever pays the moon any attention when it isn't full. And no one ever paid Greg Haverford any attention when he wasn't at the grocery store. Most people thought he wasn't real, but Cameron Jones liked to think otherwise. He was her full moon.

Rumor had it that some locals went to the store at that hour on Sundays just to see Greg, and no one ever talked to him although he had lived in the city for a year now. The people didn't know about the young man's past or how he came to be this way.

Cameron watched one night as Greg was perfectly situated on his rooftop. He was watching the moon like he did every night. This had gotten him into the habit of being nocturnal, and the only time he went out during the day was on Sundays. Yet he'd be on his roof every night, crouched like a dim gargoyle hardly moving—if at all—watching the moon. He would stay up all night, perched very still on his rooftop, attend the ten o'clock service at a church ten minutes out of the small town, go to the local grocery store to buy that week's food, and return home to bed, worn out by being up so long. She wondered what he could possibly be doing. Had anyone even seen inside his little house before?

It was Sunday, and Cameron was helping her little sister sell Girl Scout Cookies. She hadn't slept well, but staying up half the night staring at nocturnal neighbors hadn't been conducive to much sleep. They had decided to divide their neighborhood in two: her little sister Anna and her mom went in one direction and Cameron went in the other. As she went tiredly from door to door, she was glad Anna had something easy to sell. Cameron recalled a terrible school fundraiser where she had to sell candles. She had only been able to sell three.

She also recalled her mother telling her to be careful when going to their neighbors' homes. This explicitly meant: “don't talk to Greg Haverford.”

Cameron was coming to the end of the row of houses now, having been able to sell cookies at all of them but two, when she saw Greg Haverford pull up in his dinky little Toyota. *Why not?* she thought, her mother's words forgotten, or rather ignored, as she continued walking. She headed towards his house.

Her mother, like most mothers in the city had instructed her to leave Greg alone if she ever had the chance of coming into contact with him. Mrs. Jones didn't think he was a bad man, but there was no doubt that he was strange. Cameron took all this information in stride and decided to go up to the man anyway. She was eighteen now, and she knew she could technically do whatever she wanted. What a legend she'd be if she managed to sell Girl Scout cookies to Greg Haverford.

“Excuse me, sir!” Cameron called out to him. He was just opening his trunk to get the groceries out and looked up in surprise to see her standing there.

“Cameron Jones,” he said.

“Um, yeah. That's me,” she said with a smile, while thinking, *What a bright idea this was, Cam. He knows your name. The town weirdo knows your name.* “Would you like to buy some girl scout cookies?”

Greg smiled, and Cameron could see how young the man really was. She wasn't very good at determining ages, but she knew he was definitely younger than twenty. He was probably somewhat closer to her own age. He had olive colored skin, and she could tell he was of foreign descent even if he was an American. Middle-eastern? Italian?

“I haven't had girl scout cookies in years. Do you have Thin Mints?”

“Uh, yeah,” Cameron stammered.

He ended up buying three boxes—two Thin Mints and one Tagalong. Cameron looked down at the cream-colored order form where Greg's name was penned in blue slanted handwriting. She shuffled the order form to one arm but accidentally cut herself on the paper's sharp edge .

Greg frowned. “Would you like a band-aid?”

“No, no.” Cameron sucked the thin line of blood from her wrist “I’m fine it’s just a scratch.”

Although she didn’t make a habit of talking to strangers, she knew she wouldn’t have this opportunity again. She decided to ask a few questions before leaving to take care of her wound.

“How do you know my name?”

“Do you know my name?”

“Yes, but...”

“I know all of my neighbor’s names.”

Cameron blinked. That was believable. “Okay. How old are you?”

Greg laughed. “A lot of questions. I’ll be twenty in December.”

Cameron was astonished. How on Earth was a boy so young living in a house all by himself?

However, she knew she had already played nosy neighbor long enough and should probably head home to take care of her battle wound. She hated paper cuts. She scarred too easily.

She bid him goodbye and walked back down the street.

The boy was nineteen.

Cameron walked into the house in a daze from the events. Her mom and her little sister were already there.

“What took you so long, Cam?” asked Anna at the kitchen table counting money like a mobster.

“Guess who I sold cookies to?” asked Cameron triumphantly.

“Mr. Jenkins?” asked their mother, rinsing dishes at the sink.

“No, he didn’t buy any,” said Cameron with a sly smile.

“Who?” asked Anna.

“Greg Haverford.”

“No way that’s awesome!” said Anna at the same time as Mrs. Jones said, “*Cameron!*”

Cameron ignored her mother’s surprise and kept on telling her story.

“Mom, you won’t believe it. He told me he was nineteen-years-old. Everyone in the town thinks

he's at least twenty-five.”

“He wouldn't be the first person to lie about his age,” said Mrs. Jones. “Didn't I tell you to stay away from him? You know he's strange.”

“I know,” said Cameron. “But I only asked because when I saw him up close, he didn't look very old at all. And everyone thought he was at least twenty-five!”

“Don't talk to him anymore,” said Mrs. Jones decidedly.

The next Sunday, Cameron was back in Greg's driveway. Her blonde hair was curled in her usual Sunday style, and she wore a light blue sun dress.

“Got any more cookies to sell?” asked Greg laughing when he saw her.

“No,” Cameron admitted. “Would you like help carrying your groceries in?”

Greg hesitated. Then, “Sure.” When they were on their way into his house with their first round of groceries, Greg said, “You won't judge me if I tell you I've already eaten the entire contents of those three boxes of cookies, would you?”

“I'm fairly certain they put addictive chemicals in them, so no. Girl Scouts have to make money somehow.”

Greg smiled. Cameron thought that if she had known him longer, then she would know exactly what this smile meant. It certainly looked cryptic, but she couldn't tell if he was happy, sad, or was laughing at some private joke.

She only knew that she was the cause of it which was somehow more pleasing to her than knowing the reason behind it. She would have tried to decipher it for longer, but they had just entered the small house and all of Cameron's thoughts froze as she took in her surroundings.

The small living space was cluttered with various items. If she had to describe everything she saw in one word it would have been *astronomical*. She had never seen star charts before, but she was sure that's what the long scrolls of paper draping over a mahogany desk were. There was an extremely realistic mural of stars painted on the walls and ceiling. The room was dimly lit, and Cameron could

tell that some of the paint was glow-in-the-dark by the way a few of the splotches stood out in a hazy green color around the wide, white full moon.

Next, they walked into the kitchen which was painted bright blue. Here, in place of the stars there were paintings of clouds on the walls and ceilings and a very realistic moon. Obviously the same artist was responsible for the work—maybe even Greg himself.

“So you're an astronomer,” said Cameron knowing for a fact that no space agency hired nineteen-year-olds to be astronomers, but knowing that it still must be true anyway. Why else would Greg watch the moon like that at night? What else would explain the eerily realistic paintings?

“You could say that,” said Greg with a nod.

They continued going in rounds to get groceries. It didn't take them very long because Greg had only bought enough groceries for one person. When they were done, all Cameron desired to do was to ask more questions, but it wasn't polite to be too nosy, especially since she'd only spoken with him once before.

“So why are you nocturnal?” the words slipped out before she could stop herself.

Greg was silent for a moment. “I have a condition,” he replied solemnly.

“Oh?”

“Yes. It throws off my natural circadian rhythm so that I sleep when everyone else is awake and stay awake when everyone is sleeping.”

“I'm so sorry,” said Cameron.

Greg was solemn for a moment more as Cameron looked at him in silence, not knowing what to say. Suddenly, the corner of his mouth twitched. A second later, he was laughing crazily.

“What?” asked Cameron confused. “What's so funny?”

“You actually believed me,” said Greg still laughing so hard his words were barely discernible over his billowy hoots.

Cameron frowned and turned around from him, embarrassed. How had she fallen for this? If she

had only listened to her mother, she wouldn't be in this situation. This is what she deserved for trying to be daring. And what if her mother had found out she had been helping the town weirdo carry groceries into his house? The very one that was supposedly lying about his age—although she didn't necessarily think that he was—and knew her name without her telling to him. She began walking towards the front door, leaving Greg laughing in the kitchen as she went home.

Cameron's bedroom window faced Greg's rooftop, and throughout the following week, she would sometimes chance a peak out the blinds to see him staring up at the sky. He always seemed to look right at her whenever she looked out the window, noticing her glance somehow from ten houses away. He'd never done that before, and it creeped her out.

Next Sunday she was back.

“Hello, peeping Tom,” said Greg as she walked up to him. He was leaning over his trunk removing the first grocery bags of the afternoon. “You know, for someone who seemed to be so creeped out by the fact that I knew your name, you sure seem to stalk me more than I stalk you,” said Greg.

More than I stalk you? Great, Cameron thought. So now he's a stalker.

“You stalk me?” asked Cameron in what she hoped was a nonchalant voice.

“I don't stalk you any more than I stalk any of our other neighbors.”

“That's reassuring.”

Greg smiled—the same one from last week that she didn't know the meaning of. Then, he frowned. If that smile had held everything happy and unreachable, this frown held everything mysterious and vulnerable.

“I'm going away,” said Greg suddenly.

“Like on vacation?” asked Cameron.

“I guess you could say that,” said Greg.

“Where?”

“I don't know,” he replied. Cameron sighed. “I know you're wondering why you even bothered with me—I wonder that myself to be honest—but just... Nothing. Nevermind.”

“Okay.”

“Listen,” he said, suddenly serious in an attempt to explain. “Just because someone says something isn't real, that doesn't mean that it isn't. Do you understand?”

Cameron stared at him, trying to comprehend his sudden comment.

“I've only made it worse. Haven't I?” he said. “That's all I will say for now.”

Cameron nodded, performing an action contrary to how she felt. Nodding meant understanding.

She didn't understand.

She helped him with the groceries, and they didn't talk the rest of the time she was there. On her way out of the house for the final time, she tried to decide what to say to him in parting. He was strange—that much she knew. He wasn't like any of her friends from her high school or like anyone she thought she would meet in the future.

“Have fun on your trip,” she decided to say, which contained absolutely none of her thoughts on the matter at hand.

What else could be said? They hardly even knew each other.

“Remember what I told you.”

And as usual, Cameron regretted her actions. She walked back down the street to her own home, glancing at the paper-cut scar on her wrist that refused to go away as she did so. When she arrived, her mother was washing dishes like she did every Sunday at this time.

“Where were you?” Mrs. Jones asked curiously.

Cameron was a little peeved at Greg's crypticness and at life in general, so she decided to just tell her mom exactly the truth just so she wouldn't be the only angry person in the house.

“At Greg Haverford's, helping him with his groceries.”

Her mom looked at her daughter strangely. “Who's that? A friend from school?”

“No, mom. What are you talking about? You know Greg Haverford. I sold him three boxes of Girl Scout cookies the other week. Sits on his roof at night watching the moon. Sleeps during the day like a bat. He lives down the road in 3020 Pine Nut St.”

“Honey, that house has been vacant ever since we moved here.”

“Mom, are you kidding? His Toyota is parked right out front. I'll show you.”

Mrs. Jones put down her current dish warily, dried her sore hands on a flower printed paper towel, and followed her daughter out of the house. Cameron was almost jogging now, and Mrs. Jones struggled to keep up. When Cameron reached the house, she stopped in her tracks. Her mother reached the driveway a few seconds after her. Cameron stared wide eyed at the yard. There was no Toyota in sight, and the grass was in an unkempt state that it hadn't been in just ten minutes ago. The yard held a worn-looking picket sign that read:

FOR SALE/FOR RENT

There was no sign of Greg Haverford having ever lived in the house.