

Why The Water Glistens by GK duBois

Before things were as they are, Mother-Moon, who I will call Moon, had a son. She had asked the Wishing Star every night they met in the sky to give her a son. But the Wishing Star was afraid: "If I give the earth another moon, no one will watch the stars."

One day after the Wishing Star again said no, Moon was too sad to go across the sky. That night, the world was completely black. There were no tides of the ocean and no one had any dreams when they slept. The next night, Moon again was too sad. "I am too tired to move." And so she stayed beneath the earth.

This went on for one month. Without dreams, everyone on the earth was angry and serious. No one knew when to harvest or plant their next crops. Ships could not sail in the night. What was wrong? More than any other wish, people wished for the Moon to come back. The Wishing Star knew what he had to do.

"But you must promise," he said to Moon, "that you will keep the balance of the night and day."

And so Mother-Moon was given a son. In return, she promised the stars and sun that she would keep the balance of night and day. After one month, no one but two moon rose above the edge of where the eye can see.

The appearance of a second moon--how could it be?--is still talked about on earth by some peoples. The month without a moon is now known as the Month of Birth. The coming of the second moon is part of several religions,. But they have it wrong as I will tell you now.

Before they rose for the first time, Moon instructed her son. "You must do as I tell you. We must keep the balance of day and night and the seasons and we must not make Wishing Star angry." Mother-Moon rose first and Son-Moon trailed just behind her. If you squinted your eyes, he appeared to be chasing her. Just as he reached her he was back behind her. And so they passed over the sky.

Those who saw the two moon woke those already sleeping. By the end of the night, everyone on earth stood outside watching mother and son. For weeks, it was a nightly wonder. The world sat on rooftops, porches, in the middle of open fields, looked through telescopes, to observe the two moons. Everyone believed it was a miracle, something that would happen once in their lifetime, like a comet blazing the sky or an eclipse. But as the days passed, people began to trust that the second moon would be there in the sky and their lives went back to normal.

Scientists began to study the effects of the second moon: Was the sky brighter? Did the oceans rise higher? Did people sleep as they always had?

Mother-Moon, every night, while she waited at the edge of where the eye can see, said, "Do as I say. We must keep the balance of night and day." Moon, who had been rising since the beginning, knew about these things. She had lived through the time of three suns and two suns and time of a billion stars and the parade of meteors. She knew that every change in the sky meant many changes on the earth. She knew the jealousy of the wishing star and the planets and the sun.

Son-Moon listened. He rose quietly behind his mother over the world. What an amazing sight? If you have ever been on the top of a mountain or in an airplane or hot air balloon or maybe even a rocket ship, you will understand: There is no better view of the earth than from the sky.

Son-Moon waited every day below the edge of where the eye can see. "Can we go now?" he asked his mother a hundred times, until she would say "Yes." What a magical word, "Yes." And they could look upon blue green earth and out into the deepest space at the million stars. At the end of the night, at the end of their journey when they were sinking into the horizon, he grew sad. A whole day to wait!

Whether it was because she was tired of being nagged, I am not sure, but soon the day came for Mother-Moon to teach her son that he should not ask if they could rise. He could figure out the right time by himself. "Watch everything around you," she said. "Know the time of year. See where the sun is and

the other planets. Rise when it is the right time to rise.” So from below the edge of the world, Son-Moon watched the things above. “Now,” he said at last. And Son and Mother rose together into the darkening sky.

For what seemed like a long time to the people on the earth, though it was just a blink of the eye to the heavens, Son-Moon was very happy with things as they were. Every night was a new adventure. They would travel different paths over the sky and watch different areas of the earth and heavens. The day came, however, when he felt he’d seen everything there was to see. He had risen through many seasons and harvest and traversed the sky in all directions at all heights. What else would there be in the life of a moon?

One night as he rose in the sky chasing his mother, he shone a little brighter than he had in the past. Ahhhh! He could see more. The brighter he shone, the more he could see. He was hungry for the world. He wanted to know everything, to see all there was to see. When he was bright enough for the shadows to disappear he could see the smallest things on the surface of the earth: the ants dragging edges of a leaf, water drops falling from the tip of a roof, the colors of the eyes of all the people.

The first night no one thought anything of it. It was just a little brighter. Neither did they notice on the second or the third or the fourth. But on the fifth day, Mother-Moon knew the world was too bright.

“You must keep the balance of the night and the day,” she said to her son. But he did not listen. He wanted to see too badly. He rose brighter than ever before. All that Mother-Moon could do was cover herself. She rose in the sky like a sliver while Son-Moon shone.

The night was no longer night. Instead of the gold and yellow light of the day, the world was awash in silver and white. Son-Moon lit the world and saw all he could see. Every grain of sand and floating particle of dust.

Insects and animals that used the cover of darkness to do their work--bats and owls and skunks and fireflies--could no longer work. People who rose with the sun and slept with the moon, did not know when to brew coffee or put on their pajamas. Others never stopped working because the day was the time to work and it was always day. Trees grew thousands of feet high. Pumpkins grew to the size of elephants and bananas looked like canoes. Whole villages were covered in water, as the tides rose fifty feet. No one could sleep and if they did, they had nightmares. Everyone forgot why they were doing what they were doing. And why was the Son-Moon shining so bright? What had happened to the night?

A gathering of tribes was called on earth to discuss the silver sky. Three people were chosen to seek the Wishing Star. They walked towards the edge of as far as the eye could see and climbed a mountain, then climbed 300 feet to stand on the roof of the highest trees. They still could not see the stars but they called upon the Wishing Star. “Please, please, give us back the night!”

What is given cannot so easily be taken back. Wishing Star called together a conference of stars. “The people on earth can no longer see us,” he said. “They no longer have night. Mother-Moon has gone back on her promise.”

The conference of stars reached a decision. Son-Moon would be banished from the sky and would have to remain below the edge of as far as the eye can see.

When Son-Moon heard this, he was paralyzed. “I must see. I must shine,” he said. He begged his mother to give him one more night. Mother-Moon, who had risen since time began, knew she could not ask the Wishing Star. But she could not deny her son. “He is too curious not too greedy,” she told herself. “This last night is for his memory.” She agreed to allow her son to rise alone in her place one night, thinking that when the stars saw only one moon, they would believe it was her.

At the right time, Son-Moon rose one last time into the sky he made silver. Against the warnings of his mother, his brightness grew. At his highest point, he beamed as bright, brighter than the sun ever had. This was still not enough. He tried to shine more than he could shine. From the earth, they say that if you stared at him even for a moment, you would lose your vision. But there were those who said they saw the first flecks fall. A few flecks became a cloud of flurries, a blizzard of billions of white flakes that floated to the earth.

For 5 days it snowed moon under a white gray sky. People cleared moon dust from their houses and roads. Soon, like after a long winter, it was gone wherever dust goes. But where Son-Moon landed on

the water he continued to shine. that is why the water glistens. And Mother-Moon, so no one forgets her son, goes from full to a sliver every month.

This folk tale was first conceived of at Remain: 5 Days of Myth and Ritual, a gathering in May of 1998. I performed writing live, using a big easel and big pens to write a story while two others played sax and drums in the "hookah lounge." It was a very rough and greatly scaled down version of this.