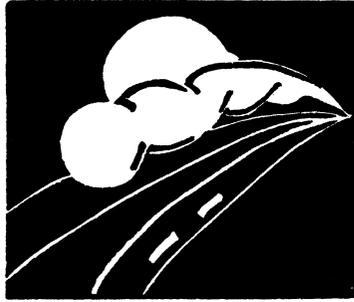


Clair De Lune

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*Winner, Freshman
SKETCH Contest*



PPRIM little theme, like a child's labored scales—prim little beginning, with your shy hints of fairies—oh, but very decorous fairies, to be sure, fairies who know their place. And, here, a piano lone and awkward in a rug-bared room—a piano piled high with words and notes and mating-calls—a piano and a stranger and I.

Clair de Lune. It was under a book of Ellington and on top of "I'll Be Seeing You." We'd stopped dancing. Then he said what do you want me to play and I said can you play this and he said I used to I'll try and I said I like it and he said I do too. We sat down on the piano bench and he slapped the music onto the rack. He took a long breath and tensed his fingers- - -

The fingers pounced onto the keys and thumped out the melody precisely. Calm little melody, spun of clear, candid moonlight.

But the mist creeps in to deepen the melody. White-dressed, a pale vague girl-child pipes her shrill song to the moon. (Oh moon, moon in the meadow, come down to the crickets and me.) Her arms stretch out, white ribbons in the moon-mist—(Climb down them to me.) The rustle of the trees and the sleepy-talk of feathered things and the sighing ripple of the grasses, and the lone girl-child in the meadow—(Aren't *you* lonely, moon, off there in the beyond? Come down, moon, to me!)

The mist and the music swirl and sweep her away.

Pierrot and Pierrette, black and betasseled—child-book silhouettes standing forever in naked white night. And Clair de Lune- - -

"Good Pierrot, I beg you,
In the moonlight bright,

Your quill pen to lend me - -"

The melody is wandering, trilling into unseen wisps and tinkling into longing. It mounts and dances and drowns me in yesterday- - -

Three o'clock on a mist-hung summer morning. Watching for the smoke-feather to sweep into the station and devour it. Clutching the arm in its alien khaki and whispering "au revoir—it's just au revoir" to mock the strange terror of good-bye. Then a chatter and a roar and damp lips brushed over mine and suddenly empty arms—and a face at the window. A chug and a swish and a lingering whisper—out of the pool of light, into the moon and gone. Into the moon and gone. And the whispered au revairs come out—"Good-bye."

The throbbing piano, that girl-child again in her ecstasy of yearning. Sobbing for the moon—clutching with empty arms—searching for the fairies and losing their footsteps in the deep meadow grass. Clair de Lune, are you shrieking? Do you weep for the fairies that you know can't be?

And I—and I—I'm here beside a stranger, aching for wings to fly to the lonely moon, to follow the train-smoke. Let me go, let me pierce through the veil of good-bye!

But would I find the moon—or would it just dodge me? Oh, the moon's a planet, and train smoke is a chemical formula, and love—maybe love is a formula, too.

"Burned out is my candle,

And my fire's out, too- - -"

Clair de Lune, you're back to the earth now, you're a sensible tune—you know *can* from *can't-be's*. And the moon? It's a picture up there on the wall. Clair de Lune is music pianissimo—played softly. Au revoir is good-bye, and the girl-child is vanished, and the face at the window—strong, tanned face- - -

It's gone, too.

Play me Ellington and mating-calls. Desire me, stranger. I'm back from the moon.

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Bill is singing earnestly, his lips turned out like an egg-cup.

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the fenceposts, catching the headlights' glare, stiff-dance in silent staccato rhythm.

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Main Street is a false front against the evening sky. Men with briefcases walk in long heavy steps, and women's heels click to the sickly blink of a restaurant.