

Moonlight Boy

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Rain pattered against the window, as I sat alone reading in my dorm, Boieldieu playing in the background. The brothers who shared my room had gone home to attend their father's funeral. I liked the solitude, but tonight I felt lonely, and my mind drifted. I'd been sent to Winchester College after my mother had yet another child and claimed she could no longer look after me. She had been mostly absent in my life though, so I didn't mind. My father had left her shortly before she found out about the newest baby. Though I tried to help her look after my two younger sisters, she told me I only got in the way.

There was a knock at the door, and I looked up to see one of my professors opening it. 'Sir? Is there anything I can help you with?' I asked, surprised by his appearance.

'Gilbert, do you realise the time? Lights out.' His stern voice faltered, and he smiled. 'Get some rest, won't you?'

'Sorry sir, I didn't notice how late it was. Goodnight,' I said, putting my book down and turning the music off. He closed the door and his footsteps faded.

Looking out the window, I saw the rain had ceased and so, wide awake, I grabbed my coat, book, and a lantern. The school was quiet, and I crept along, listening for any professors patrolling the halls. I slipped out the front doors and let out a sigh, as the sound of crickets and the wind blowing through the trees filled my ears. After I made my way to the lake, I sat down under an oak tree; the grass was dry due to the shelter it provided. With my lamp hanging from a branch above me, I pulled my book out from my coat, opening it up to where I left it. I started to read but was interrupted by a quiet voice coming from the darkness.

'Hello?' I whispered, but there was no response, so I continued reading.

'Aren't the stars beautiful tonight?' the voice said after a few minutes. It was soft and sweet. Almost comforting.

'Who's there?' I asked. I felt something next to me and turned to see a boy.

'The name's Marshall,' he said with a small smile.

'What're you doing out here?'

'Could ask you the same question,' he said, laughing. 'I saw the light from your lantern, came down to investigate.'

I nodded, then turned back to my book, but I couldn't concentrate. Not with him sitting so close.

'The stars are beautiful tonight,' he repeated, and I looked up at them. 'I spent a lot of time stargazing before I was sent here. I wanted to study astronomy, but my parents want me to do something 'important'. Law or something.'

I hesitated. 'Tell me about them. The stars.'

'You mean it?' I nodded. 'Well come on then.' He took his coat off and put it on the grass, lying down on it so that he had a clear view of the world above us. I followed, unsure if I was meant to lie with him or not. He didn't seem to mind.

We lay under the stars for what felt like hours as he pointed out the constellations and the planets, but soon it was time to go back to our dorms. We picked up our coats, and I grabbed my book and the lantern, and we headed back towards the school where we exchanged sleepy smiles, said goodbye to each other and went our separate ways.

I got into bed and tried sleeping, but I couldn't stop thinking about him. His smile. The way his voice seemed to gracefully float through the air, like butterflies on a warm spring day. The way his face lit up while talking about the stars, the evidence of true passion showing itself. I hadn't seen him before tonight, and I was sure he was new, but somehow, we connected. That was something I had never experienced before, not in this way, and it was not something I wanted to lose.

Tears pricked my eyes as my thoughts drifted back to my mother. Is this what the start of a good friendship felt like? Would it just be a friendship, or could it develop into something more? I knew people would think it was wrong, a sin, but the idea of it seemed exciting as well as daunting. The idea of it made me feel safe. Is this what it felt like to be cared about? Would *he* care about me? Would I finally experience what I'd been missing out on my whole life? My mother's absence hadn't bothered me before, but I hadn't known anything except what it felt like to be ignored and tossed to the side. The only person who had ever listened or shown any sort of interest in me was Professor Francis, but since he was a teacher, our relationship was professional and had its limits. But I was hopeful. Scared, but hopeful. I had a feeling I was going to see Marshall again. This was the start of something new, something exciting. Something *without* limits.

Unable to sleep, I decided to finish my book. By the time I'd reached the end, the sun was up, and I could hear voices coming from outside my dorm room. There was a soft knock on the door and Professor Francis walked in again. I gave him a smile but seeing him brought back the memories of my mother that had been racing through my mind last night.

‘You missed breakfast. Are you okay?’ he asked in a gentle voice, sitting down next to me.

I shrugged. ‘How do you know when someone cares about you?’ I asked.

‘You never know if someone cares. But if you believe they do, and if you look hard enough, I’m sure you’ll find what you’re looking for, Gilbert. If you think you deserve their care, then you’ll eventually receive it.’

‘Do you think my mother cared?’

‘If you believe she did, then yes. If not, try looking harder. If you cannot find the love or care you’re searching for, then focus on the ones you are sure do care,’ he said, standing up and walking towards the window and looking out towards the lake. ‘I believe everyone cares for one another to a certain extent, but you can’t see into their head, nor their heart, so for now I only have hope.’ He walked back towards the door and turned once he’d stepped outside and stood in silence, waiting. He knew I had something else to say.

‘Do you care?’ I asked, looking away in embarrassment.

‘As much as a teacher can, my boy. Now come on, get up and get dressed. You don’t want to be late to class, do you?’

He closed the door, leaving me to my thoughts. The knowledge that someone cared warmed my heart. Someone finally cared. Elated, I pulled my school sweater on and made my way to English, humming a tune as I raced down the stairs.

I would go back to the lake once the sun set. I had a feeling he was going to be there. The stars would be beautiful tonight, and so would he.