

## The Man Who Swam to the Moon

Under a moon, near a small pond, stood a lonely shack of a lumberman. The shack, so quaint, could almost be considered a part of the forest since it was built from the very timber that surrounded it. Each night, at the same time, the lumberman stood at the dock watching the moon shift and kiss the pond. This night, however, would be different for Emrys. The lumberman took his usual swim after a long day, after all, chopping and moving wood was hard work. As Emrys swam closer to where the moon touched the lake, he could hear a whisper grow in volume. When Emrys drew close enough, the whisper turned to a voice and it spoke with a sweet melody.

The voice directed its attention at him and said "I have watched you many a night, child of the canopy. I feel your stare, whether you know it or not."

Emrys paused and asked "Who are you? How is it that you can speak with me?" The voice didn't answer but Emrys could feel its presence.

He sat there for a while, waiting, when finally the voice said "I am the Moon. I have watched over your kind since your species first step. And you, Emrys, I have watched you for some time."

"How is it that you know my name? I have never spoken to you." Emrys beckoned.

The Moon replied "I know many things for I am a god and have watched you on different nights as my moon touches your pond. I can access your world this way, but only this way." the Moon paused and then said "Tonight, however, I have overstayed my welcome. I will visit you again Emrys of the Forest" and with that she left without a trace.

Some days had gone by since Emrys had last heard the Moon, he was beginning to believe that it was all just a dream, however real the voice might have felt. Each night since then, Emrys had waited on the dock to hear that voice, tonight was no different. He heard nothing, felt nothing, and not even the wind flowed through his hair. As Emrys had risen to go inside, shifting his attention from the pond for only a moment, there she was. Emrys had never seen her before but he could feel the very air change around him. She took a step towards him and the Moon said "Hello, Emrys, it has been a while. Please don't look so shocked, I understand this might seem strange but I promise I mean no harm. It is rare that I am allowed the pleasure of speaking with you humans."

Emrys waited a moment and then spoke "Why is it that you speak with me? I chose this place in the woods for a reason. I do not mind people, but I enjoy my solitude." The Moon didn't hesitate and interrupted before he could say more "I chose you because I am stuck on the moon for all of time and, more importantly, I have grown a liking to you. Is that so bad?" Emrys didn't answer, he sat there while the Moon spoke for what seemed like for a long time, but who was he to judge, being trapped somewhere for all of time might be lonely, even though Emrys liked that idea.

The two sat by the dock and Emrys enjoyed listening to her voice. The Moon's voice was very soothing, almost like a lullaby which did some healing by listening to stories she spoke of.

Some were familiar like the "The Iron One Molded Anew" although he knew it by another name he could not remember. Upon realizing the time, the Moon stood up, sighed and said "Well, it is about time I left, I will see you soon, thank you for listening" as she walked away, Emrys asked "What is your name?" the Moon smiled, satisfied she piqued his interest, "I am Veera'udin. I am the one you call the moon" and left offering nothing more.

Ever since that night, Veera had appeared to Emrys, unannounced and unabashedly. Why should she be, after all, the moon has existed for all of time. However, Emrys did not care. He enjoyed the company. They spoke of simple things; food, which she didn't but enjoyed the art of it. Games, one of his favorites being the strategy game, Imperial. A popular card game that soldiers played to pass the time. And more stories, old ones. Of course this fascinated him the most. Emrys remembered when he was young his father used to read stories of all kinds from all different lands. But there were stories that she knew which existed in another time. One of the strangest ones was "The Sacrifice of Delphos", the mighty demi-god who sided with humanity to secure their freedom. It sounded similar to a story his mother used to tell him as a boy, "The Stand of Delyas" but this didn't say there was a war, only a judgement of his character and humans would be spared.

"What's it like up there, being on the moon? I mean, sometimes you can travel here but only when the moon is full and closest to earth."

Veera thought for a moment, it was a good question "It is interesting to be up there, even when I am not here I can see what is happening on Earth. Wars, famines, progress. All sorts of interesting events. Why do you ask?"

Emrys replied "Well I would like to know what it is like up there. So often we assume to know and feel what someone experiences but I would actually like to experience what you do."

Veera stared blankly and then laughed. A laugh that seemed to echo a sweet melody. Something Emry assumed only a Goddess could do or whatever she was. Once Veera had stopped laughing she spoke "Okay, I will bring you to the moon one day but not tonight. The moon is not the right color. When the violet moon strikes the pond, swim and don't stop. I will see you once you do. As usual, she left without a trace."

Emrys was baffled. The violet moon, he thought. How long had it been since he had seen one?

The moon on this night showed a beautiful violet. Emrys could remember now, he was so young when he had first seen it, yet, there was a patch of his memory that faded him. Emrys forgot as soon as he had seen Veera step down from the moon. Her skin was a milky white that contrasted beautifully with the dark violet gown that she had on.

Something was familiar and tugged at Emrys but before he could think any further Veera said "It brings back beautiful memories, doesn't it? How long has it been since we last looked at the moon?"

Emrys thought about her last words. *They had done this before?* Veera could see the confusion, she chuckled like a child then replied “It is okay, Emrys. Maybe once we go to my home you will remember.”

Emrys swam to the moon as Veera glided on the water. Emrys kept swimming and finally came up for a breath of air. What he saw made him stand still. This wasn't the forest with a cabin on a pond but a beautiful crystal palace. Large chandeliers hung from the never ending ceiling, paintings lined the powder blue walls. The whole palace was well lit and well taken care of but it was missing a certain touch.

Veera was in heaven it seemed. She flew around, around and appeared to be over the moon. Finally, Veera stopped. She looked at Emrys and said “Emrys, what do you think? Isn't my home beautiful? I have cared for it for so many years! Oh here is the crystal pool! I don't swim in it much. Here are the Gardens of Ina. My mother's name, I dedicated to her...”

Emrys listened to her as she guided him through each hallway and each room. The first room was the kitchen. There was nothing to eat but she thought it made her palace more homely. She took him to the living room where she would rest. Admittedly, she didn't do very much of that since she didn't need it. To finish the tour she showed him her room. It was a beautiful spectacle but something about the room was off. There were dolls everywhere and not so well drawn pictures on the wall.

She ran back and forth while she placed different stuffed animals and dolls around Emrys. She muttered to herself while she grabbed and placed these items next to him “...and this is an animal that flies around and eats things, isn't it so pretty? Oh and this here is a doll from a village I found on the ground a long time ago. Oh! And this...”

Emrys sat on the bed, thinking and then it clicked. This being who has been living for thousands of years acted like a little girl, she was alone. Emrys was hesitant but then he said matter of factly “Veera, all these things are very beautiful but you're alone. This whole palace and I haven't seen a single person besides you and I. Your home is not a home but a prison. It is missing the feeling of love here.”

Veera sat very quiet for a long time. Disappearing and reappearing. Then she burst in a mighty rage “How DARE you speak of my home being LONELY! I invite you here and you insult MY HOME. Emrys, leave. Leave and never come back and..”

Emrys tried to explain himself but the walls of the palace seemed to be melting. Everything around him seemed to be changing to the color of red. *Was she responsible for changing the color of the moon?* There was no time to think. Emrys ran and escaped back to his small shack.

One week had passed since Emrys had offended Veera. It wasn't his intention to upset her but he was just making an observation. He couldn't really understand what made her so mad. Emrys himself lived alone and he loved it. Why would she be so sad? He set the thought away and looked up at the moon again. It was a pale blue and almost looked sad. Emrys came to

believe that the moon reflected the feelings of Veera and in this moment it was his fault the moon was showing pain.

Veera paced around her palace trying to place sculptures everywhere. She put each one of them in different outfits. She tried hard to make the place feel like a home and not a prison but nothing worked. She looked down at the lake and could see him sitting there, alone. Served him right.

Emrys called out to Veera. He pleaded, he begged and knew that she was probably watching him that very night. It seemed he couldn't get her to listen. Finally, even if he would never see Veera again he would write. He would write so that she would know how sorry he was and what he said was not meant as an insult but how even though they both lived alone he noticed how different alone could really be. One trapped and one free. So he wrote, he wrote until he could write no more and placed each page individually on the dock weighted with a rock so they wouldn't fly away. After he had written his apology, he went back inside to turn in for the night.

Around twilight Emrys awoke to a noise in his cabin. How strange, his magic wards around his land should have alerted him of anyone trespassing but then he saw her, hair flowing even though there was no wind. He watched out the window and could see that she was shaking. To his surprise, he could also see that there were waves in his little pond. Veera stopped reading and she looked directly at the window. He could feel the intensity in her eyes and then he looked closer. There were black streaks which looked like tears. She was crying. Emrys stepped outside and both locked eyes for a long while. The waves calmed and she stopped shaking.

Finally, Veera spoke "Do you remember what happened to you as a child, Emrys? Do you remember when you fell in this very same pond when you were just a little boy and your parents were nowhere in sight? "

Emrys thought hard and looked at the pond. He did remember. He fell in but couldn't quite remember how he got out.

Veera continued to speak, noticing he was piecing everything together "It was me, Emrys. I watched you as you were a child, such a curious little human. Always getting into trouble. Your mother and father loved you dearly. I grabbed you out of that pond and do you remember what you said to me? I will tell you--"

Before she could finish he delivered the final words "--please don't leave me" Emrys said. He could remember those very words now, he saw her face, her silhouette, everything was so clear now. Emrys continued "I said please don't leave me. Stay with me forever and always stay by my side."

She nodded and spoke again, still looking at the pond "Yes but there was more. After those days we would talk. I would tell you stories and you would tell me one day you would be a great knight and save me. You said you would build me a grand castle and all sorts of lovely

things. You were so silly back then but I loved hearing everything you talked about.” she paused then continued “But then you said what you said about me being lonely and I was so hurt because everything I created was what you said to me when you were child. So many dreams you had only to be alone in a forest with no castle. But I never left your side. I watched you, I made sure your flowers grow and your crops were healthy. I granted your land power. Haven’t you ever noticed?”

Emrys sat there, he did remember, everything he said down to the letter. He felt so tired in that moment and found all the energy he could to speak “I’m sorry, Veera. I guess after all this time I forgot. Once I was on my own I let everything go. It was just me and I thought of nothing else. Can you ever forgive me? There is no beauty in this world or the night without you, the moon, Veera’udin”

Veera now focused on the moon, or herself, reflecting and then focused her attention on the pond then to Emrys “I can Emrys. I read what you wrote. Who knew being out here all alone could make you such a talented writer?” She laughed, a harmonic laugh that carried a sweet melody and then spoke again “I have an idea, if you would like to hear about it” Emrys nodded and she continued “There is a way where I can spend half your year here, on your homestead if you would like. I can bind myself to an object and for two hundred and eleven days I can live here with you.” Emrys could feel a catch. Something in the tone of her voice signaled there was more. Veera noticed he understood and elaborated “You must be bound to an object in my palace and be forced to reside there with me for the other half of the year. I know this is a lot to ask...”

Emrys didn’t hesitate “I accept.”

Veera was surprised but pleased. The moon took on a beautiful shade of yellow, like a daffodil and pulsed. Resembling that of a heart. So Emrys was correct, he thought, it did reflect her emotions. Emrys then asked “So what next?”

Veera took his hand and guided him across the pond “No more swimming,” she said as Emrys flailed “you no longer are bound to the human realm but to the energy between. Come.”

Emrys relaxed and let himself be dragged like a child, just how Veera did when she rescued him from the pond when he was a boy. There was a great joy inside Emrys, like a great heat from the furnace of a blacksmith. He drifted into the Palace of Udin and welcomed a new life of undiscovered treasures.

The End.