When the cow jumped over the moon

Sara Crane

When she was much younger she wrote clichéd poems about the moon.

Now, she stands on the cold sand rubbing her ankles gritty with the soles of her feet. She hums tunelessly "will he won't he, will he won't he …". If there were daisies on the beach she'd be plucking off their petals. The stars push moth holes in the darkening sky. The moon's not up yet.

Last week she saw him in the arcade when she was getting a double chocolate milkshake. Later he sat next to her at the bar and bought her a Babycham. She isn't sure about meeting in the car park.

The waves are slack on the outgoing tide. A few unmated cormorants loiter and chortle. She slides backwards towards the rocks so she can be sure to see his headlight when he rides over the rise.

Suddenly the moon shows up. A highway of silver spills towards her and makes weak shadows on the shore.

She twirls her skimpy skirt like a ballerina. She dances and laughs. Twiddles patterns with her toes, reaches towards the full moon with outstretched arms and bathes in its filmy light.

When she hears the car she freezes. Catches voices she doesn't recognise. Then he calls out. A crude expletive. They all laugh. Bottles bounce and break on the sea wall. The acrid smell of smoke reaches out.

She ducks down and runs through the dunes towards home by the back lane down by the railway track. She ignores the gravelly screeches of wheelies and bikes backfiring in the distance. Swinging her sandals she sings all the nursery rhymes she can remember.

She crosses the bridge and slowly pulls her sandals back on.

The moon disappears behind Cave Hill.