



PROMPT #3: Every year, one person is sent to the moon. This year, though you hid in terror, it is your turn to enter the rocket.

Mina

by **Mollie Smith**

I didn't want to come. I took the little pills that Mary told me to take in the back room of the boarding house. "These will stop you from being sent away," she told me. But they didn't take or maybe they were only sugar pills. That would have been just like her. But I guess Mary isn't here only me and all the others that the pills and the teas and all the other myths didn't work for.

It's lonely here on the moon even with the others who came from different places, some thin, some fat, some with large bellies, others with no bellies at all, some blonde, some brunette and one redhead. And there really are aliens like everyone says. Not friendly little green men but ones with cold dark tentacles that touch your heart and lifeless eyes that stare down at our tired swollen bodies as we lie on their tables with arms and mouths and stomachs hooked to tubes and screens. They take fluids and give you fluids, look inside your body and stroke you and stab you, scrape and poke you. What does my blood tell you today? What pills do I take today? The orange ones? The white ones? The red ones? Are the cloaks around? Will they be pleased or upset? When can I leave? Don't tell them I asked to leave.

The moon is beautiful though, it's bright and airy. I haven't seen a rainy day since coming and the sun shines brighter here. The windows are all wide and thick with dark iron bars woven together without hiding the view. Miles and miles with no one around. No one aside from the cloaks at least. That's what Petunia calls them, says they dragged her here by her hair. Can you believe it? I can't, then again everything Petunia says is only half true, but at least she still says things. Each morning we watch the cloaks on their morning walks always in packs and always singing. Black and white. I feel like I'm in a black and white picture show. Black and white cloaks white window sills with black bars white beds on black floors black shoes with a white dress. *Cleanliness is next to Godliness.*

We sit and we wait. Wait for the time to pass. Wait for the next appointment. Wait to sleep. Wait to truly disappear.

Someone gets sent to the moon every year. Never to be discussed though, only whispered through gloved hands at grocery stores and church potlucks in the shy corners where women gather to speak. Warnings spoken in raised brows and sly smiles from sandpaper tongues.

Last year Lacey Brown was the one sent to the moon. Lacey Brown was a waifish girl of sixteen only a couple years younger than myself, all freckled and tanned with large teeth that made her look like Howdy Doody when she smiled. She had spent the year before working the stables for Mr. George Pearson and his horses.

“I heard she worked a lot more than just the horses if you know what I mean” the girls in the boarding house whispered to one another after the lights had been turned out.

“Bless her she should have known they can’t help it” replied another; *it’s not gossip if you say bless them*. Two weeks later she was sent for and away to the moon she disappeared. I never saw her again. It’s my turn this year and I hid under the steps of the porch the day I was to be sent. Everyone was looking for me, said they wanted to say their goodbyes, but I think they wanted to give me one last once over and see what it was like to have a moon girl living under your roof. I found myself burrowing further into the yellow rose bushes and dirt placed strategically in front of the porch, attempting to suffocate myself in their sweet fragrance. I clutched my stomach, the geranium pattern of my skirt clinging to my skin as I folded into myself like a child in the belly of its mother. *Maybe if I’m small enough they won’t find me*.

My bags had already been packed. Not that I had packed them myself, but I could see them through the brambles, tapping their feet at me at the end of the sidewalk. The same brown suitcase I had arrived with, pale and wearing shades of yellow at the edges, the loose wooden handle I had to hold a certain way when I arrived fresh and excited so that it wouldn’t break was now stiff and coated in a thick layer of tape. The hatbox Mary gave me the night before sat beside my suitcase on the walkway now, candy pink and white with delicately painted foxgloves and a bow on top. I don’t know why she gave me a hat box. I only owned one hat I wore on Sundays and hung from the door hook the rest of the days.

Mary had looked over at me with a smile “They don’t have things with hooks on the moon. It would be too much of a.. temptation” she said and placed my hat neatly in the box closing the lid.

I saw widow Beasley's chicken legs rounding the porch stairs over to where I lay crouched. If I lay still and hold my breath she won't find me. "Get out from there Willamina what are you doing acting like a barn animal" she yelled as her spindly hands reached for my arms. I began screaming and attempted to work my way further under the house kicking dirt from behind me like a burrowing rabbit. I felt two hands much stronger than widow Beasley's grasp the back of my ankles and pull me backwards through the dirt and into the light. I looked up to see Mr. John standing in front of me before realizing my socks and bloomers, once white were now a vibrant shade of brown all on display on the front lawn. He smiled down at me and I saw myself through his eyes. *Rabid animal*. Maybe that's what I had become. I picked a rose branch from my hair and dusted off the crumbling dirt from my limbs before making my way over to the rocket with him.

The Oldsmobile Golden Rocket, my ride to the moon. *How ironic*. It wasn't the first time I had been inside and it wasn't the first time I had gone unwillingly. But I hadn't expected it to be here standing before me brilliant like the sun glimmering to take me into darkness and into the unknown.

I clambered inside and attempted to smooth the wrinkles from my dress. Mr. John's keys jangled and the engine came to life, as I looked up I could see all the faces sitting on the porch, peering out the windows watching and waiting. As the car began to drive I stuck my head out of the window, scrunched up my nose and poked out my tongue for all to see. *I'm glad that was the last any of them saw of me*.

"Stop that mess" Mr. John said and swatted me. I folded my hands on my chest and looked out the locked windows as we drove on.

"Come on now Will, don't act that way. You know I'm gonna miss you" he said as he began to turn onto a back road and his hand made his way up my dirt clad flesh. "No one's got spirit like you hon."

I remember fifth grade, the first time I heard about the moon. Jimmy Brown had told me about it as he held me down underneath the hot metal slide. Jimmy Brown was two grades older but one grade small for his size, redhead and freckled and he rarely hung out with the other boys.

"I'm sending you to the moon," he said.

"What's that?"

“What do you mean, what’s that?” he said in a huff. “It’s just where girls go when they get in trouble.”

“Why?”

“Stop asking dumb girl questions” he said and began to pinch the soft flesh on my upper arms “give me your skates or you’ll disappear just like Lorna.”

I didn’t know who Lorna was and I didn’t know why she disappeared but I knew that I didn’t want to. I handed over my skates and didn’t say a word more. I asked my mother about the moon later that night who promptly shoved soap in my mouth and told me not to talk about it. I found out years later Lorna was Jimmy’s neighbor and just like all the others she didn’t come back.

I buckled up my seatbelt again as Mr. John started up the car again and pulled out from under the cover of the apple trees that littered the path to the moon. The car sputtered and peeled off from the gravel and I realized my bloomers had been left behind. *A white flag amongst the leaves.* I guess it didn’t matter where I was going. They were dirt stained anyway.

“Be good for me now, Will” Mr. John yelled from the car door through his softly wrinkled green eyes. “I’m gonna want you back, don’t you go skipping town like everyone else” he said. I made no reply and kept facing forwards.

Sister Moon’s Home for Wayside Women was plastered on the front door in copper lettering for all to see, surrounded by anemones of soft pinks and blues. As if anyone other than those affected would ever dare to set foot here. As the door swung open I looked into the barren face of the black and white cloaked woman, the sickening scent of lavender and geraniums wafting into my nose and eyes as I gathered my bags and entered.