

**SISTERS
OF THE
MOON**

About the Author

Marie-Louise Fitzpatrick is an award-winning Irish author and illustrator. Her books include *Dark Warning*, *Hagwitch*, *There* and *Owl Bat Bat Owl*. Her YA novel *On Midnight Beach* received rave reviews and was shortlisted for the Carnegie Medal and the Irish Book Awards and longlisted for the UKLA Book Awards.

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For Róisín, with love

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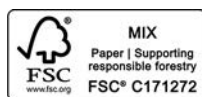
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This story ends with me watching my best
friend fly off a cliff.

Consider yourself warned.

1

I don't know what summoned me into the garden that night. It wasn't the moonlight because there was none, not when I first crept outside. But once I was out, it felt like I was where I was supposed to be.

I'd spent the entire day tracking my end-of-summer blues around the house, wandering from kitchen to living room to kitchen to bedroom to living room to kitchen. I suppose I was looking for Mum, searching for traces of her in the furniture and the everyday utensils, the stuff that had travelled with Dad and me when we moved here.

'A new beginning,' Dad had said when we arrived in this cute seaside town eight months ago. But neither of us had been ready to begin anything. We unlocked the front door, blanked the neighbours, ignored Christmas and zoned out on the sofa, the same sofa we'd spent the previous four months zoned out on at

our old home. Now, as I walked the new house on Mum's first anniversary, it felt like I should be doing something, marking the day. Dad hadn't booked an anniversary service or anything like that – our family doesn't do religion. 'It's just another day, love,' he said that morning, even though he was shuffling around the kitchen in his pyjamas at eleven thirty.

It wasn't.

If I live to be one hundred, the twenty-sixth of August will never be 'just another day'. I don't believe in an afterlife but it felt wrong not to mark the date Mum died. I had this urge to do something, I just couldn't figure out what that something might be.

Mum was into rituals; she was an ask-the-universe/read-the-signs/consult-the-Tarot kind of person. I considered suggesting to Dad that we attempt a ritual for Mum but he spent most of the day in his bedroom. Eventually I went to my own room and shut the door. It was ten minutes to midnight when I found my feet taking me down the stairs and through the kitchen, out the patio door, into the garden.

'I'm cutting it fine, Mum,' I whispered to the night sky. 'But here I am. It's still your anniversary. I miss you. We miss you. We're living your dream, Mum – we left the city for the sea, just like you always planned – but life is crap without you. Dad's a zombie,

and I'm not much better.' I stopped. My voice was quavering. 'I should have brought a candle. You always lit candles when you did this sort of thing. I'll get a candle.'

As I turned to go back in the house, a cloud shifted above me and the garden flooded with light. I looked up and saw the moon. It was full: a disco ball suspended above the garden. No need for a candle, then. It felt like a sign, even though I didn't believe in signs.

'This is where you'd say, "Make a wish, Suzy" – right, Mum?'

Mum was always dragging me out into the garden of our old house to greet the full moon when I was a kid. I smiled at the memory and felt my body unclench a little.

'OK,' I said. 'I'll make a wish or two, in your honour. Where do I start? Let's see. I don't have any friends in my new school and I didn't keep in touch with my old crowd back home so it's been a looong, quiet summer. On the plus side, I've read a stack of books and taken a lot of solo walks on the beach.' I paused. 'I'm still afraid of the dark, Mum. And then there's the period thing.'

Sharp inhale, slow exhale. The 'period thing' was becoming a serious issue. Mine had stopped six months after Mum died.

‘Delayed shock,’ Dr Zhang had said when I trailed all the way back to Stoneybatter to pay her a visit. ‘It’s not terribly unusual. I’m sure they’ll kick in again in no time.’

But that was May. Dr Zhang had warned me that I’d need to go for tests if it went on too long and I knew this was way past too long.

‘I’m scared, Mum,’ I said to the night sky. ‘If I have to get tests I’ll have to tell Dad. He’ll flip out. Which would make a change from him being catatonic, but I don’t think I can handle his anxiety on top of my own. What if there is something really wrong with me?’

I felt a whisper of fear trickle up my gut. I had been telling myself that I didn’t care and who needs periods anyway, but somewhere underneath I was terrified and I hadn’t admitted it to myself till now.

What the hell, Suzy Button? I thought. You turn sixteen next weekend and you’ve been ignoring the fact that you haven’t had a period for six months? Seriously? If something’s wrong, it’s six months worse now, you frigging tulip.

A burst of hysterical laughter filled the garden. I clapped my hand to my mouth to hold it in. I began to shiver so I wrapped my arms around my body and paced up and down the garden path to walk the fear out.

‘OK. I’ll ring Dr Zhang tomorrow after school, I promise, Mum. I will.’ I stopped and looked up at the moon, shimmering and silver, with a halo of light around it. I remembered the last time Mum had tried to get me to make a moon-wish and her face when I’d refused – that semi-regretful, semi-proud face parents make when they see you’re growing up and away. I was snarly and mean – as snarly and mean as a newly turned teen could be – rejecting Mum’s gentle ideas about expressing your wishes/manifesting your dreams with one big gush of contempt.

‘It’s just rubbish,’ I’d yelled that night. ‘Whatever happens, happens. You can’t stop it and you can’t make stuff happen either. Wishing is a waste of time. I’m not doing it any more, and you can’t make me.’ I’d stomped back inside to watch whatever stupid TV programme happened to be the most important thing in the world to me and my friends that week. Now, on her first anniversary, I’d have given anything to wish on the moon with Mum again. Wishing in her honour was as close as I could get.

I faced the moon, uncurled my arms and raised them up to the sky. ‘Hey there, Moon,’ I said. My voice came out a little too loud, I suppose because I felt like ten types of *eejit*. *Get over yourself, Suzy*, I said. *Do this for Mum*. ‘It’s been a while, Moon,’ I said,

sounding more like real me. ‘I have a few wishes for you. The traditional three, in fact.

‘I’d like a friend, please. She doesn’t have to be best-friends-forever material, just someone to hang around with so I’m not on my own all the time, like a pathetic loser.’

I swallowed hard. My uniform was ironed, my schoolbag was packed. Next day was the first of the new school year, and I was dreading it. I’d been on my own the entire summer but now I’d be alone in a crowd. In an all-girls school like Star of the Sea, being alone is pretty much the same as walking around naked. The class I joined when we moved here in January was an even twenty until I knocked it off balance.

‘OK. Wish number two: I’d like to stop being such a baby about the dark. I turn sixteen this week and I’m too old to be scared of shadows.

‘And wish number three: my period. Please, make my body function normally again.’

Normal. That’s what I wanted to be. I couldn’t have my mum back but I could be some kind of normal. I walked to the patio door and stepped inside. As I pushed the door closed, I raised my hand to the sky.

‘Goodnight, Mum,’ I whispered. ‘Goodnight, Moon.’