Emma Yarrow goes to the Moon

By: Erica Crowe

The moon appeared suddenly. Full. Staring down at her. Plastered onto the sky. It wasn’t there five minutes ago. But there it is. Beautiful. Round. The faintest yellow. Craters that make a face. This moon is powerful. She can feel it. This one has significance. But they all do. The moon pulls the tides up and down. The moon pulls her emotions up and down. It pulls her in and out of creativity and love, anger and lack of innovation. She dreams of going out there. Getting off this plastic covered, fossil fuel loving planet. But the only way to do that is with the consumption of fossil fuels. So she’ll just sit here dreaming until someone creates a better way off this place.

Sometimes she feels like none of this is real. She looks at that perfectly spherical moon and thinks *maybe it’s just an illusion.* That’s why she seeks to climb as many mountains as possible. She needs to know what’s on the other side. She needs to know that it’s not just an illusion. That there are more mountains, rivers, lakes, and eventually the ocean. But still. That could be fabricated too. Illusionists are powerful. Technology is powerful. It doesn’t take much for things to be believable. She can imagine living in Hogwarts and magic being real after all. Why is this reality any more real than those written by her favourite authors? What if she’s just a character written into someone’s story?

She shakes off those thoughts. That is the rabbit hole of insanity. Of living her life trapped in an asylum pumped up on drugs to keep her sane. Or to keep her viewing the illusion. She might as well just pretend she’s like everyone else. Keep up her own illusion so she doesn’t get locked away. Beacuse what is worse than not being able to make her own decisions? She could not handle being locked inside a building with people monitoring her every move and decision. No. She needs freedom. Or at least the illusion of freedom. She needs those climbs up mountains to clear her head, to get her away from the minds of everyone else, trapped in their rat race, in their new cars and mortgages. She doesn’t care about the latest trends. Who cares about a piece of technology that they’re going to love for a month and throw away in a year anyway?

Nope she has to find a way to fit in without giving away her inner thoughts and desires. If they knew she wanted to live on a spaceship and travel to the moon, they’d lock her up for sure. That was utter madness. This was the most perfect place to live. She must see that. That’s what they taught her in school right? This country is free. You have freedom. As long as you’re living by their rules. As long as you get a job, and buy a car, and buy a house, and get married, and have kids. Then you’ll be free. As long as you don’t think too hard, don’t get too educated, don’t do illicit drugs, because those open your mind up to possibilities.

“What are you doing in there?” her sister says from outside the door, interrupting her thoughts. She bangs on the door, “Emma?”

“Nothing. Just looking at the moon. It’s beautiful tonight. Come see.” She unlocks the door and lets her sister into their room. The moonlight shines in through the window, illuminating the pages of Emma’s sketchbook. She has drawn a picture of herself, standing on the moon. Her sister eyes it nervously.

“You shouldn’t be drawing stuff like that,” she says.

“Don’t worry about is Mary berry, not like anyone is gunna see it.”

“Just be careful.”

Emma rolls her eyes and looks back up at the brilliant moon. Someday she’ll be free of this place. “What’s for dinner?”

Mary closes Emma’s sketchbook and slides it into the drawer. “Nothing if you don’t quit staring at the moon. Come on, Mom’s waiting.”

Emma sighs and follows her sister downstairs to the kitchen. Her mom is leaning on the half island. It is still connected to the main counters, but has a place that doubles as a table. That’s where Emma and Mary eat. Mom always stands, right where she currently is. It looks like Mom made the usual, rice and salmon, green beans, yuck. Emma is so tired of this. She wants to go eat space food. It is probably more exciting than this. Her mom doesn’t flavour food properly. Or at all. It is always so bland.

“Sit down girls, eat,” Mom says, “then I have something we need to talk about.” She walks out of the kitchen into their small living room and sits down on the threadbare couch that was once her mother’s.

A lump of worry forms in Emma’s stomach. She knows her mother never has anything good to talk about when she says ‘we need to talk.’ Last time she said that Dad got arrested. The time before that they had to move, leave her friends, the only ones she ever had. She sits in her chair and picks away at the food on her plate. Mary is already done. She always eats fast. She is sitting there in her blue chair, staring at Emma.

“What?”

“Hurry up.”

Emma forces the food down her throat. She has to eat. Mom will be pissed if she doesn’t. She takes a gulp of water and follows her sister into the living room.

Mom looks at them. That look of worry has returned to her eyes. It hasn’t been there in such a long time. But here it is, like a reunion with an estranged friend. The wrinkles have grown deeper around the edges of her eyes since the last time that look of worry was there. Emma realises she doesn’t actually look at Mom’s face very often. She always thinks of her as looking like Mary. Straight brown hair, beautiful, round brown eyes, smooth skin, with just the right amount of freckles. But now she sees her grandmother. Mom’s hair has faded into light brown and gray. Her once smooth skin is wrinkled and beginning to fall from her face. She still does resemble Mary a bit, but they no longer look like twins, like they did not too long ago. What has happened?

“I have some news girls,” Mom starts, “sit.”

They sit in front of mom on their pillows. Mary’s blue, Emma’s green. They never were allowed to sit on Mom’s couch. She said it was only for women who had been with a man. Oh if she only knew…she probably meant married a man…whatever. Emma is fine with her pillow. She’s sat on it her whole life. The couch doesn’t look comfortable anyway.

“Dad’s been shot.”

“What! Is he ok?” Emma says. Her heart is pounding in her chest. She knew it could happen, was likely to happen. They weren’t fans of creative types in prison. But she had hoped it wouldn’t.

Mom takes a deep breath, “He’s in the hospital. It isn’t looking good. They said we can come see him.”

“Really? It’s that bad is it?”

Mom nods.

They get to the hospital just as the sun is rising. Mom wouldn’t let them leave last night. She is too scared to travel in the dark. It isn’t safe. At least it is lighter out right before sunrise. It isn’t soon enough. Emma needs to see Dad.

It is quiet. Usually trucks drive up and down the streets all hours of the night. But they aren’t out this morning. Something is happening. Emma isn’t sure what though.

The guard at the hospital doors asks them their names and status.

“Lyla Yarrow. Prisoner’s wife. Prisoner’s daughters.” Mom says.

He checks a tablet in his hand and nods. The door slides open. Made of metal. No windows. This is nothing like the hospital Emma had gone to in their last city. That one had glass doors and windows, natural light everywhere. This one is dark, lit by fluorescent bulbs. And quiet. Something is going on.

A nurse leads them to the room where Dad is. There he lays, he looks dead. But his chest moves slowly up and down. Good. He’s breathing at least. Emma walks over to his side, his left eye opens, the same blue as hers. A crooked grin works its way onto his face.

“Hey my girl,” he says in a breathless whisper. It looks like it hurts to speak.

“Hey Dad,” Emma says, grabbing his hand gently, “Where did they shoot you?” Tears form in her eyes. She hates the idea of her dad being in pain. He is so strong. He has always been a powerful force, his energy like that of the moon. Emma can’t picture a world without her dad in it. He has to get better.

Dad points with his right arm towards his left lung. Even the slight movement of his arm looks like it causes him great pain. If only he had never been involved with the Moon Colony plan… His artwork is what stemmed the project. If they had never found it…

“It’s not looking good, I might get to the moon though,” he says.

“How are you going to get to the moon if you’re not… alive Dad?”

His eyes leave hers and find Mom’s, a tear rolls out of the corner of his eye.

“Emma, let me talk to Dad for a minute,” Mom says.

Dad nods, and gives her a reassuring wink. Emma walks out into the hallway with Mary and closes the door behind her. This hospital is so dark and cement. It’s so cold. No wonder Dad is so sick. If he was in a proper hospital, not this drab prison hospital, he might be better off.

“Do you think he’s going to be ok?” Mary asks quietly.

Emma looks at her sister’s face. She doesn’t look as sad as Emma feels. She never did get to be as close with Dad. He was locked up for most of her childhood. She was more like Mom anyway. Stoic. Emotionless. They didn’t feel things like Emma and Dad. They weren’t creative. They couldn’t look up at the moon and picture a better life up there. Though that was safer for them. It was dangerous to have dreams. It was dangerous to think of leaving this place. You got locked up. Or shot. Or both. Her mind was dangerous, just like Dad’s.

“I sure hope so.”

“It wouldn’t make much difference if he wasn’t here,” Mary says.

Emma glares angrily at her sister, “How can you say that! You don’t know what you’re talking about. Life would change so much if he wasn’t here.”

“Would it? Mom already has to work all the time. It’s not like Dad is sending money from prison.”

“You- you…” Emma pauses. She doesn’t know what to say to her sister. She can’t believe Mary is being so cruel. “You have no idea what you’re saying. The world without Dad is nothing.” Emma turns away from her sister and goes back into Dad’s room. Mom is whispering something to him. She looks up. Tears are falling from her eyes.

“He doesn’t have long Emma.”

Emma looks from Mom to Dad. He also has tears leaking out of his eyes. But he smiles at her.

“I’m going to the moon love. You don’t need to worry about me anymore.”

“How?” Emma says.

“Mom has the plans. Don’t worry about it.”

Emma looks at Mom. She won’t make eye contact. Emma is so confused. Is there some kind of technology on the moon that will make Dad better?

“Can’t you tell me? Are you going to get better Dad? I don’t want you to leave me.” She grabs Dad’s hand and presses it to her cheek. The way he used to hold her when she was small and scared. She needs him to hold her like that again. He can’t leave her. She can’t stay with Mom and Mary. They don’t understand her. Only Dad does. Dad’s hand goes limp in hers. He doesn’t caress her cheek. His hand grows heavy. His eyes stare blankly toward her. One last tear escapes from the confinement of his eyelid.

“No! Dad! No! Don’t leave me! Take me with you! Dad!”

“Emma, it’s time to go.”

Mom pulls at her arms, but Emma won’t let go of Dad. She clings to him while Mom pulls on her. She hears Mary saying something to her. She can’t let them take her away from Dad. He can’t leave her again. She is pulled away from him. Some big nurse’s aides or security guards pull her off. She is kicking and screaming. She is trying to get back to Dad. She is going to go with him.

“Mom! Don’t let them take me! I need to stay with Dad!”

She feels a needle stab into her neck.

“Mary! Mom!”

She stops fighting back. Her limbs are numb. They feel invisible. Is she even here?

There’s Mom and Mary looking at her with matching expressions of concern. Like they know anything. They never loved dad like Emma. They didn’t want to go to the moon and build a castle. They are content here. They love breathing in the stagnant air. They love shopping for phones and clothes. They never understood Emma’s ability to draw, her need to draw. Her and Dad are different.

Emma is pulled away. Mom and Mary just stare at her. She tries to yell. To scream something at them. But her tongue won’t move. It is numb like the rest of her. Useless. Why are they just standing there? Why aren’t they helping? Why are they letting them take her away?

She is strapped onto a bed. She doesn’t see the point. It’s not like her limbs can function anyway. She wonders where Mom and Mary went. Are they just going to leave her here? Locked up? She stares at the ceiling, she imagines the moon. She sees Dad up there, smiling down at her. She needs to go to him.

They give her some weird pills that make everything fuzzy. Nothing looks right. It’s like this reality they created is fracturing. She can see the cracks. There is something wrong here. Something is happening. They know she knows. They look at her like they know. They see into her mind and know she has discovered their secret. This world isn’t real. The only real place is the moon. She needs to go there. But she can’t do that with this fuzzy distorted vision. She needs to find a way to not take the pills. But they always watch. Maybe she can puke them out after. Maybe she can just run away. No. That won’t work if the world isn’t put together right.

Yes. Throw up. She feels sick already anyways. The smell of bleach is strong in here. And the filtered air still smells like outside, sulphur. She finds the washroom. She is followed by a fat nurse in purple scrubs. She looks mean. Her eyebrows are pulled in towards her nose, permanent creases between them. Her hair is dyed red. The roots are coming in grey.

“I’m going to puke,” Emma says, and proceeds to do so as the angry nurse watches. How can she not be sick from this? Emma flushes the toilet and washes her hands.

“You’re going to need another pill,” the mean nurse says.

“It’s just going to make me sick again,” she says, wiping off her mouth.

“It’s the pill or a shot.”

Emma cringes. Her neck is still sore from where she was injected the other day. The day Dad went to the moon. Tears form in her eyes. Thoughts of that day haunt her. She still can’t believe it happened.

“Can I try again tomorrow? I just feel so sick.”

“You don’t think we’ve heard that before? You’re not going to get better without your medicine.”

Medicine. Ya right. Medicine shouldn’t make her feel sick. It shouldn’t make the world look wrong. It shouldn’t make her feel this way. Medicine. She doesn’t need medicine. She needs to get out. She doesn’t even know where the door is though. Maybe she can just break a window…

“Please. I will take it tomorrow. Can I just eat? Maybe call my mom?”

The nurse looks over Emma’s frail body. The furrow of her brow deepens.

“You do look like you could use some food. Go eat.”

“Thank you.”

Emma makes her way to the dining room. She sees a door on the other end of it. She hopes it will lead to a staircase, a way out. It does have a glowing red EXIT sign above it. It’s probably locked though. Or guarded… A big man stands next to it, scowling at the patients milling about the dining room. Just as friendly as the nurse. There is a commotion by the kitchen. A patient has jumped on top of another patient. The big guard runs over to break them up. This is her chance. Emma slips quietly towards the door, turns the handle. It’s unlocked. Yes! She opens it a fraction, just enough to squeeze through. And she’s out. It *is* a staircase. She goes down. Three flights of stairs. And the exit door is in front of her. She pushes the metal bar, the door opens. An alarm goes off. Shit. She runs toward the gate and slides out before it slams closed.

There is a hill ahead. She might as well climb that. The moon shines brightly overhead. Did a month went by since her dad…How? A month or is it still the same day? Is the moon always full? No. Of course not. Emma shakes her head. Now she can get to Dad. To the moon. That’s where he is.

“Where’d she go?” She hears someone yell behind her. She drops down onto the ground, scraping her knee in the process. Oh well, what’s a little pain. Better than feeling nothing at all. She smiles and army crawls toward the mountain. These guys won’t see her in the dark. They’re all used to being inside and seeing by their bright false lights. Even the beautiful light of the moon does nothing for them. She looks behind her and sees flashlights moving back and forth. She laughs under her breath and keeps moving toward the hill. She stands up when she reaches the tree line. There’s no way they’ll see her in here. She is a shadow.

She moves up the side of the mountain, loving the feel of rocks and sticks beneath her bare feet. She is thrilled by the pain of sharp stones cutting them up. She knows it doesn’t matter if she’s bleeding and in pain. The moon will heal her. Like Dad. He is up there. Healed. Better.

She sits atop the cliff looking up at the moon, her moon. She takes in a deep breath of the acrid air. The pollutant of their ever burning, ever consuming, fossil fuels. She looks down at the red and white lights, dancing in trails across the ground, making their way home from work. She coughs. Then she sees the beautiful moon glowing down below her. Reflecting off the lake… or is it in the lake? Then it comes to her. She doesn’t need to use a space ship to get to the moon. There it is right there. Dad went there. He said he’d meet her there. She can get there. She can jump off this cliff and she can fly there. Yes. She feels it in her bones. She feels the ability to fly growing in her veins. Her mind knows how to do it. She is going to fly there, down there, where the moon is, right below her. She can get there and live with Dad.

She stands up, breathes in another breath of the horrid air of this planet. Yes. She needs to get out of here. The moon will be beautiful. They can start a colony there. She’ll build a big beautiful castle out of moon rocks. Yes. Dad has most likely started gathering supplies already. She can’t wait to be with Dad, to be happy.

She jumps. Freedom. Finally. She is flying. Soaring through the air. She has found a way to get to the moon. She doesn’t need fossil fuels. She can do it all by herself. Air blows her cheeks back towards her ears, her lips flap around her teeth. Her hair flies all around her. She is weightless. She is going to make it. She can see the moon getting closer. The moon. That incandescent glow, warm and welcoming. She will make it there, all on her own. She will find Dad there. They’ll be free together. That’s what he said right? Dad is free now. The moon is the only place where there is true freedom.