

"Chasing the Moon"
Sydney

We chased the moon.

That was what Jimmy called it, anyway. The more correct term was "stealing his mother's car and driving to God knows where in the dead of night." Not that we'd ever say something like that out loud. In Jimmy eyes it would be the deepest betrayal and none of us could stand the idea of him thinking that we didn't like his wild imagination or that we only put up with it out curiosity and affection. Besides, we'd all been on the receiving end of Jimmy's anger before and remembered it as the worst kind of place.

He'd come for us a couple of times a month, one at a time, cruising the suburban streets in the dull gray Pontiac. Lucky for us, we lived in the kind of neighborhoods where the cars were safely in the garages by midnight. Otherwise Jimmy would have hit them. His driving was the same kind of wild and unpredictable as his mind, and he had a clinical inability to keep his foot steady on the gas pedal for more than a minute at a time. It was always jerk, stop, start with him, like driving with your arthritic grandmother. Not that we'd ever say something like that out loud, either.

I lived the farthest away from Jimmy's house, which meant that I was picked up last and also risked the greatest chance of being caught. This statistic was padded by the fact that while Jimmy threw rocks at my window the rest of the group piled out of the Pontiac and proceeded to snort and fight and cuss a few feet away from my front door. They sounded like a load of angry pigs and they would be just as rank when I stumbled out of my window and over to them, my hair sticking up and shirt hanging wrong. They would fall all over me, glad to have a new victim crippled by sleep, punching and laughing and shoving me into the backseat of the Pontiac until I woke up enough to ask, "Hey, where are we going?"

This was tradition of sorts—I always knew what the answer would be, given by Jimmy as he glanced at us in the rearview mirror. "The horizon, guys."

We would kind of nod and then roll our eyes at one another without saying anything. I mean, what kind of answer was

that? It sounded like a poem, some metaphorical shit that they made you dissect in class. The roundabout way of saying, "I don't know."

I think he knew every time, actually, though I never really called him out on it. The most I ever did was say, "Alright, Jimmy."

He would laugh. Jimmy had a cool laugh, one that invited you to join in even though it was a little bit cruel, too. I think it raised the hair on all our necks every now and then. I know it did mine. Something in the way it went on, and the way he would take his hands off the wheel and close his eyes when he did it. As if he expected that the world around him was going to stop spinning for a second because it had noticed that hey, Jimmy was laughing.

In the end, the arrogance was what we liked about him. It takes a lot of pride, you know, to come up with the things he did and carry them out. Daring, too, and maybe some real courage, but I'll never be a judge of that.

The night would really start around then, the Pontiac ferrying us to our unknown destination. It was always the weirdest place, a different one every time and somehow never a disappointment. An all-night diner where we ate for free for hours because Jimmy somehow knew the manager. Clubs two hours away, with college girls. Sometimes it was something totally out-there: a cemetery where Jimmy did handstands on the headstones and C.J. got so scared I swear he started to cry. That night, we left early.

That was the thing about Jimmy, or at least one of the things. The second he saw that we weren't having fun anymore, it was time to leave. As if entertaining us was the only purpose he had, and he wanted to get rid of us as soon as he knew he wasn't doing his job anymore. As if he couldn't stand our boredom or our fear.

But usually we had fun. Those trips were some of the best times of my life, and I loved those guys. Not that we were like girls, or even like family. It was more like we could laugh until we were high just from the lack of oxygen, and we could talk about everything from the president to how long we thought you could look in a Victoria's Secret window before anyone noticed. And the nights when we chased

the moon were always the best. We never questioned them, hardly discussed them, even. We just anticipated them.

Only once did I come to close to asking. It was on the way to class when I passed Jimmy in the hall. He spoke to me first. Jimmy usually initiated conversations, not just with me but with everybody.

"Dude," he said, pivoting 180 degrees to start walking beside me, "you up for a chase tonight?"

I was surprised. Usually none of us found out about a trip beforehand. "Sure," I said automatically.

He raised his eyebrows. "You got other plans or something?"

"No." I knew because of the raised eyebrows—with Jimmy, any expression that wasn't a smile was dangerous—that I was supposed to defend myself. "I've just got this crap loaded on me for Spanish due tomorrow—"

"Well, that's fine if you want to do that, man, but this one was for you."

"For me?"

"Yeah. You and May just broke up, right? Figured you could use a pick-me-up or something. But if you'd rather mess around with stem-changing verbs..."

"No, dumbass, I'm going. Definitely. And thanks."

He smiled, and even I'd sweated through the whole conversation I smiled back, and I was genuinely happy as he brushed past me to enter his next class. Looking back on the conversation, it was obvious that I'd made the error, not Jimmy. Of course I had. Who ever put anything before chasing the moon?