

# Lights and Shadows

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## A' La Lune

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**"A' LA LUNE"**  
**Amanda J. Smith**  
**Short Story**

Anna Lindley bolted upright in her bed. The moonlight poured into her room and outlined a large round head above the window sill. Whoever it is, he has to be huge to see into the upstairs window, she thought, trying to decide whether to run to her mother's room or take the creature on herself. It wasn't until she'd flipped the switch and flooded the room with light that she realized she had been dreaming. The huge head belonged to the stuffed Panda who always sat beneath her window.

She rubbed her eyes and sighed to herself as she glanced nervously around the pink-papered room at the other stuffed animals she had collected. They all smiled contentedly back at her from their places. She hesitated as embarrassment flickered in her conscience, then leaped over and checked under her bed. Something told her that she was too old to be worrying about monsters, but she had to be sure just the same.

There was nothing there, so she flipped the light back off and slid down from the old bed. Drawing the curtains away from her window and pushing the big Panda aside, she pressed her forehead against the cool glass.

The house was quiet for once. Even Howie's room was silent. She

couldn't remember ever being awake when her older brother's stereo wasn't blasting from the room next door.

Anna raised the fragile window and leaned out into the night air. Down below her, the rain-soaked yard was empty. Only the cloyed moon, reflecting off a puddle, bounced light up into her face.

An old magnolia tree had guarded her window for as long as she could remember, its strong arms stretching from her window all the way across the neighbors' fence and into their yard. But now, down below her, only the tar-covered stump remained. The old tree where she and Howie had spent most of their days had been dying a slow and surely painful death for years. Finally, her mom and dad had had the diseased remains hauled away earlier in the week. Now, there was only the gooey tar and a large gap in the small yard that couldn't be filled.

Anna was lost there in the tar and the old tree until another, brighter light flashed onto the stump. It came from the Stevens' apartment next door. Actually, it was an old garage that the Stevens had converted into an apartment for their son David.

She leaned out farther to get a better look at the building that had been hidden by the old magnolia. It didn't seem so much to her, just an old two-car garage that needed paint.

From her position a few yards away, Anna could see a little of the second story window where the light was. In the corner of the small living room was a shiny chrome lamp that dangled over the arm of a faded sofa, and the corner of a bookcase, full of records, with a stereo on top next to David's baseball trophies.

Anna squirmed down behind the Panda when David crossed the living room to open his window.

He was slim and wiry, but not so handsome, and Anna wondered why all the older girls thought he was so great. He just looked like another boy, like Howie might look in a few years, but nothing special.

She held her breath as his window grated in its tracks and pieces of his scratchy voice floated across the Stevens' high wooden fence to Anna's ears.

"I shouldn't have left the heater on. Maybe . . ." he said, turning back to throw his jacket at his companion.

"Cut it out!", the man said as he batted the jacket back across the room. He nodded towards the stereo then shrugged off his own sweater and sat down on the sofa.

". . . what?", David asked, turning back from the banks of records.

"Kate Bush."

"Perfect." David nodded, " 'The Kick Inside.' I was just thinking of that."

"No," the other man argued, his

voice getting louder, " 'Lionheart.' "

David turned to look at the other man again and smiled. He stood for a moment, just staring at the other man, then gave in.

"O.K., O.K., my 'Lionheart.' " He slipped the album out of the stack and gently placed it on the turntable.

Anna was surprised when she heard the crisp tinkling of a piano and orchestra behind the wailing female voice. It wasn't like the music that she listened to, or the music that Howie listened to, or even the music that her mom and dad listened to, but it was pretty anyway. And she wished that it was louder. It held her there with the moonlight. She yawned and brushed a long strand of hair away from her ear to hear better.

David came back to the window and gazed out across the Lindley's back yard.

"Looks different without that old tree," he said, almost to himself.

Anna nodded and leaned back against the wall. She snuggled the bear into her arms and laid her head on his. Through droopy eyelids they watched the distant moon hovering over David's apartment. Another silhouette sprang to life behind David's.

"What?" he asked.

"There used to be an old magnolia tree over in the neighbors' yard. Right there." David pointed at the

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"A' LA LUNE" (continued)

stump below Anna's window. "You couldn't see anything out of this window except it."

The other man leaned out to look at the stump.

"Why'd they cut it down?" he asked.

"Who knows?" David shrugged, turning to face him.

They stood staring at each other forever, it seemed. Just like a movie, Anna thought. The words will start rolling up any minute now, and I can go to bed.

The muffled sound of her mother's door opening down the hall snapped her out of her drowsiness. She jumped up to close the window but changed her mind when she remembered the two men across the way. Anna sat the bear back in his place and climbed gingerly into the bed that had been her grandmother's. She moved fast but carefully, hoping the old bed wouldn't creak. But it did anyway. And even after she had gotten settled, the ancient springs beneath her squeaked out a warning to the whole room, and her mother down the hall.

There was nothing left to do. She closed her eyes and feigned sleep, waiting for the door to open. All she heard was the swishing of her mother's robe coming closer and the slipperted footsteps that paused right outside her door.

Anna held her breath until the

swishing started off down the stairs. The bed creaked again as she slid down and tip-toed back to the window.

David's arms were around the other man's shoulders, and his head rested in the hollow of the other man's neck.

Anna gasped, afraid that something terrible had happened. Then she realized that David was only whispering and not crying, when he leaned his head back and laughed. The silhouettes stared at each other for a few seconds, then kissed and laughed again, gliding away from the window.

As their dance brought the two men back to the window, Anna heard her own back door opening below her window. An arch of warm yellow light swept the wet yard as she heard her mother sending Jackson out to do his business.

The big red setter trotted out into the sloppy yard and the door slammed shut behind him.

At the sound of the door, David and the other man jumped back out of sight. Suddenly, an arm reached out and pulled the window down. Then the shade. In a few seconds, the light went off.

Anna waited in the darkness at the open window. Even after Jackson came in, and her mother swished back down the hall to bed, David's room stayed dark. Only the muffled music and the moon lit the night. □

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*Anna waited in the darkness at the open window...Only the muffled music and the moon lit the night.*

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