

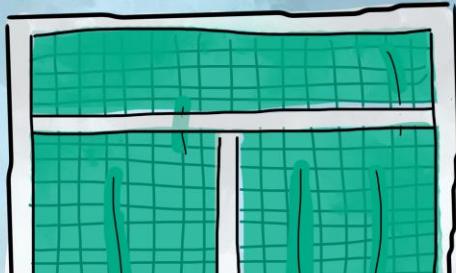
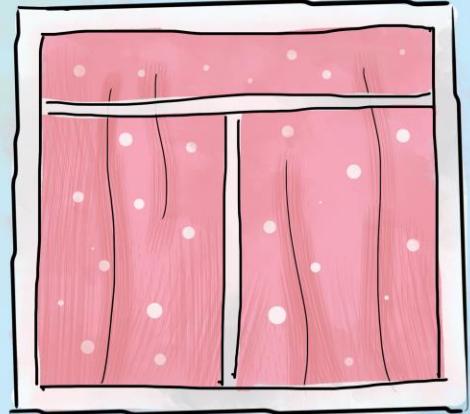
The place of Moon and Stars

Pie Corbett





Jo had always wanted to travel to the moon. When she was younger, she had shifted her bed so that at night she could see its ever changing shape through her window. As she slept, the silvery light fell on her sleeping form. She imagined that it protected her and made her life just a little bit special, magical even, with a silver edge to everything she touched. She was like Midas, though in a good way. Didn't her mum often say that every cloud had a silver lining?

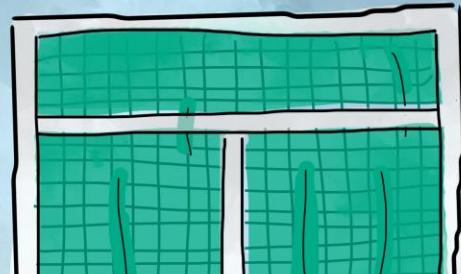
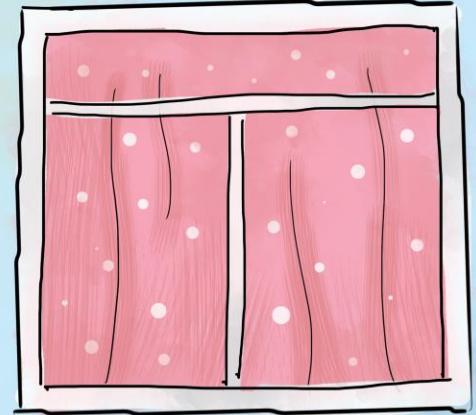


That night she went to bed as usual, bathed moon-bright, and soon drifted off to sleep, dreaming of the project they were doing at school. It was fifty years since the lunar landing and Jo's mind was full of rockets, those first tentative, dancing steps on the moon's surface and the magic of floating without gravity.





Then she woke and, to her surprise, found herself inside an enormous factory of polished machines that gleamed in the lights. A bell tinkled and metallic fingertips tapped a rhythm as the factory buzzed with energy. Jo stared round, eyes wide as saucers. Alarm bells rang inside her as pistons pumped, wheels spun, cogs clicked and steam hissed. Engines glittered as brass spindles rhythmically pluttered and massive bellows billowed; a cacophony of clattering and battering assaulted her ears.



A girl with long brown hair, wearing a light blue dress, stands on a large, yellow, smiling face that appears to be a floor or platform. She is looking up and reaching towards the ceiling. The background is dark and textured, suggesting a factory interior.

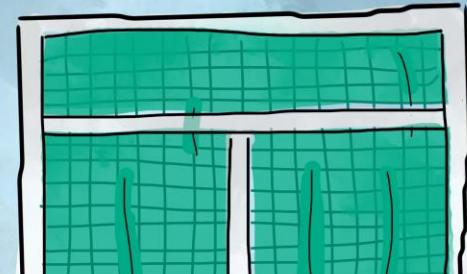
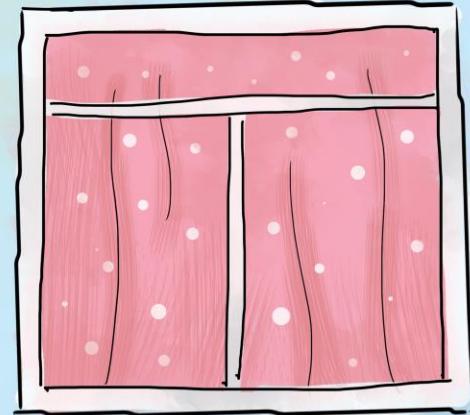
As the factory pulsed and pounded, a flight of what looked like tiny winged stars fluttered down from an enormous cage that hung on the ceiling. Light glinted off their golden wings. Shimmering and quivering in the light, with their tiny engines whirring, the starbirds swarmed over the thudding machinery: pressing buttons, pulling levers, swooping high and low, checking dials and spinning handles.



Then, as if by some hidden signal, a series of tiny doors opened up on the sides of the smaller machines and Jo could see what they were making.

Thousands of toys of all shapes and sizes appeared, one by one: packages, packets, balloons, train sets, miniature planes, dolls, soft toys, and tiny cars.

Toys of bright colours with gleaming crimson, deep blues, flickering yellows and rich purples mingled with sea green and brilliant orange. It was as if the factory was making children's



In the centre of the room stood the largest machine. Star-birds shimmered round, tending to its needs. Out of a thin opening, slivers of silver rolling like waves drifted up to the ceiling and escaped through an opening into the darkness beyond. Jo realized that the machine was making moonlight.

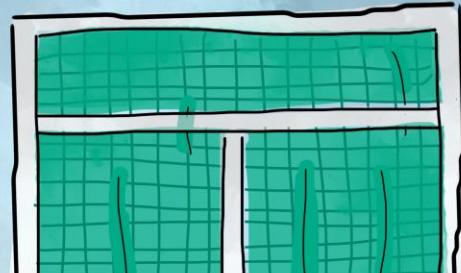
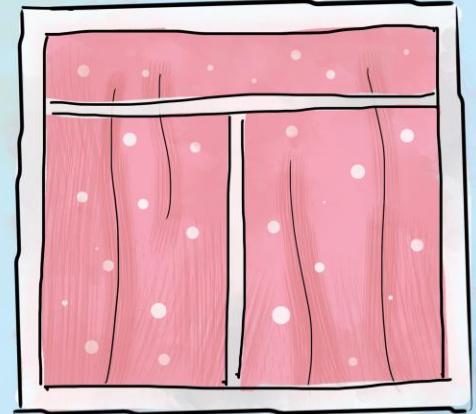


It was then that Jo noticed the person in charge. He was dressed like a ringmaster from a circus. His huge, red, round face glistened with sweat as his arms whirled in a series of gestures and she realised that, as he moved, some of the star-birds would swoop and dive as if he was conducting their movements. Jo stood

and stared



At that moment, Jo noticed a silver door that led into another room. She edged forwards, slipped through and stepped quietly into something quite different. She was standing in what she imagined was surely the King's room in a fairytale palace. Silk curtains cut out the daylight, candles flickered and the carpet was a thick, soft scarlet. In a corner stood a suit of shiny armour, labelled, 'Will do as it's told – works on command'. Jo was tempted to ask it to get up and walk but felt that she had better not.



The walls were covered with wooden shelves that bowed under the weight of crowns, piles of coins, golden keys and bracelets. Strings of pearls and necklaces of gleaming jewels hung from thousands of hooks. Sitting on the top shelf was a snowy owl. Suddenly, it blinked at her and muttered, “Don’t stare. It’s rude!”



There was a huge table in the centre of the room, cluttered with jars in which swam all sorts of strange creatures. Scarlet eels writhed; golden lizards and emerald frogs blinked back at her. A pile of tiny boxes caught her eye. Jo picked up a small, red package and read the inscription that had been written on the label in spidery writing: to travel to any destination, put on the ring and twist once. Only use when you really mean it, as there is no escape clause.