

Tale for a Tongan Princess

Once upon a time, after a week of full moons, something extra-ordinary occurred.

Some would say that little could be construed as extraordinary after seven full moons in a row, but there they were, one right after the other, starting on Monday and ending on Sunday. Astronomers were tearing their hair out in confusion and astrologers were delighted they couldn't function. Tides were thrown out of whack and ship's captains had no idea when to leave port, so the ferries were late and all the commuters blamed the government. There were tsunamis and earthquakes and the cats yowled endlessly and werewolves were painfully at large and, since the seven full moons in a row were also blue moons, all manner of events that would have transpired only once in a long while happened continuously for a week. But, as I said, this is all nothing compared to what happened at the end of the week. Because at the end of the week, a Tongan Princess married the Sun.

She was born a princess, and raised a princess, but as Langiola matured she realized with a shock that she did not feel like a princess. "Why not?" she thought to herself. Her father was a king, her mother a queen. She lived in a castle on the shores of a lake that was teeming with swans and eels and pukekos and snappers, and the lake was surrounded by a vast land that was teeming with forests and treasure and boys and girls and spoons and forks, and the vast land was surrounded still by a vaster ocean that was teeming with incredible and mysterious amounts of things, and her family owned and ruled it all. She ate savoury meals from dawn to dusk—crocodile-stew and willow-salad and chocolate-bread. Her lessons included studies like Conjuring and Fencing and Unicornmanship, and her teachers were only the best. She had everything anyone who was not a princess wanted to have. Why oh why should she feel so desperately ordinary?

This fixation with ordinariness, I'm sorry to say, bothered her so much that she couldn't sleep. As a result, she could often be found out on her balcony, leaning against the railing and thinking deeply about her life during the very wee hours of the morning (which is, of course, disorderly conduct for a princess, but for now she must be excused, because she was Troubled). Incidentally, that is where she stood on the first night of this story - the night when she discovered something glinting in the middle of the lake.

"Whatever could that be?" she said, and being Spontaneous as well as Troubled, she rushed down to the Boatman and bade him row her out there.

When they arrived at what she presumed was the spot, she stared down at the Shining Object. She tried to reach for it, but it seemed to be quite far down. The Boatman yawned.

The next day dawned beautiful, bright, glorious and warm...but Princess Langiola barely noticed. She'd forgotten about feeling ordinary and was now preoccupied with the Shining Object. It hadn't been there when she woke up the next morning. What was it? How could she get at it? What did it do?

The second night she sat in her bed and waited until full dark then rushed out to the balcony and looked - there it was again! Had no one else noticed it? Could only she see it? She ran down to the Boatman again and shook him awake to take her to the same place as the night before. "Do you see it?" she asked him when they arrived. "Yes Princess," he answered. "What is it?" she asked. "It is the moon," he replied.

"Take me back," ordered Princess Langiola.

Now clearly, the moon is in the sky. But princesses, historically notorious for hopeless naïvety, are often forced to learn the hardest, truest lessons all on their own. So it must come as no surprise that when the Boatman told Langiola that the Shining Object was the moon, she thought he meant that the moon had fallen and had sunk to the bottom of the lake. On the third night when she woke the Boatman, he was surprised to see her in her scuba gear, but being a

prudent man he said nothing, and rowed her out to the middle of the lake as before, whereupon she jumped into the frigid water and was gone for some time.

Finally she emerged, raised her goggles and sputtered, "The moon is in the sky!" Which sounds like a completely foolish thing to say, but I know sometimes when I am Troubled, things that ought to be obvious escape me entirely until I am under water and it is dark, and I look for the light source and find that it is above me. Which is what happened to Langiola.

The fourth night she was on her balcony again. She did not bother the Boatman, nor did she even look at the lake. Langiola looked at the moon. "So," thought she, "the Shining Object was only a reflection of the moon on the surface of the lake, and that's why it shone." Then she paused and thought some more. "What a terrible trick!" she suddenly exploded. And she rushed down to the Ladderman and ordered a ladder set up. She had a few things to say to this tricksy moon.

The Ladderman rubbed his eyes and sleepily set up a ladder for the princess on the lawn. "Too short," said she. He put that ladder away and got out the next size up. "Still too short." "Princess," said the Ladderman (just a little peeviously), "Perhaps you'd better decide which ladder you want." Langiola looked at the ladders and finally pointed at the tallest one she could see - the hundred-footer. The Ladderman obediently started to set it up but Langiola stopped him and said "At the top of the tallest tower, please." So he gathered the supports and braces and trudged it all the way up to the tallest tower and nailed everything into place. Once finished, before he could stop her or give her instructions, Langiola shimmied up the ladder's length to the very top rung and waved her arms and shook her fists and chastised the moon for his cruel joke. Unfortunately she also stamped her foot, and as we all know, one must never stand on the top rung of a ladder - much less stamp one's foot on it - and the ladder gave way beneath her, and she fell.

The next night she was on her bed. She had been on her bed all day. She was broken, but she stared up at the moon outside and pouted and seethed in a very un-princesslike manner. She was convinced he hadn't paid attention to a word she'd said, and she resented it. But since she was broken there was little she could do to take the matter up with him right then, so she spent her time thinking instead. And she thought about all that had happened. And presently she realized that it wasn't the moon's fault that it made the reflection - after all, could Langiola stop reflecting if she passed a mirror? No, she was being silly. And with all this thinking and brooding, she began to feel Troubled again, and more ordinary than ever. Even less than ordinary: she felt stupid.

The sixth night she summoned the Balloonman. She couldn't bear her humiliation, she simply had to speak to the moon and apologise for her foolishness. So the Balloonman shuffled into the room and tied balloons to all four posters of her bed, and a thread to her pillow so she could give a tug when she was ready to come back down, and Princess Langiola floated. Through clouds and flocks of herons and mists she came finally within speaking distance of the moon, and so began the Apology Speech she'd worked out earlier as she floated closer and closer. At last, her bed settled on the spongy surface, and she finished her speech and looked up.

It was dark.

How could that be? No! She'd come to apologise to the moon for thinking it was his fault for making all that shine that reflected on the lake and here he was, not shiny, not even here! The place was barren, and freezing, and dark as dark. Bravely trying to hold back her tears, she tugged twice the string attached to her pillow, as prearranged between herself and the Balloonman, and waited almost until she was to the balcony again before she flung herself down upon the bed and wept bitterly. The Balloonman collected his balloons and quietly left.

The next and seventh night he came back. Princess Langiola hadn't summoned him. In fact she had been asleep, having cried all day and at last sunk from her Troubled state into a weary Depression...but the thread attached to the pillow had been forgotten and she must have tugged it a bit as she turned on her side, because the Balloonman peeped his head in the door and said "Yes?" Langiola awoke and the first thing she noticed was that the moon was still

shining, brighter than ever. She suddenly remembered something about when she was in the lake, and then she had a revelatory thought...

So she said to the Balloonman, "Balloons again, please." And arrange them he did, just as before. When he was finished, he held up his end of the thread as if to ask, "What shall the signal be this time?" But Princess Langiola only untied the thread from her pillow and passed it to him, as if to reply, "No signal this time." And he nodded solemnly and let go of the bed. When she arrived on the moon she took a deep breath, and looked up...

And saw the Sun.

And what transpired between the Tongan Princess and her future spouse is theirs alone.