



Translated extract from

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Hanne Chen
The Moon King

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In the little house with the overgrown garden lived a little girl named Susie. She had a balloon named Puck, and a cat, Balthasar. They were happy together right up until the day that Puck started to feel homesick. All balloons feel homesick at some point. They start to long for a really good float, and nothing can hold them back. They just fly higher and higher until they reach the moon, for this is the home of the balloons. There, they don't need to wear a piece of string, and can float wherever they want. Once a year, when it's the Moon Festival, every balloon is given a new colour. The balloons dream of this. And this is why every child's most beautiful balloon flies up and away at some point.

Puck was no different from all the other balloons, but he knew that Susie would be very sad if he just flew off.

"Can't you come to the moon with me?" he asked Susie and Balthasar.

"We can't fly", said Susie.

"Perhaps there's another way", said Puck. "We could ask the puddles. They've got plenty of time and they're always looking up at the sky."

Susie, Balthasar and Puck asked the biggest puddle they could find.

"I can fetch the moon down at night", said the puddle. "But you're not allowed to touch it. Come back again this evening, and stop bothering me for now. I'm busy."

"You?" asked Susie, astonished. "What are you doing?"

"It's autumn", answered the puddle. "I'm saving the light. For the evenings."

It wouldn't tell them anything more. Puddles are silent creatures.

“Oh dear”, said Susie. “What use is a moon to us that we can’t touch?”

And so they fell asleep, and their dreams shared the wide spaces of the sky with a couple of late swallows.

“Dear swallows”, asked Susie in her dream. “Could you tell us how to get to the moon?”

“There are many moons”, cried the swallows. “Which one do you want to go to?”

“Many moons?”

“Masses of moons”, twittered the swallows. “We sail over towns and countries, and they all have their own moons. After all, one moon can’t be everywhere simultaneously. That’s why every place has its own.”

“But where’s the nearest one, and how do we get there?” Susie asked again.

“That’s easy”, chirped a small know-it-all swallow. “You go to the sea and wait for the moon to come out of the waves. Then you can swim across to it quite quickly.”

And then she quickly sailed out of Susie’s dream.

Susie and Puck decided to walk to the sea. Balthasar stayed at home, because the only thing he was more afraid of than water was lots of water, and the sea was full of it.

“I’m still hibernating from last year”, he yawned, shutting his eyes.

So Susie and Puck set off on their own. When they reached the sea and asked the waves the way to the nearest moon, the waves gave a most peculiar answer:

“We’re carrying on rolling”, they said. “Rolling on until the very end of silence and back, and the moon is still a long way off. You can’t swim to the moon.”

“So how can we get to the moon?” asked Susie desperately.

But the waves had already started to roll again, and the ones that followed them didn’t know. Susie and Puck had no choice but to carry on walking.

Soon a big black bird came to join them.

“I’m the big hooded crow”, he introduced himself. “With my cawing, I can turn the meadows into mist. Do you know what fog is?”

“No”, said the pair.

“Melted clouds”, croaked the crow.

“You can turn the meadows into melted clouds?” asked Susie, impressed. “Then you can presumably magic the earth onto the moon?”

“I can do everything”, asserted the hooded crow. “But there’s no way I’d do that. If the whole world were on the moon, it would be too heavy. It would fall down and smash to pieces. So why do you want to go to the moon?”

“I’m homesick”, said Puck. “Homesick for the great float when I don’t have to wear a string any more and can fly wherever I want. Do you happen to know where the nearest moon is?”

“I know everything”, said the crow. “Go to the brightly coloured end of the world and ask again there.”

They went, and just as they were already thinking that they would never get there, they suddenly heard a voice calling: “Stop! I’m the boss around here!”

The voice belonged to a very small garden gnome.

“I could boss you away”, he stated, looking at Susie and Puck.

“What are you doing here?” asked Susie.

“I’m watching over the Christmas tree kindergarten”, said the garden gnome. “I teach the Christmas trees to stand up straight and not giggle when Christmas comes and the tinsel tickles them. Do you go to kindergarten?”

“Yes”, said Susie.

“So who dug you up and brought you here?” asked the garden gnome. “And when did they last water you?”

“They don’t water the children where we live, Mr Garden Gnome.”

“So how do you grow?” asked the garden gnome suspiciously.

“We eat disgusting things that are good for us”, answered Susie. “Carrots, peppers and salad. May I ask you something now? Do you know where the nearest moon is?”

“Where the featherlight folk are”, answered the garden gnome sullenly, because he didn’t think much of people who were too light. “Beyond the little wood, in the quiet meadow.” And he showed them the way.

The quiet meadow was full of dandelion clocks, but there was not a soul to be seen.

“Where are the featherlight folk?” wondered Susie aloud.

“Hhhheeeere ...” breathed a dandelion clock, and blew away.

“Quiet!” warned another dandelion clock. “Or all the dreams will blow away.”

“Who are you?” whispered Susie, confused.

“A lost wish”, lisped one dandelion clock.

“Children’s dreams”, said another.

“A smile that was left behind”, whispered the third.

“Where is your moon, and how can we get to it?”

“There it is”, said the dandelion clocks. And it was true: at the end of the meadow stood the most beautiful moon that Susie and Puck had ever seen. It was very big and quite near.

“If you want to know how to get to it”, said the dandelion clocks, “you have to ask the wise dandelion clock. The wise dandelion clock is our King. The moon belongs to him.”

The King was standing in the middle of the meadow, gently swaying in the wind.

“May we wish for something?” asked Susie and Puck shyly.

“Of course”, answered the King composedly. “You may wish for whatever you like. Then you can dream of having it, and that’s already half the happiness.”

“We’d actually prefer to have the other half”, said Susie. “We’d like to go to the moon, you see.”

“All the balloons I know have already flown to the moon”, Puck added pleadingly.

“I’d so much like to be there when every balloon is given its new colour. We dance the whole night away on the moon river so that we can see ourselves reflected in it. Then the moon river glows like a brightly coloured flower.”

“That’s a lovely wish”, said the King, and smiled. “It’s a wish that you don’t even have to kiss goodbye to.”

“And?” asked Susie eagerly. “Can you fulfil it for us?”

The King of the dandelion clocks thought for a while.

Then he said: “Go home. There’s someone waiting for you”.

“Yes, but ...” stammered Susie.

“Please ...” whispered Puck again.

“Go home!” the King simply repeated, and it was clear that he didn’t want to hear any more arguments.

Oh dear, what should they do? Nobody wanted to help them, and yet the moon was already so near! Dejected and disappointed, Susie and her sobbing balloon wandered home in the moonlight.

Suddenly Puck paused and said: "Look! It's following us."

"Who?" asked Susie. "The moon", said Puck. "It's coming with us."

And it was! They ran ahead for a little way, and the moon ran with them. They stood still, and the moon stood still too. One minute the moon was behind them, then it was beside them or above them, but it was always there! The wise King had given them the moon, and they hadn't noticed! They kept stopping to look at their present.

Suddenly Susie said: "If the moon's going to stay close to me, then you're very welcome to fly to the moon, Puck. I shan't cry."

"You really won't?" asked Puck.

"No. Because the moon is going around with me. And every time I see it, I can think of you and feel happy."

"Yes", said Puck. "If I'm on your moon, I'll go everywhere you go."

When they got home, Susie gave Puck a kiss. Then she let him go.

"Take care, Susie!" cried Puck as loudly as he could, for he was already high in the sky.

"Take care, Puck!" cried Susie, and watched him until he was just a tiny dot in the evening sky.

When Susie reached her room, the moon had placed itself outside her window. And as she watched it, something soft and warm stroked her legs.

"Welcome home", purred Balthasar.

"Balthasar!" cried Susie, taking him in her arms. It was lovely to be home again. It was extra-specially lovely because the moon had come with her, and the little cat had waited for her. Later on, Balthasar cuddled down into his favourite place in bed, and Susie told him about the waves, the hooded crow, the garden gnome and the wise King who had given them the moon. Then she fell quite silent.

"Are you asleep, Susie?" asked Balthasar.

"No", said Susie, thinking of Puck, flying free and happy above the moon river with the other balloons. "I'm not asleep, Balthasar. I'm just dreaming ahead."