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Nonfiction Jury

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## Luna

### 1. The Orbiting Period

*The moon makes a complete orbit around the sun every 27.3 days.*

Only twice have I been woken up by the moon. The first night we moved into our house, I was sleeping on a mattress on the floor (the blankets smelled like mothballs because they had been in storage), it was late – I thought someone was shining a light in my face. But when I opened my eyes, I looked up through the window in the ceiling and saw the moon, so close and full and bright that it seemed blue. I could discern each pockmark from the next; even though my eyes hurt from the light I kept on looking. The next morning I woke up to the white sun.

I was eight then; it was before I slept too heavily to be roused by anything but my mother. And although the moon had cycles, it seemed to me to be not consistent: sometimes I would stay up on nights when it was supposed to be at its largest and it was never as remarkable as I remembered. I would stumble around for the rest of the days, eyes heavy – the only stars I saw

were the ones against the black of my closed eyelid. It wasn't bright enough to wake me up for years. I felt the distance.

When we moved the bed frame into my room, my mother made sure it was facing the opposite direction as the skylight. "You don't sleep enough, anyway," she'd said. "You need the room to be black at night. No light – nothing."

## II. Impact Craters

*Since impact craters accumulate at a nearly constant rate, the number of craters superposed on a geologic unit can be used to estimate the age of the surface.*

We are moving. For almost eight years, we've lived in this house – chipped its paint, scuffed its brown wood. We've grown accustomed to its smell and which rooms are coldest and the way the doors slam no matter how lightly you close them. I've marked my height since the fourth grade on the wall of my bathroom. When my brother Evan was younger he locked himself in his closet on accident and panicked – he picked up a little toy telescope and beat a hole in the door to try and get out; the hole is still there.

My mother and brother and I are moving, anyway – she wants us to live in a garden home. "Somewhere nice, with a big lawn. And not so many stairs because the dog is getting arthritis." My father is not coming with us but is getting an apartment somewhere; he hasn't found one yet (he wants me to help him look). He's been staying in the guest bedroom in the basement for six months – because my parents are in the middle of a divorce, he lived in an extended-stay hotel for almost a year but had to come back. "Times are just too hard," he told me. He rubbed my

shoulder, placed his scratchy cheek against my forehead, cried salt that ran just as much down my face as it did his.

### III. Ocean Tides

*The gravitational tide of the moon stretches the Earth's oceans into an ellipse with the Earth in the center.*

When I was thirteen, my family and I went to the beach for a week – Destin, where the tourists go. We didn't know any better. We packed our sunblock and swimsuits, pails and sandals, but when we got we found that rain was forecasted for the entire week – and the weathermen were right. My parents bought movies from the grocery store that Evan and I watched from the scratchy sofa for hours. It was a small hotel room, just one bedroom. My parents shared the queen bed; Evan and I slept on inflatable mattresses on the floor. They never touched, but slept facing different walls – a foot of space between their backs. Every morning my father woke us, hopeful, rubbed white lotion on our shoulders and noses for protection even though we didn't go swimming once. We wanted to look for crabs when the sun was down and the tides were out, but it was always raining, and the sky was too dark.

Once, though, my mother and I stayed up late watching a movie, something silly. She smiled – something rare – and whispered “Let's go.” She grabbed my hand, pulled me out of the door, and dragged me down the stairs of the hotel until we were on the beach. The storm had subsided, but it was still raining. We stood at the edge of the water, only submerged up to our

ankles – the push and pull felt like breathing. My mother held my hand the whole time. I squinted into the gray sky, and beyond the curve of the water saw a pinprick of light – I couldn't tell whether it was a star or a boat. But it was light anyway.

We went back inside when the waves got louder and large and the rain picked up speed. When we got inside the room, my mother stripped off my dripping clothes, wrapped me in a towel, and tucked me in bed. Through the foggy glass door I thought I saw a hint of the moon.

#### IV. *Maria* (lunar planes) and *terrae* (highlands)

*The dark lunar planes were believed by ancient astronomers to be filled with water. The highlands are believed to be the remnants of the impact basin's outer rims.*

My mother's reason for moving is an economic one. "It doesn't make sense for three people to live in this big house. We just don't need it, and besides – think about the dog. It hurts her back." It makes sense, but I think the real reason is because she wants to move away from what this house means. It's meant arguments – no one ever seems to agree. It's meant my father. It's meant a family that could have done better.

My parents thought that if they talked in the basement, Evan and I couldn't hear them. They were wrong. The house is old (1928) and the floorboards are not thick. They would be quiet at first – barely a whisper from underneath the wood – but would eventually escalate to talking loudly, and then yelling. Evan and I sometimes tried to listen by pressing our ears against the wood in the way one presses their ear against a shell to fins the ocean, but it always just sounded

like mumbling no matter how loud they were. They argued in the laundry room, drowned out by the noise of slow-rinse cycles. I wonder what they were arguing about that made them so upset. I've asked and they still won't tell me.

My mother recently told me that she has never been in love with my father; they have been married eighteen years. My parents are more different than any two people I know – my mother likes the nighttime, coffee, tans; my father gets up early, drinks sweet tea, and is pale. I wish she hadn't told me. He loves her more than he has loved anything his whole life, he's estranged from his parents – we're all he's got. When I asked her why she didn't get a divorce earlier, she said, "You wouldn't understand. It's harder than you think to hurt someone like that."

## V. Lunar Ice

*In July 2008, small amounts of water were found in the interior of volcanic pearls from the Moon.*

Now we all cry. My father cried into my shoulder the first time he dropped me off at work. My mother cried when the realtor said how much he thought the house could sell for. Evan cried when he found out he had to go to a different school. I cried about everything.

## VI. Eclipses

*Eclipses can occur only when the Sun, Earth, and Moon are all in a straight line. Solar eclipses occur near a new moon, while lunar eclipses occur near a full moon.*

Things will get better. Maybe my father will stop crying, and maybe my mother will fall in love. Evan and I will have to grow up and learn what to do when the answer's not right in front of us. We'll move into a new house and try to be happy because that's all we want. I won't have a skylight probably, but that's alright. I'll find light in something else. My dog's back problems will subside, even if just a little bit – not so many stairs.

My father wants to go to the beach with my brother and I again. Even though it's winter now, and cold, he wants to pack our things in the back of his silver truck and drive to Destin, where the tourists go. He wants to go to the outlet malls and surf shops for sweaters and swimsuits we don't need. But most of all he wants the sun, because it has been so grey. Maybe he thinks the sun only shines in places with sand. He is the eternal optimist – as his hair recedes, he gets more hopeful. His eyes get bluer.

## VII. Geologic Evolution

*The lunar geologic timescale is largely divided in time on the basis of prominent basin-forming impact events.*

My mother has met someone new. I first caught her on the phone with him back in September – it was late, one in the morning. I had finished my homework and went downstairs to tell her goodnight. She was sitting in the green armchair, legs folded underneath her, phone to her ear.

She laughed loudly until she saw me, and then held her hand over the receiver, still giggling, ran into her bedroom, and locked the door. I knew it was a boy – someone she liked – because I had done the exact same thing before.

For about three months she has been talking to a man named Keith, who she met at a church conference. He lives in Minnesota and has three children of his own. She says he's funny and smart and handsome (a marathon runner, even); she says I'd like him. He's well read and sends her books like The Brothers Karamazov and Letters to a Young Poet through the mail – she never did like reading that much before now. She's lost weight, too, and I can't help thinking she did it for him.

Keith is a secret I'm supposed to keep from my father. I tell him it was me who ran up the phone bill, I was the one getting packages in the mail. There is something in the pit of my stomach that tells me this is wrong. But my mother is happy; she's reading poetry. And I think, eventually, that it will be worth it.

## VII. Peaks of Eternal Light

*Four mountainous regions on the rim of the 73 kilometer-wide Peary crater at the Moon's north pole remain illuminated for the entire lunar day.*

The second time I was woken up by the moon was just a few nights ago. My bed has been moved to where it's facing the skylight again because my mother says it looks better for prospective

buyers. I was dreaming about something – I don't remember what – and all of a sudden the dream ended abruptly and my eyes were open and I was flooded with light. The moon was hanging in the ink-black sky, waxed and waned from the beginning of the month, a crescent silver, to a sphere that stretched the corners of the window. I felt luminous. I saw my mother, my father, my brother in those craters – their hearts and heads filling them up to the brim. And they were smiling; men in moons always smile. I laid back in bed, closed my eyes, and smiled as if the world was made fuller simply because of its nearness.