

# *A Cow Jumping over the Moon*

by Christina Rosso

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I remember shards of glass like jagged puzzle pieces scattered around the white-and-black tiled kitchen floor. The overhead lights were bright and blinding, leaving floating blurs and stars in front of my eyes.

They had been arguing again. I didn't know what about. I knew it wasn't over though. The broken dishes and glasses signaled limbo—a lull in the fight when the embers were still simmering, ready to flare up at any moment. Ready to burn.

She did the throwing, he the cleanup. It made sense. She was hot-headed, he obsessive compulsive.

She had moved onto the second story of the house, pulling clothing and jewelry from drawers. Soon she would come into my room and then my brother's and sister's and put us in the car, saying we were going to stay at Mommom's. This happened occasionally, and always late at night. Usually we just drove around until the sun woke up. Then we would go home, and she and he continued their fight, sometimes with more shouting, sometimes with silence.

I had come down from my room for a glass of apple juice. But the one with a cow jumping over the moon lay on the floor, broken. It was the only cup I would drink juice from. He was on his knees when I walked into the kitchen. My father's hands out before him, he was meticulously maneuvering larger pieces of glass to the trash can while avoiding the small splinter-like ones. His neck craned when he heard the pitter-patter of my feet.

Hi, Sweetie, my dad said. Stay where you are. I don't want you to get a boo-boo. He leaned back and slowly rose, now a giant before me. He carefully walked through the maze of glass until he was standing in front of me. He picked me up; I wrapped my arms around his neck. He smelled both musty and fresh at the same time, hints of his aftershave still on his skin from the morning. His cheeks were a deep pink like the stickers I wore as an angel in *The Nutcracker* ballet. From his green irises sprouted vines of red. My father seemed defeated, like he'd been to war and lost the battle, but I knew it wasn't over. My mother wasn't done until there were no survivors left.

He told me if I drank my apple juice out of one of the plastic cups tonight, he would buy me a new glass tomorrow. Any kind I wanted. I agreed.

He filled a small orange cup with juice and snapped a clear sippy lid on it. And even though I wasn't a baby anymore, I said, Daddy, don't put me down, and he didn't. He cradled me in his arms, telling me a story about a dragon and a hero as she continued to throw and smash things above us.

Like a spider weaving her web, my memories expanded over time, strands of silk eventually covering this one, leaving it forgotten. Hidden. It was lost for twenty years, not coming back to me until I arrived at my parents' house twenty minutes ago to find the kitchen floor and counters covered in broken glass. It was surreal; I felt like I was five years old again coming downstairs for a glass of apple juice. My mother had been at it again, breaking dishes, glasses, an expensive vase he had bought her for their fortieth anniversary. The vase had been large and pale blue in color. Pieces of it were scattered on the counter and floor like crystal tears. He was sitting on the other side of the room, away from the wreckage, tending to a cut on his pointer finger from a shard of glass. It was strange to see him bleed; I had never seen my hero wounded before. My father said she had thrown the vase at his head. Luckily, he had ducked in time.

Tears welled in my eyes, my hands balled in fists. Where is she? I asked.

He shook his head. She left, he said. He didn't know where she'd gone.

I knew my father wasn't lying in an attempt to protect her. Mom-mom's house no longer existed; it was sold and torn down the same month she was placed in the ground. There was nowhere else for my mother to go; this was her only home now. My mother was gone, who knows for how long, but maybe that was for the best. I said, I'm sorry. You deserve better.

He didn't counter my words. Instead, he said, Thank you.

I walked up to him and threw my arms around him. He was no longer a giant or a dragon-slaying hero, but an aging, tired man. He was smaller than I'd ever seen him, shriveled, fragile as glass in my arms. I love you, Dad, I said.

I love you too, he said.

I squeezed him, breathing in the familiar mixture of sweat and after-shave on his skin, my hands still balled into fists.