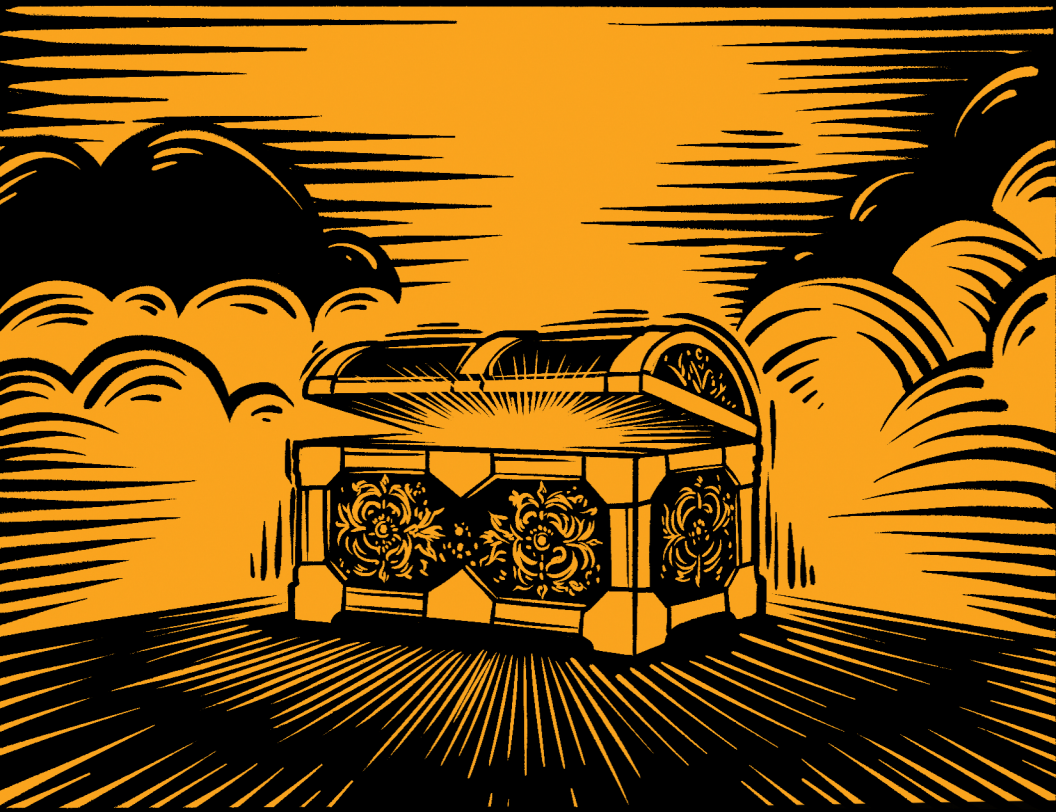


A PATH OF SILVER, A HEART OF GOLD.

THE GARDEN BEHIND THE MOON



HOWARD PYLE

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by

HOWARD PYLE





IN THE GARDEN BEHIND THE MOON.



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Foreword

WHEN you look out across the water at night, after the sun has set and the moon has risen high enough to become bright, then you see a long, glimmering moon-path reaching away into the distance. There it lies, stretching from the moon to the earth, and from the earth to the moon, as bright as silver and gold, and as straight and smooth as a turnpike road.

There is nothing in all this world that was not made for some reason and for some use—not even the moon-path—but always you must find for yourself the use of a thing and why it was made.

So it is with the moon-path as with everything else. Thousands and thousands of people have seen that long, level stretch of brightness, and have looked out at it, and have thought it was beautiful, but there are very, very few who have ever really found out what is its use.

It looks like a path, and that is what it really is, for if you only know how to do so, you may walk upon it just as easily as you may walk upon a barn floor. All you need to do is to make a beginning, and there you are. After that it is smooth enough walking, and you may skip and play and romp as you choose. Then you may come and go whenever you have a mind to, and if you will take my word for it, it is the most beautiful and wonderful road that a body can travel betwixt here and the land that so few folk ever go to and come back again.

For the moon-path leads straight to the moon. That was why it was built—that a body might go from the brown earth to the moon, and maybe back again.

But why, you may ask, should anybody want to go to the moon? That I will tell you. The reason is that behind the moon there lies the most wonderful, beautiful, never-to-be-forgotten garden that the mind can think of. In it live little children who play and romp, and laugh and sing, and are as merry and happy as the little white lambs in the green meadow in springtime. There they never have trouble and worry; they never dispute nor quarrel; they never are sorry and never cry.

Aye, aye;—that beautiful garden. One time I myself saw it—though in a dream—dim and indistinct, as one might see such a beautiful place through a piece of crooked glass. In it was the little boy whom I loved the best of all. He did not see me, but I saw him, and I think I was looking into the garden out of one of the moon-windows. I was glad to see him, for he had gone out along the moon-path, and he had not come back again.

Perhaps you do not understand what I mean, but maybe

you will after you have read this story. For it is all about a little girl who went to the garden behind the moon and lived amid all the beautiful things. Also it is about a little boy who paid a visit to the moon-house, where the Man-in-the-moon lives, and how he too went out the back door into the moon-garden.

It was the Moon-Angel who told the story to me, and now I shall tell it to you just as nearly as I can remember it.





I.

The Princess Aurelia

ONCE upon a time—for this is the way that every true fairy story begins—once upon a time there was a King and a Queen who loved one another dearly, and had all that they wanted in the world but one thing. That one thing was a child of their own.

For the house was quiet and silent. There was no sound of silver voice and merry laughter; there was no running hither and thither of little feet; there was no bustle and noise and teasing to make life sweet to live.

For so it is always dull and silent in a house where there are no children.

One day, when the sun was shining as yellow as gold, and the apple-trees were all in bloom,—pink and white,—the Queen was walking up and down the garden path, thinking

and thinking of how sad it was in the house without any children to make things glad. The tears were in her eyes, and she wiped them away with her handkerchief. Suddenly she heard some one speaking quite near to her: "Lady, lady, why are you so sad?"

The voice came from the apple-tree, and when she looked up among the branches there she saw a beautiful figure dressed all in shining white and sitting amid the apple blossoms, and around the face of the figure it was bright like sunlight.

It was the Moon-Angel, though the Queen did not know that—the Moon-Angel, whom so many people know by a different name and are so afraid of, they know not why. The Queen stood looking up at him, and she felt very still and quiet.

"Why are you so sad, lady?" said the Moon-Angel again.

"Because," said she, "there is no child in the house."

"And if you had a child," said the Moon-Angel, "would that make you happy?"

"Yes," said the Queen.

The Moon-Angel smiled till his face shone bright like white light. "Then be happy," said he, "For I have come to tell you that you shall have a daughter."

Then, even as the Queen looked, he was gone, and nothing was there but the blossoms and the bright blue sky shining through them.

So by and by a little Princess was born to the King and Queen. And she was a real Princess too, for she came into the world with a golden coronet on her head and a golden star on her shoulder, and so the Queen named her Princess Aurelia.

That same day the Queen died—for the Moon-Angel never brings something into the house but he takes something away with him again. So after all they were more sad and sorrowful than if the Princess had never been born.

Princess Aurelia grew and grew and grew, and the older she grew the more beautiful she grew. But the poor King, her father, was more and more sad every day. For nobody had ever seen such a little child as the Princess. She never cried, but then she never laughed; she never was cross, but then she never smiled; she never teased, but then she never spoke a word; she was a trouble to no one, but then she neither romped nor played. All day she sat looking around her with her beautiful blue eyes, and all night long she slept like an angel, but she might just as well have been a lovely doll as a little child of flesh and blood.

Everybody said that she had no wits, but you shall know better than that when you have read this story and have heard about the moon-garden.



II.

The Moon-Calf

THERE was a little boy named David who never had any other name that I know of, unless it was “Silly” David. For he was a moon-calf, and all the other children laughed at him.

A moon-calf? What is a moon-calf?

Ah, little child, little child! that is something you can only learn in one way. For though a world-wise scientist with two pair of short-sighted spectacles on his nose may write a great book upon the differentiation of Human Reason, or another with far-sighted glasses may write a learned disquisition concerning how many microbes there are in a cubical inch of butter-milk, they know no more about what a moon-calf is than my grandmother’s bed-post. “Moon-calf!” says such a one; “I do not know what a moon-calf is. There is no such thing. It’s nonsense.”

If you want to know what a moon-calf really is you will either have to ask the Moon-Angel or else read for yourself in one of his never-to-be-altogether-understood

books, where such things are told about, if you only have the wits to understand what is written there.

David was a moon-calf. He carried more wits about him than the little Princess Aurelia, but nevertheless everybody called him a moon-calf. None of the other children would play with him because he was so silly, and so he had always to help his mother about the house, and to look after the baby when she was busy. He lived in a village that stood on the rocky shores of a great sea that stretched far, far away toward the east, so that whenever the moon was round and full, there was the bright moon-path reaching away from the dark earth to the shining disk in the east.

It was a queer, quaint little village in which little David lived. Nearly every one in it, except the minister, the mayor, the schoolmaster and Hans Krout, the crazy cobbler, were fisher folk. It had steep roofs, one climbing up over the other as though to peep over one another's shoulders at the water below. Nearly at the top of the cliff was a church with a white steeple, and beyond that was an open common, where there was grass, and where the geese and the cows fed, and where the boys and the girls played of an evening. Up above on the top of the cliffs was the highway, which ran away across the country and through the fields, past the villages, to the King's city.

David loved the sea as a little lamb loves its mother, and oftentimes when the day was pleasant he would carry the baby down to the shore and sit there on the rocks in the sun and look out across the water. There he would sit hour after hour, and sing to himself and the baby, and think his own thoughts all to himself.

None of the other children were at all like him. They

had brown freckled faces and shock heads and strong hands that were nearly always dirty. When they played with one another they would laugh and shout and romp like young colts, and tussle and roll over and over upon the grass. Poor little David would sometimes stand looking at them wonderingly. He would have liked to play with them, but he could not, because he was only a moon-calf, and so simple. Sometimes the little boys, and even the little girls, would laugh at him because he was so foolish, and had a pale face and pale blue eyes, and nursed the baby. Sometimes they called him "simpleton," and sometimes they called him "nurse-a-baby." When they teased him, he would carry the baby off to the rocks and would sit there and look out across the water and think of it all, and maybe want to cry so badly that his throat ached.



III.

The Man who Knew Less Than Nothing

BUT there was one in the village who neither laughed at David nor called him moon-calf. That was Hans Krout, the cobbler. For Hans Krout also was moonstruck. Some of the people of the village used to say that he knew less than nothing, and I dare say what they said was true enough—only sometimes it takes more wits to know less than nothing than to know more than a little.

But Hans Krout had not always been thus. One time he was as world-wise as anybody else. One time he had a wife living with him. He had worked hard when he was young to earn enough money for two people to live upon, and when he had earned it he had married the girl he liked best. They lived together for a while, and then she died. After that Hans Krout became just as he was now, so that some people said he was crazy, and some that he knew less than nothing.

Yet, in spite of what folks said, Hans Krout did know something. He knew more about the moon-path, and the Moon-Angel, and the moon itself than almost anybody.

Little David was very fond of Hans Krout, and when he was not helping his mother, or nursing the baby, or sitting by himself down among the rocks, he used to be in the cobbler's shop watching Hans Krout cobble shoes.

This is how Hans Krout would do it:

He always sat on a bench that had a leather seat to it, and a box at one side. The box was full of brads, and wax-ends, and cobbler's wax, and shoe-pegs, and this and that and what not and the other. Hans Krout would take up a shoe and put into it a wooden foot that he called a last. Then he would fit a piece of sole-leather to the upper and tack it down to the sole of the wooden last. Then he would hold the shoe and all tight between his knees with a strap that went down under his foot. Then he would take his crooked awl and drive it in through the leather sole and out the upper. Then he would stick the two bristles of the wax-end into the hole he had made. Then stretching his arms and drawing the thread about his little fingers, that were always black with shoemaker's wax, he would give a grunt and draw the thread tight.

That is the way he would sew the shoes;—this is the way he would drive the pegs:

He would make a hole with his awl in the sole of the shoe. Then he would stick a little wooden peg into it. Then, rap-tap-tap, he would drive in the peg with his queer, round-faced hammer, and there the peg would be as tight as wax. Then, by and by, he would take his knife and trim off the tops of all the wooden pegs he had driven into the shoe, and rub down the sole till it shone like glass.

Yes, indeed! It is a very wonderful thing to see.

When I was a little boy like David there used to be

a cobbler at the old toll-gate under the weeping-willow trees. He had a little black dog, blind of both eyes, whom the Moon-Angel used to lead around hither and thither with a string that nobody could see. I used to go down to the toll-gate and sit there and watch the cobbler cobble shoes just as David used to sit and watch Hans Krout at his work, and to this day I believe it takes more wits to cobble a pair of shoes than to write a big book, and more cleverness to make a good wax-end than to draw a picture with a lead-pencil.

But it was not altogether the shoe cobbling that brought David to the cobbler shop. Hans Krout had a fiddle, and he could play you a tune so sweet and thin and clear that it would make your throat fill up with happiness to listen to him. When he was not busy he used to play the fiddle to David, and David would sit and listen and listen, and the baby would suck its thumb and go to sleep.

But it was not altogether the fiddle either that brought David to the cobbler shop. For the most wonderful thing about Hans Krout was that he was as full of stories as an egg is full of meat. He could tell you about princes and princesses, and kings and nobles, and lords and giants and hob-goblins, by the hour and by the day, when he was not busy cobbling shoes.

But even this was not the best, for Hans Krout knew ever so much more than these things. He knew all about the Moon-Angel and the moon-path and the moon-garden and the moon-house, and he would sometimes tell the little boy about them. That was the most wonderful of all, for all the other things were only fairy tales, but what he told about moonshine was real.

“Were you ever out along the moon-path yourself?” said David.

“Yes,” said Hans Krout. “As true as I sit here. I didn’t know how to travel the moon-path at first, for I hadn’t learned the trick. All the same I knew that Katherine”—Katherine was Hans Krout’s wife—“that Katherine had gone out that way—I mean along the moon-path—with the Moon-Angel. And so I tried and tried, and by and by I learned how to do it. I was down on the shore one night,” said Hans Krout, “and there was the moon-path stretching away toward the moon. I knew that this was just the time to take a walk upon it, for the moon was neither too high toward heaven, nor too low toward the earth. There was a wave coming in toward the shore. Right on top of the wave was a crooked bar of moonlight. I knew that was what I had to stand upon, and so I stepped out. But just as I did so I got frightened, and—souse! there I was in the water over head and ears. Well, what of that? I got out and walked home. But I wasn’t going to give it up—not I. I went out again another day. There was the moon-path, and there was the wave, and there was the bar of moonlight right a-top of the wave. I stepped out again, and this time I wasn’t afraid. This time, would you believe it, I didn’t fall into the water at all. All the same I had to jump off that wave on to another, for the moonlight was sliding away under my feet. It was as slippery as glass. I jumped to the next wave and to the next and to the next, and then I was all right, and it was like gravel under my feet, and I ran just like you run along the shore where the gravel is. Then by and by the path was like a field of pure light with blades of silver grass,

and I ran along just as you do when you run across the fields up on the hills.”

“Did you get to the moon?” said David.

“No,” said Hans Krout, “not that time. I did get to the moon afterwards, but not that time.”

“And what was it like inside of the moon?” asked David.

Hans Krout looked at him and smiled just like a little child when it first awakens—a foolish, silly, simple smile that had no more wits in it than moonshine itself. But it seemed to David that his face grew white and shone bright. He got up, took his fiddle down from the wall, and began to play. He played and played, and little David sat and listened and listened, and the baby slept on and smiled and smiled, until Hans Krout grew tired of playing. Then he laid his fiddle aside and began cobbling shoes, rap-tap-tap! and the baby came awake and began reaching for David’s face. “I wish you’d show me how to walk on the moon-path some time,” said David.

“So I will,” said Hans Krout, “if you’ll be a good boy and mind the baby.” Rap-tap-tap! and he drove another peg. Then David heard his mother calling, and he knew he had to go home.

“Moon-calf!” called Tom Stout, as he went along the street. “Moon-calf! Moon-calf! Moon-calf!” called all the other boys and some of the little girls.

Little David looked over his shoulder and laughed. He did not mind how much they called him moon-calf now, for Hans Krout had promised to show him the way to the moon-path, and if he was to play on the moon-path, why, of course he must be a moon-calf.



IV.

David in the Water

THERE is only one evening or two at most out of all the twenty-eight and a quarter days that it takes for the moon to change from full to full in which you can travel upon the moon-path. Maybe after a while, and when you get very well acquainted with the way and know just how to set about it, you can travel the moon-path almost whenever you choose. But when you are learning there is, as I said, only one or, at most, two evenings in all the twenty-eight and a quarter days in which you are able to walk out upon it. Those evenings are the second or third after the full of the moon.

I will tell you why this is so. It is because, when the moon is quite full, there is too much daylight to see the moon-path when the moon first rises. And when the moon is too far past the full, there is too much night to see what you are about. For when you are learning to walk upon the moon-path it must be neither daylight nor dark, but just betwixt and between.

So it is that the proper time comes only twice or thrice