

STRANGE
TALES

DANIEL MORDEN has enthralled audiences with his performances of traditional stories for more than thirty years. He is as comfortable in front of a nursery of small children as he is in a theatre with three hundred adults. His work has taken him all over the world, from remote villages in the Arctic to the National Theatre. He is also the author of many anthologies of traditional stories, and his writing retains the propulsive momentum of a live performance. Though he tells many kinds of story, he is particularly known for telling mysterious fairy tales like the ones contained in this book.

In 2017 he was awarded the Hay Festival Medal for his storytelling. He lives in Abergavenny with his family.

STRANGE TALES

DANIEL MORDEN



First published in 2023
by Firefly Press
25 Gabalfa Road, Llandaff North, Cardiff, CF14 2JJ
www.fireflypress.co.uk

Text © Daniel Morden 2023
Illustrations © Anne Glenn 2023

The author asserts his moral right to be identified as author in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patent Act, 1988.

All rights reserved.

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form, binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

All characters in this publication are fictitious and any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

A CIP catalogue record of this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-915444-17-2

This book has been published with the support of the Books Council of Wales.

Typeset by Elaine Sharples

Printed by 4edge Limited

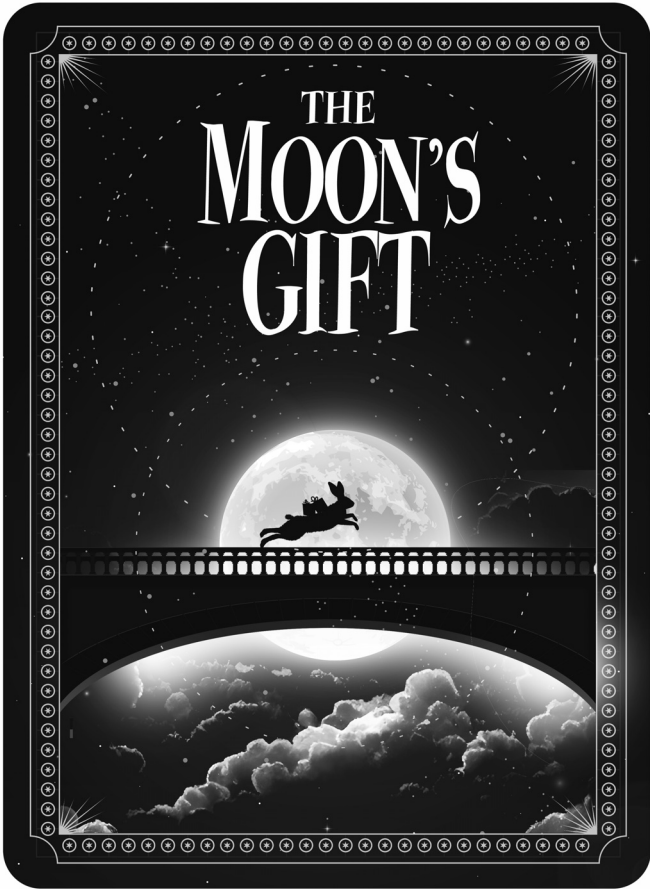


To Marion

CONTENTS

1	The Moon's Gift	3
2	Bear Sister, Wolf Sister	11
3	Shudder	25
4	Miss Fortune	43
5	The Luck Child	61
6	The Other Eye	85
7	Spellbound	97
8	The Tale of Daniel Crowley	109
9	The Boy Who Kept a Secret	119

THE
MOON'S
GIFT



THE MOON'S GIFT

I



In the beginning the shining king and the glittering queen of the sky were husband and wife. They lived in harmony. Sometimes he rode the heavens in her sledge, sometimes she rode in his chariot. He loved her and she loved him.

The problems came when they had a child. With the child came bitter bickering and sullen silence. The child was the Earth. At first the Earth was lifeless, but then two-legged things appeared: men and women. From the moment she saw them, the Queen of the Moon loved them. She watched them like a parent, with infinite compassion. She wanted only good for them.

They knew nothing. They did not know how to speak or walk or sleep. There was nothing for them to eat, nowhere for them to shelter...

The shining king was jealous of the time the queen spent doting over them.

She said, 'They're helpless. We have so many things that we could give them that would ease their lives...'

'You waste your love on them. They are weak.'

'They will thrive if we help them.'

'As long as they are helpless, they are no threat. If they thrive, don't turn your back on them. They will overrun us. Overthrow us.'

She saw him gathering weapons to use against the people. He had every intention of killing them all.

The shining king and the glittering queen spoke less and less.

One day, while her husband was busy, guiding his blazing chariot across the sky, she gathered the things she needed. She wanted to take them to the Earth, but if she went down there, he would see ... Ah! She would send her servant. That scatterbrained hare.

She gave the hare two boxes: a white box and a red one.

'Take them to the people. I will wait until my husband is asleep then join you. Tell the people they must only open the white box. When I arrive,

I will teach them how to use the things inside. And as for the red one...’ she saw the hare had forgotten half her instructions. ‘Just take them both boxes. I will explain everything when I arrive.’

The hare set off.

‘And, hare—’

‘Yes, Your Highness?’

‘The boxes are for the people. Not for you. Don’t open them.’

In those times there were bridges between Earth and the heavens. As the hare scuttled down a bridge, a million thoughts passed through his scatterbrain.

I wonder what she’s giving them.

What harm would there be in knowing?

What is so special about man and woman?

What about me?

Don’t I deserve gifts after such devoted service?

The boxes are so light. She probably forgot to put anything inside.

What harm would there be in looking in an empty box? And who will know that I have done so?

So, he lifted the lid of the white box.

He was thrown onto his back. Out came birds

and beasts and bees and seeds. Grain and pollen and fire, and countless good things that the glittering queen knew would help our lives.

Now for the red! Out came disease and madness and jealousy and greed. Snakes and scorpions and pain and death. The things the queen's husband had been gathering to use against Earth. She was sending them to Earth so that the people could hide them from her husband.

When the queen saw what had happened, she tried to retrieve the awful things, but they scuttled into the shadows and wriggled into the crevices.

So she did the best she could. She taught the people how to use the good things she had given them. How to make fire to stay warm and to cook. How to grow crops. How to keep animals.

But the people were terrified of the scuttling, whispering things in the shadows.

The people ascended the bridges, pleading with the queen. 'It is safe up here. Let us come and live with you!'

'You see?' said the shining king. 'They aren't content with everything you gave them. They want to be us!'

THE MOON'S GIFT

And he blasted the bridges into dust.

Ever since then the Sun and the Moon have been apart. He built a palace on one side of the Earth, and she on the other. When she is in the sky, he hides his face. When he is in the sky, sometimes she tries to join him, but he will have nothing to do with her.

But the Moon still loves us. Sometimes she walks the world disguised as an old woman, helping those she meets. Often at night we will see her face gazing down, with all the tender love of a parent. Because she loves us, she gave us one last gift to help us endure the torments and disappointments that escaped from the red box...

Stories.