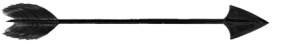
AN ARROW TO THE MOON



AN ARROW TO THE MOON

EMILY X.R. PAN

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In the process of writing this, I almost thought
I would never find my way out of the woods.
But I did—and so this book is for me.

Once upon a time

There was a girl who lived on the moon as its guardian. She was its heart and its breath.

One day, standing on tiptoe to glimpse the boy who made the stars fly, she lost her footing and stumbled off the edge. Her plummet was like a stone displacing water. It shifted the universe off its axis.

Slowly, slowly, everything began to crack.

1974

XIYANG VILLAGE

The air smelled of overturned earth and impossible things. Birds dove in front of the sun like embering ash from a stick of incense. The farmer wiped the sweat from his brow and paused his work at the drill to take a swig of water. He spat aside the grass in his mouth and felt a shiver cross his skin: that distinct feeling of being watched.

The unblinking eyes stared at him from several paces away, low in the grass. The head of a man. Mud-colored. Preserved. Was it some kind of hungry ghost, making itself visible in order to bestow a request upon the living?

No. Neither a man nor a ghost. A sculpture? The farmer thought it was likely made of the same clay as the teapot that sat on his kitchen table. A nudge of his foot sent it rolling and revealed a shard of similar material half-buried in the ground.

"What are you doing?" another man called as he bent toward the land. "The well won't be over there."

"I found something," he replied. "Do you have a shovel?"

"What do you need a shovel for?"

The others came over to watch as the farmer dug and scraped. More hands and tools joined to scratch at the earth, and by the time the sun was treading just below the horizon, they'd pulled up a collection of broken terracotta pieces. Enough to fill a wheelbarrow. The men would take these to the nearest city to see what money could be gotten for them.

Someone called out, "Look!"

They all saw it: light shining from the very bottom of what they'd excavated. It burned brighter with each second, and the men held up palms to shield their eyes. The ground shook; one farmer shouted an earthquake warning.

By now the world was a quick-dimming gray. It was in this almost-night that they watched the silvery light rise into the sky—a star falling in reverse—until it disappeared from sight and none of the farmers could be sure the phenomenon had been real.

The star arced through the skies. It cracked in half as it fell back down to the other side of the globe. One piece landed first; the other tumbled for a longer stretch.

In those moments, two children were born and given their names.

Hunter Yee.

Luna Chang.

1991

IN FAIRBRIDGE,
WHERE WE LAY OUR SCENE

Luna Chang

Luna Chang was about to make a bad decision.

The door of the walkout basement yawned wide, and the older kids were already pouring into the night. Guppies who'd been flushed down the toilet, now finding their freedom.

"What are you doing?" Luna said to no one specific.

"There's a guy the next house over who's a senior at Fairbridge High—he's throwing a party," said one girl.

"Like, a real party?" said Luna.

"Yeah." The girl hesitated. "Our shoes are upstairs, though."

As if in response, a saxophone intro blared from above, followed by some auntie's microphone-enhanced vibrato. Luna hated these things. Her mother and father liked getting together with the other Mandarin-speaking members of their very white community—which, good for them. What she didn't get was why they had to drag her along.

While the parents wailed out Chinese oldies on the sound system upstairs, all the kids—aged four through eighteen—were

relegated to the basement. This was where the youngest ones wreaked havoc and broke the cue sticks of the miniature billiards set. Where the teenagers were sullen-faced and sighing, and the oldest ones pretended not to have heard about one another's SAT scores from their parents. Luna used to have Roxy for company . . . but Roxy was away at college now.

"We're celebrating the Mid-Autumn Festival," her father had said when Luna didn't want to go. He'd opened his face wide with exaggerated cheer. "There will be so many different types of mooncakes!"

And then he was wrong. There was only one kind—red bean—and they didn't even have salted egg yolks in them. This party sucked.

Luna could stay here in this corner of this random auntie's house, watching awkward middle schoolers work at loops of string for cat's cradle. Listening to the occasional exchange of jokes that weren't particularly funny. Idly wondering about the people she didn't recognize and probably would never see again.

Or she could do something different.

Her heart drummed in her ears. She was not a rule breaker.

"We don't need shoes," Luna said as she stood up.

Most of the teens had already gone. Only the youngest kids were left.

"I'm telling," said a little boy, pouting. He looked fearful of the open door, the wind gusting through. He was the one who had snapped all the cue sticks in his fists.

"No, you're not," said one of the older guys, his tone nasty.

The kid deflated.

Luna ran over the prickly grass, shivering in her T-shirt and jeans, the late September wind whipping at her ponytail.

In a few blinks she was across to the other yard, stepping beneath the back deck and through a new door into a crowded basement. The air was thick with the smell of cigarettes and maybe something more.

Music thrummed in the bones of the house. If not for a group of people drunkenly singing along to "Losing My Religion," she would not have been able to pick out the song behind all the chatter. This was the kind of party you saw in movies, or heard about after the fact, through the gossip chain. It was not the kind of party where Luna ever found herself. She wasn't even allowed to attend school dances.

Maybe this was a bad idea. Should she go back?

Directly ahead of her was a couch with just enough space left for one.

"If you sit here you have to play," said a red-haired girl she didn't know.

"Play what?" said Luna.

"Seven Minutes in Heaven." The girl grinned mischievously.

Luna had never played it before but knew the gist of the game. There was a flutter in her gut. She was seventeen years old and had never been kissed. She'd never had the opportunity, especially given her parents' *no dating* rule.

And really, Luna was curious to do a lot more than kissing.

The girl leaned over to explain. "Each person takes turns spinning that bottle, and whoever it ends up pointing to—"

"Go, already!" someone shouted.

The boy being nudged was sitting on the floor, shaking his head. Luna was pretty sure he'd also come from the basement of the other house—he was one of the kids she'd never seen before tonight.

"I'm just watching," he said.

Someone with pale skin and the world's baggiest jeans stood up. "Nope, you're playing, and I'm spinning for you."

The empty Coke bottle was sent turning like a spoke in a wheel. Luna thought she felt a droplet hit her knee; the bottle was probably newly emptied. The glass swept around and around, trapping the light and colors of a nearby lava lamp, drawing circles on the low table.

The bottle began to lag and teeter, then rolled to a stop. As if summoned by her gaze, it pointed directly at Luna.

The group howled with delight, and the girl who'd made her join was pulling at Luna's wrist, getting her to stand. Her pulse shifted like gears changing.

Luna could have resisted, if she'd wanted to. She could have bowed out—peer pressure was a thing that didn't really work on her.

But a feeling rolled up like a current: Here was a kind of adventure.

Hunter Yee

Hunter Yee hadn't meant to join the game, but here he was, being shoved into a random room in a stranger's house. The door slammed shut behind him, and it was like a bell jar dropped down. Noise disappeared, sucked away in one gulp.

He looked around at the modern art adorning the gray walls. Large bed pristinely made and stacked with pillows. Small dresser in the corner. All of it dimly lit by two lamps.

And there was the girl the bottle had chosen. She faced away from him, watching creatures in a bright fish tank as they swept and darted from one side to the other.

Well, this was weird.

Hunter tried the doorknob. Whoever was on the other side was holding it tight. They gave a hard knock as if to admonish him.

He stuck his hands into his pockets and headed for the tank. It would probably be a good idea to speak. His palms were

sweating. Why was he so nervous when he didn't have any intention of actually *doing* anything?

"Cool fish," he said, then winced. *Cool fish?*

The girl didn't respond. Didn't even acknowledge that he'd spoken. Hunter hadn't gotten a good look at her face back when the bottle had been spinning. But her hair was so dark, and the way her ponytail hung…he was guessing she was East Asian. She definitely didn't go to Stewart.

She was wearing a T-shirt and jeans and her feet were bare. That was a clue—the lack of shoes. Hunter wondered if she'd hopped over from next door, same as him.

That was when he noticed the fish were following the girl. She held her fingers up to the tank, and wherever she moved, they moved. The water pulled gently from side to side until she dropped her arm.

"Whoa," said Hunter, stepping forward to give it a try. The fish scattered before he got his hand halfway up.

"How'd you do it?" he said.

She shook her head. "No idea. I've never seen that before."

Her reflection watched him in the glass of the tank, dark eyes locking on his. For a moment, he forgot to breathe.

She turned so that their gazes met through nothing but air. Raised her index finger up in front of his face, moved her hand from side to side.

"Guess my trick only works on the fish," she said.

Hunter found himself huffing a laugh.

The girl smiled, and he felt as if a weight slipped off him. Her

ponytail had gotten swept around in front. She smelled like fresh laundry and something sweet. Maybe honey.

"So," she said. "Have you done this before?"

"Done what?" His knees were oddly weak.

"Wandered into a random house for a game of Seven Minutes in Heaven with a fish-controlling girl?"

His eyes dropped to her lips.

What he knew about Seven Minutes in Heaven—or rather what he guessed, based on the conversations he'd overheard in the Stewart cafeteria: It was supposed to be spent lip-locked, maybe shedding a few items of clothing. It was supposed to go by in a hot, sweaty blink.

Several things happened in the next breath:

Someone called, "Time's up!" The door swung open and cacophony spilled into the bedroom.

Luna spun to look and her knuckles grazed Hunter's arm by accident. Light bloomed where their skin met.

The floor rumbled and tilted, and in some other part of the house, people started screaming.

Hunter heard the words "It's an earthquake!"

The girl disappeared out the door and into the crowd before Hunter could stop her. Noise came rushing back into his ears like a blast of wind.

Luna Chang

Luna ran through the house, dodging inebriated bodies and dangerously angled SOLO cups. Picture frames rattled against the walls. The ground was still shaking when she burst out of that basement and into the night.

It felt almost like a punishment for what she'd done. She never broke the rules like this. Not that there had been any spoken restriction—just the implicit understanding that her parents expected her to stay put, that they would be furious if they knew where she'd been.

She made it back to the other basement just in time.

"Luna!" her mother was calling from the top of the stairs. "We're going home!"

The rumbling had stopped, but her parents were too nervous to stay.

"That didn't feel like a normal earthquake to me," said her dad. "Not like the ones in Taiwan."

"Aiya, look at your feet!" her mother exclaimed. "And what

is that smell?" She checked that nobody was within range before whispering to Luna, "How is their basement *so* dirty?"

In the car, her parents gossiped about the families in attendance at the party, and Luna tried to quell the guilt thrumming in her veins. What on earth had come over her? She couldn't believe she'd snuck out like that. It was miraculous that her parents hadn't noticed she was gone. She pressed the end of her ponytail to her nose—it smelled like cigarette smoke. She would dive into the shower the moment she got home.

Laughter from the front of the car helped to settle her pulse. Some joke or other exchanged between her parents; she'd missed it. Luna watched how her dad gazed lovingly at her mother until the light turned green.

She exhaled. The days would pass, and this one night would be nothing but a memory glittering in the back of her mind. She tapped a finger against her knee—the same finger that had drawn the fish back and forth in that water. How strange it had been. How right it had felt.

And that boy—something about him felt very right, too.

She wasn't sure what had prompted her to behave the way she did. There'd been this unfamiliar boldness. Like someone had reached inside and turned her volume way up. She blushed and shivered to think of the minutes spent in that room. His eyes had been inky pools. His mouth looked soft. She'd very nearly leaned in and kissed him, because why not? That was the whole point of the game, wasn't it?

What had given her pause was the feeling that they were being pulled toward each other, as magnetic and bizarre as those

fish following her fingers. And when the door burst open on them: that point of contact for the sliver of a second. Her skin against his, and the spark between.

No, not a spark. Something bigger that made her hold her breath. She remembered the way it glowed before snuffing out.

Then there was the floor tipping and shuddering—she might have stayed longer if that hadn't happened.

Luna couldn't help wondering: Would she see him again?