

Mother Moon and the Tears of Joy

by Greg Lam

One day in the great city by the desert, The King called his entire palace staff into the main hall: his wise men, his scholars, his advisors, his clowns, and his warriors.
5 Even his servants. They all assembled there. And when the King himself came, he asked them all this question:

“Who amongst you knows how to talk to the moon?”

Silence filled the hall, for everyone knew that while a true answer would bring great rewards, a false one would only bring death.

10 The King grew angry. “Here I have assembled the finest minds from over three continents. Does no one know how to speak to the moon?” he shouted. “If no one can answer then death shall come to you all.”

And from the other end of the hall came an answer. “I do.” And all turned to look at who spoke. They saw a humble servant girl step forward, strong and unafraid. She
15 looked at the king with eyes that did not waver.

“Sire,” said an advisor, “she is but a kitchen wench. How could she know this great thing?”

“Silence. Only I shall decide, for that is my right. Tell me, woman, what is it that you know?”

20 The lady knelt down and spoke. “Sire. You are my King, but my name is Dahlia, not Woman. As for what I know, it is this: The moon does not like to show her true face to people, so you must venture far into the desert alone, until you can no longer tell which direction your city lies. You must ask for her at night of course, and you should give her a gift, something near to your heart. And be polite. And that's all it
25 takes to talk to the moon.”

And so in the morning, the king ventured alone into the desert sands, carrying his gift in his hand. He walked until he couldn't see the city behind him. He walked more, until nighttime came and he was not even able to tell in which direction his city was.

30 Only then did he take out his gift - a jewel - the center jewel from his crown - a magnificent blue diamond - He set it on the ground carefully. And he called into the sky at the moon.

"Please, Mother Moon. I have walked this long way to speak to you, for my need is great. I ask you to appear before me."

Nothing happened, and the moon stood distantly in her sky.

35 "Please, Mother Moon. I have great need of you tonight. If you do not appear, I must kill the girl who told me how to find you for lying."

And a desert breeze came and whispered into the King's ears.

"I am here. Close your eyes and I will be here."

40 The King closed his eyes and he opened them again, and the moon stood before him, wearing her true face and holding the king's blue diamond.

"I am here, wise King. What would you have of me? You say your need is great, but there are others in your kingdom who have more need of me. Your plate is full while most farmers can only eat on every third day, if they are lucky. The drought has robbed your city of food."

45 "That is precisely the problem, Mother Moon. There is not enough food, and my people starve. I have worked endlessly to solve this problem, forsaking all pleasure, not even taking a wife. I have done everything I can think of. And yet, I can look out of the palace in any direction and see misery. I see this, but no tears come. People starve in my city every day and I cannot cry for them. Lady, is this not wrong?"

50 And Mother Moon gave a smile to the King. "You have walked this way through the scorching desert because you do not cry?"

"Yes," he said. "A servant girl told me the way."

"She is as wise, it seems, as you. Tell me, King. Why did you call me? There are others who are more powerful than I. Why did you not call the sun or the wind?"

55 "The sun is more powerful, yes, and the wind is more unrelenting. But only you watch over us in the night, when we sleep. When the masks of the day are discarded... only you can see who we are when we do not pretend."

And Mother Moon smiled once more.

"One more thing, wise king. What is this trinket that you give me?"

60 "That trinket is my crown jewel, the most valuable piece I could carry all this way. I was told to give you a gift."

"But you were told to bring something close to your heart, were you not? A crown jewel is something worn near the head. That is your mistake."

65 And Mother Moon took the jewel in her hands and clasped them closed. A red glow came which blinded the king. When he could see again, Mother Moon was gone and so was the diamond. In its place, there was another jewel, a red ruby, cut in the shape of a heart.

"Thank you, mother," he said. He picked up the jewel and held it by his own chest. To his shock, the jewel melted into his flesh and stayed there in his breast, warming him in the cold desert night.

70 He turned around. To his surprise, he was back at the gates of his city. Mother Moon must have taken him back there while he was blinded. But still he felt no tears. He thought of his people, starving and miserable, and still he felt nothing. He then thought of Dahlia, the servant girl. And then he knew what he must do.

75 He assembled his palace staff again. The wise men, advisors, jesters, warriors and servants. And called for Dahlia to come forth. She came forward again, strong and unafraid, and knelt before him.

80 "Sire," she said. "I see that you are unhappy still, and so I must think that my advice has displeased you. If this is so, I place myself at your mercy. My life and my head are yours for the asking."

The King shook his head. "Arise, Dahlia. Your directions were true. In the desert, I found Mother Moon. I gave her a jewel, a cold diamond, and she returned to

me my heart, that I did not know that I had lost. The heart I did not know I had lost to you."

85 Dahlia looked up, unafraid and unsurprised.

"Dahlia," said the King. "Because of this drought, I had forsaken all pleasure. I looked for all of the answers inside my head. But I did not know I could find the answers inside my heart. You said that your life and your head could be mine, but I do not want those. Instead, I ask you for your hand and your heart. Will you give those to me?"

90 And the raggedy servant girl kissed the King, and the assembled crowd cheered. And then the King began crying with joy. He cried so much that day, it flooded the palace, spilling over into the desert sand surrounding, and making the ground wet and fertile. And where the King's tears of joy fell, green things grew and there was food aplenty for the entire city. And by the time of the King's wedding, there was no more need for anyone to cry.

The End