

Mooncake Festival

by Jane Mee Wong '06

Tonight is the Moon cake festival. The bright full moon sat comfortably like an egg yolk, beaming in the cool darkness of night. There, legend has it that Chang-er sits with her rabbit after she took the elixir of immortality four thousand years ago, to prevent her evil husband, Hou Yi, from ruling eternally over all heaven and earth.

Four thousand years ago, Hou Yi was a good man who shot down nine out of ten suns to save heaven and earth from being scorched by the blasting heat of the ten suns combined.

Chang-er watched as power and time tweaked him beyond recognition.

Four thousand years ago, Chang-er exchanged brimming material luxury for eternal solitude to save heaven and earth from being ruled by one evil man, her husband, Hou Yi.

She is so beautiful like a glowing gem hanging in the sky. Yet she is so alone in the vast vacuum of the soundless universe. What were the thoughts that ran through Chang-er's mind when she popped the elixir of immortality into her mouth?

Was she nervous, frantically popping the pill in her mouth, in fear of Hou Yi's sudden arrival into her room? Did she in her frenzy, grab the nearest thing next to her when swallowing the globular object and did it happen to be the rabbit? Was she nervous and afraid was she not sure what would happen next was she suddenly a moon first and then flew up to the sky or did she first fly up and then become a moon? Was she as bright from the beginning and how did she feel about the choice she made?

Could she have regretted and it was too late to regret because there was no choice but to go through with her choice? And how much choice was there, really, if the stakes for not doing it, were so high? He could have turned on her and killed her too because he was so evil... Did he beat her, was she abused, and any escape would have been a good reason to get away from the man who once was kind to her?

Did she just *happen* to save heaven and earth? Or did she really *intend* to give up all to save heaven and earth?

When Papa sat by me and Nin's bed on those nights when he was not traveling to those far away countries, I relished the stories he would tell. Running out of new bedtime stories, he repeated them one after another. There would be the story of Chang-er, and then sometimes there would be the story of Momo Taro, the little peach boy who grew up so quickly that his elderly foster parents couldn't believe it for all that their old eyes were worth. When narrating these stories, Papa's eyes danced with the fiery heat of the nine suns that Hou Yi had shot down, his voice suddenly trembling, suddenly angry with the angst and hatred of the villagers who felt betrayed by Hou Yi's deception. The five-syllable "Elixir of Immortality" that he would utter, was like a consonant-cluttered conundrum with a pronunciation that my early years could only recognize but not repeat, with a mysterious significance I could only imagine but not empathize. What could be so exciting about staying young and juvenile, when age and maturity was all that my young body was craving?

Chang-er was a symbol of strength and resilience as I sometimes filled my little bolster with clothing to escape from home because the noise was too much and Nin was too annoying and I didn't think Mama and Papa loved me because she loved her business more and he loved the far-away countries more. Especially those nights when the sounds of vases and plates breaking, and Mama's cries mixed in with all that were a little too much cacophony for comprehension. Knelt knees with caps cutting coarse ground, salt-stung eyeballs staring into far away distance, I wanted to grow old instantaneously so I could be big and strong to protect Mama. Those nights I would be Chang-er, who would leave home and fly to the streets and seek out an adventure by venturing into the city where excitement and adventure burst through the colorful sidewalks onto the roaring asphalt roads... I would say bye bye to Papa...to Mama...to Nin... We will meet in our next life and thank you very much for the care that you have bestowed unto me while I have lived and sometime somewhere I will express my gratitude and repay your kindness....

How did Chang-er feel when she flew to the moon?

Did she feel like Papa did when he left home to find work as a construction worker in the jungles of Brunei at age 18? Perhaps with that tinge of desperation that inevitably transforms itself into anticipation and excitement because one cannot live in downtrodden conditions without venturing onto new grounds? Or, did she feel like Mama did when she scrubbed toilets of the ritzy and the glamorous and felt her dreams disappear into the sewage of waste water and poop? I mean, did Chang-er feel for a moment that the moon could potentially be a very wet and dirty place where she could easily slide and slip into potholes and crevices if she just was just careless for a moment? Or, did she feel like me? Like me, when I attempted to sneak out of the house in the wee hours of the night with my clothes-filled, toothbrush and toothpaste-packed, walk-man and cassette tape equipped, ramen noodles-stuffed bolster? In other words, was she prepared for the unknown like I was when trying to launch an escape into the unknown streets of a scary and suspicious night?

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Tonight, Chang-er lives again as I share moon-cakes whilst drinking fragrant jasmine tea on a warm night. Tonight, the fog shades the bright moon glow into a cloudy orange. Her distance made painfully clear as the mist carelessly hides her on the night we pay tribute to her sacrifice. Chang-er, how does it feel like to watch us live our lives? Do you wish you had never left? Do you ever regret your decision and do thoughts of the people you saved from Hou Yi's terror help you get through your occasional loneliness? Tonight, I am 21 hours and 10 000 miles away from family. Sometimes, vestiges of home float slickly above new surroundings, like oil that never mixes with water. Moments of loneliness tickle memory into an unlived utopia, knowingly deceiving yet comfortably nostalgic.