

The Woman Who Stole The Moon

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After a number of small articles vanished from my home, I began to suspect that Lavonia was taking or hiding them, though I couldn't explain how or why. After all, I never actually saw her touch them, and besides, none of the missing items was even worth bothering about, except of course in the inexplicable manner of their disappearance.

I tried to allay my suspicions. It didn't make sense that Lavonia would steal from me, especially such trivial objects: a hand-painted egg I'd bought on a trip to Eastern Europe; a miniature carved ivory ship; and a hundred-year-old aqua-green Chinese opium bottle.

One day, however, returning home soon after leaving for work, I chanced to find Lavonia squatting in the nude on the bedroom floor. That in itself wasn't unusual, for Lavonia often did her stretching exercises without the hindrance of clothing. As she rose, her hands moved in a sudden flutter, and I caught the flash of something blue, which she quickly managed to conceal. A faint grin, impish and cunning, flitted upon her face, then vanished, like whatever she'd been holding, without a trace.

She held up her hands to show, see I have nothing up my sleeve. Though there was nothing in her hands, I was sure there'd been something a moment earlier.

It was with a sinking feeling that I noted the absence of a Delft figurine of a girl carrying a water jug, which had formally stood on a bookshelf in the livingroom.

Lavonia had never shown any proclivities toward stealing, so I doubted this was the work of a kleptomaniac. She was far more physically active than I was, inclined to jogging, bicycling, yoga, and hiking mountain trails. But none of this, I felt, explained or seemed to point toward what now threatened to upset our domestic harmony.

Two days later, I lost all patience. I came home to find that a brand new book I'd bought on Marilyn Monroe, with never before seen photographs and an exhaustive re-examination of her career as well as her life, was missing.

I questioned Lavonia. "No, I haven't seen it." She seemed swollen with glory, giddy with self-satisfaction, as if she'd just sung *Happy Birthday* to J.F.K. But the proof of it was when she began telling me intimate details about Marilyn Monroe, facts I was sure she couldn't have known, for she had never read anything extensive about the actress's life, had always shown a complete disinterest in the subject.

"Did you know she was a Gemini?" Lavonia said. "And she loved Keats." Suddenly Lavonia was a veritable repertoire of exacting minutia concerning the life and death of Norma Jean Baker.

"What next?" I asked in exasperation.

Lavonia merely shrugged, grinned sheepishly, and said nothing.

I grabbed hold of her arm. "Now, Lavonia Anne, you best tell me where that book is."

"What do you think I've done with it," she said, in a voice devastatingly playful.

"You don't think I've swallowed that great big book of yours, do you?"

Had her voice lowered a register or two? Was there a breathiness to it that I hadn't noticed before?

I discovered the truth several days later in an antique shop, when she lifted her dress, parted her legs slightly, and with a miraculous deftness, placed an intricately carved miniature wooden music box, inlaid with mother-of-pearl and crowned with a spinning carousel horse, inside her body.

"Jesus, Lavonia," I said, my heart leaping into my throat. "What are you doing?" I glanced round quickly to make sure none of the shopkeepers or customers had seen. I tried to shield her from any peering eyes, and whisked her out of the shop.

"Just what the hell was that all about?" I asked, once I got her to the sidewalk. "What

were you thinking?"

"It's so pretty," she said. "Did you hear the tune?"

That night, with my head resting on her belly, and tears streaming down my face, I listened to Tchaikovsky's "Serenade for Strings in C Major" playing inside my Lavonia.

Several days later she performed a similar feat with a wind-chime made with hand-blown glass tubes of the softest pastels.

"Look," I said. "I'm trying to be patient. I'm trying to understand whatever you're going through, but you just can't go around taking things and putting them where they don't belong. It doesn't make any sense. And besides, it's stealing."

"Why is it you only understand things in a nuts and bolts, point A to point B, what goes up must come down way?" she said.

"Because that's the way the world works. Things happen for a reason. The universe operates on the principles of cause and effect."

"You're hopeless," she said. "There's more to life than facts and numbers. Grids and graphs can't explain a sunset or a baby's laugh."

"Is that what this is all about, then?" I asked. "This is your way of letting me know you want a baby?"

"Oh, you're impossible!"

After that if I tried to press the point she'd merely shrug in exasperation, and shoot me a look as if to say, "Stop being absurd. Leave me alone. I have nothing more to say."

Things worsened as I stood helplessly by and watched items disappear from stores, restaurants, the homes of friends and family. Lavonia no longer even bothered to turn away from me, or hide what she was doing, as if taunting me, demonstrating the lengths to which she was capable of going.

Anything that caught her eye, or her ears, for that matter, anything she saw that she wanted, she took.

Naturally, I tried to come up with something that resembled a logical explanation. Perhaps there was a biological cause: the maternal instinct inverted and run amok. In my darker moments, I confess, my theories grew foreboding, with everything de-evolving back to its source, the universe shrinking, collapsing in on itself, returning to the primordial state, preparing to re-ignite, the Big Bang all over again. In moments of quiet, calm reflection, I imagined Lavonia as the personification of nature, intent on reclaiming what was rightfully hers, a nature that intended to return to a purer, more pristine state. Feeling a sense of awe and amazement, I couldn't overlook the possibility that Lavonia was perhaps some modern day saint whose miracles were manifest before my own incredulous eyes.

For all I knew it was just another obscure Irish Catholic ritual, of which I was wholly ignorant. Then again, maybe she had simply lost her mind.

Although the objects she put inside herself were of all shapes and sizes, Lavonia showed no signs of getting larger. She seemed to have an endless capacity to hold anything and everything inside her slim, five-foot, four-inch frame. It was difficult not to marvel at the incredible feat of engineering she accomplished with each new acquisition.

In the dizzying span of three weeks I saw her swallow up, or "internalize" as I preferred to term it, two paintings, "The Little Shepherdess," and "The Bohemian," by Bouguereau, three very expensive bottles of Chateau Latour Bordeaux, a Tiffany vase, several tapes of Chopin Etudes and Nocturnes, a radio, a black pillbox hat with a fringe of black dots, like Audrey Hepburn might have worn, a blank journal with gold-embossed cover and spine, a stuffed panda, some white orchids, perfumes, crystal figurines, a passionflower vine, and two hand-woven baskets made by a Native American woman from Las Cruces, New Mexico, who signed Maria de Luz on tiny slips of yellow paper glued to the bottom of each.

And these were only the objects I had seen her take.

I began following Lavonia everywhere, afraid of what or who she might take next. I

saw her stoop to pet a kitten on the sidewalk.

“Come on, Lavonia,” I said, rushing to take her arm and whisk her away before the kitten proved too irresistible.

What if one of these items hurt her? If she’d taken the kitten would it not start biting or clawing its way out? It seemed reasonable that sooner or later all these various foreign objects might have some sort of adverse effect upon her, but she refused to be concerned.

Every time I heard on the news that some priceless object d’art, or other had been stolen or was missing, I shuddered. At the same time, whenever Lavonia and I kissed, or when my mouth touched her skin, I found myself transported to the southernmost regions of France, the mountains of Tibet, or the high painted landscapes of New Mexico. I smelled smells and tasted tastes I’d never known before, and I’m somewhat ashamed to say I became drunk and satiated, and lay in a stupor for hours afterwards.

One evening, we heard the song of a nightingale through the bedroom window. Lavonia dropped the book she was reading, rushed down the stairs and out the door. I followed and saw her climb up the tree nearest the window, but before I could reach her, the nightingale was gone.

Night after night, she lay by my side, and I felt the slithering tendrils of a vine creep along the side of my legs, as she sang an enchanting nightly tune, no longer with her own voice, but with a blend of hers and the nightingale’s.

And each morning I awoke to find a bud or a yellow passionflower on the bed beside me.

Lavonia, I noticed, had changed, was different with each new thing she put inside her, much in the way the sky or the sea can change color and become clear one moment, opaque or murky the next. It may sound selfish but I began to miss the Lavonia I’d known before. This new Lavonia seemed to have nothing, really, to do with me. We had grown apart: all those things within her stood between us. We no longer lived for the same things.

I stirred late at night, and when I opened my eyes I saw her sitting completely still on the side of the bed, staring at me. Am I next? I couldn't help but wonder.

The way she repeatedly studied the world, the various maps and atlases she pored over, the globe she spun with a wild carelessness, gave me the impression she had aspirations far beyond the limited scope of our life together. It was as if she had sprouted wings and taken to flight, while I could only stand back and watch.

She began to sing songs and recite poetry in foreign languages—things I had never heard before. Instead of discussing dinner, or that night's entertainment, she spoke of far-off places, or people I knew nothing about: newly discovered species found in Borneo, and rites among the herdsmen of Azerbaijan. She spoke eloquently about China's internal political struggles, for God's sake. She became an avid horticulturist, learning to graft hybrid miniatures of exotic tropical fruit trees, and creating a Bonsai garden that would make a professional seethe with envy. She began writing haiku, and cooked up delicious Tibetan dishes.

It was impossible not to worry about what could be the end result of all this internalization. What was she aiming at? What were the limits? She had a fascination for the Egyptian pyramids, for the Sphinx. She had spoken recently of a desire to see the Taj Mahal.

I finally blew my top. The stress tore at me, blinded me. I yelled, screamed, threatened; I told her if she wanted me, she would have to stop. Then I stormed out of the house.

I didn't return for several hours. When I did I found Lavonia sitting naked in front of the upstairs sliding glass window, staring up at the sky. Her eyes were moist.

I gazed for a moment at her body, as slender and fit as ever, even with all that she now contained. I marvelled at her perfect breasts, the smooth sculpted small of her back. She was beautiful, I had to give her that, perhaps even more so now.

It's as if all the world radiates from within her, I thought. No, not just the world, but

the universe, too. If she opened like a rose, would she too expand outward forever, into the farthest reaches of space?

I realized that I couldn't change her; she would never stop. I climbed into bed, still seeing her enigmatic smile, an unsettling expression like that of the cat who had "internalized" the canary upon her face, her teary eyes fixed upon the full moon that lit up the sky.

I sensed her stirring in the middle of the night. With eyes half-opened, still half asleep, I made out Lavonia's silhouette, her features mysteriously illuminated, as if from within, her once slate-gray eyes now shimmering with an unnatural golden bioluminescence.

I felt her kiss my cheek.

I woke alone. Her side of the bed was untouched. A chill filled the room, and a resounding emptiness fluttered in the air, like an echo of absence.

Without having to look any farther I knew she was gone.

There was no moon that night, as there damn well should have been. It was gone!

Only the feeble light of the stars struggled to make the darkness of the night sky less than absolute.

Lavonia Anne Macpherson had stolen the moon.



The moon rose again the following night, I hear you say. Just as it always had, just as it always would, until it will finally drift off into space, leaving the earth behind, devoid of its benevolent luminescence.

I wished I could take a potshot at it, for I wasn't fully convinced it *was* the moon. It might have been a substitute, an impostor. I noted how this new moon resembled nothing so much as a scar. That seemed fitting. Hell, it could have been papier-mâché, for all I knew. Unfortunately, I don't own a gun so I couldn't test my theory. But I know what I know.

I couldn't sleep, and still can't, for now I'm left to ponder: what else has Lavonia stolen? How does one measure the loss of love, the loss of one's dreams and hopes, or a fragmented heart?

Go ask that pale scar that glows like a waxen monument to our vanquished love in the night sky!