

# A DAYTIME MOON



KERRI SCHLOTTMAN

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*A Daytime Moon, a novel excerpt*

At a park, at the edge of fall, sparrows peck the seasoned grass. The dry sprigs catch and flutter in their beaks. They make a Greek key pattern across the gray-green clearing—a twittering of uncoordinated activity. And then, all at once, they spook and take to flight, assembling a whipping lash of black in the deep blue sky. Their wings beat the air in a great *shush*. Their hearts rush four hundred and sixty beats per minute, like little drums against their keel-shaped sternums.

There are other things here: a kyphotic sycamore that sways slow in the breeze, a troop of sallow marsh in the near distance, a knuckle of land rising from the otherwise monotonous horizon. And beyond that, too, a river. Above that, the sun, a silky screen of clouds, the forked tail of exhaust from an airplane long gone now. I follow a dirt path.

The language of this place is whispery, spoken in microscopic particles and phyla, a low-level cadence of complex acoustics. It hums. It groans. Its vocals are soggy and yet soft. Like poetry, it keeps me trying to find something.

I've come here to tell a story. And it starts like this. Inside.

I tell it to the leaves, to the breeze. About a mother whose belly swells. Inside. Ella and I rap and wriggle, swap and tangle. We buzz in our translucent cocoon, monoamniotic, a clinging closeness. We marvel at the edges, stretching webby limbs to their outer reaches. Outside. Mama touches her belly, smiles, and says, *They're kicking*. Cole's hand is somewhere above the surface. But it's not a kick. It's a test of the perimeter, an outline of the confinement. We need to know where we start and where we end. Ella's alien oval eyes stare at mine in wonder. Even then, her lungs are lost to my own, labored to my strength. A speck of umbilical afterthought, like stardust in a universe, clings to her chin. Debris, from the inside. She takes it on. We develop like this, side by side, giving and taking. And then.

It's secluded, this place. That's the point, for Mama and for Dane, but not for this, not for a need like this. The pulse of life quakes unrestricted. Ella's eyes widen in the trapping. She goes first, digested, disposed. I fearfully watch her sink in and then out. My fingers trail the insides, animalistic, grasping for an anchor. They unforgivingly scrape the lifeline. It resists, but loosens, clenched in my grip. Like a reed in a tide, it comes.

Mama bleeds out. And just like that, Mama is no more.

There on the floor with Dane in despair and Cole, a new big brother in wonder. My first memory, hidden somewhere in the tangle of recollection, is Cole's dirty finger sweeping my mouth, tickling my throat. I cough out the membrane between there and here. Between inside and out. Ella is at my side, already angry. We have arrived.

There are good things. Cole makes a fantasy land of the playa, his imagination is a stage on which we enact grand performances. We are superheroes with capes made of pillowcases and masks cut from socks. We are astronauts zooming into the dark unknown, fearless in our curiosity. Firefighters and robbers and police and dance judges and famous singers. We mine Dane's drawers and Mama's art supplies for props and costumes. And then we are adolescents. We are adults, but we are not adults. Dane moves us from his home to our own home. We stay up too late and miss school and don't do homework and eat the wrong things, and Ella's asthma is a grizzly roar we learn to control with inhalants and medicines. We know the pharmacist and the nurse and the doctor who only comes out to our town every other week like a slow patrol.

Ella grows the way I do. Overnight, it seems. We go to sleep with board-like bodies and wake with small curves and historic aches. Cole gets a shadow on his cheek and lip, rubs at it self-consciously until the postman brings him a razor, shows him how to drag it across his face. The neighborhood raises us with little nudges and suggestions in the right direction. A waitress teaches Ella how to use a tampon, standing outside the bathroom door whispering instructions as she watches out for who needs a coffee refill. Ella teaches me the things she learns first, which are

most of the things.



I've come here to tell a story. I walk the path. A rotting fence holds the marsh behind its mossy angles. The reeds bend over its edges. The seedy cattails are stoic in the sunlight. Dane takes us to the water's edge. *It's poisoned*, he says. *See this?* The white granules of sand are really pulverized bones. What once shifted and swayed fish in the murky lakebed, what flapped birds' wings in aerodynamic wonder, what fed and sustained, is now defiled. The salt killed the fish who killed the birds. When he's not looking, we make castles of it.

But Ella is in trouble. She is *fast*, they say. *Loose*. She takes up the backs of motorcycles and the hips of boys who are actually men. She bends like the reeds under their shoulders and arms and tells me to stop when I tell her I worry. Her lightning bolt strikes wooden surfaces and cracking facades, leaves nicks on her fingertips, and spray paint in her nailbeds. At home, alone in our shared room, I can feel the heat of mouths on her neck, groping hands that startle me awake. And then the dare that parts water and drops her through, sinking. Just like that, now Ella is no more.

The hill's incline is enough to feel, but I'm compelled to get to the top. But then the path dips and descends, and I realize there was no apex, just a rounded mirage of anticipation. It's behind me now, and in front is the river—the surface sparkles. I look back, but from here, there never was a hill, just a slight sigh in elevation.

After that? I leave. I steal what I can find, pack a bag and hitch a ride and buy a truck and drive as fast as I can, as far as I can. There are boyfriends and menial jobs and a small thought about finishing high school, but there is a line constantly towing, and it takes me to New York City, to Lizzy—my best friend, my whole life, to a city that gets so cold in the winter that my first January in a rented room that should be a closet, I wonder if I might actually die from it. Die from the way it slows the rush of blood in my veins, the way it crystallizes in my lungs and aches in

the dips of my ribs.



But before then. Before me and Ella. Cole no longer totters from the couch to the chair to a hand held out for him. His little legs are like new branches, a slighter version of a day from now, a month later a shapely limb.

Isn't he old enough to remember the man?

He stays for enough days that Cole starts to share his toys. And then Mama, under the starlight, just a wisp of white in the blanket of dusty darkness, cries. Only the one time. Then it's the business of life making. Sore swells of breasts with blue-gold veins, a path of pigment from navel sunk between her legs. She eats. So much. She paints, sitting in her flowered underpants by the creaky box fan. Alien landscapes of brick hues. They are stark things but always have one element of beauty. Cole drums gently on Mama's belly, says, *Please come out now*, to his swimming sisters. It becomes his first memory.

But the man's eyes are mine, though I always thought that mine were Cole's and that ours were Mama's. But no, it's so clear looking at him now that I wonder how I was ever persuaded to think otherwise. He blinks our golden eyes. The park inside my mind dissolves. I've gone far inside and come back out. We sit at a café in Santa Barbara whose air is thick with the dirty scent of beans. There's barista prattle and the hiss of steam.

He has a story too. About a beautiful woman that he never meant to meet. How she danced on a slab of concrete at night, a mirage in the dense darkness of the place he was only visiting. He sees things that Dane never did, and in his mind, I find a new version of Mama. Mama as goddess, Mama as aura as heat and light, the coma of a blazing comet.

"It was an affair," he says in a quieter tone, leaning closer to deliver the words. "I suppose she didn't want to disrupt my life."

His mind is stumbling to understand why she did not tell him, while his

eyes remain wet from the news of Ella, her death, though a decade ago, is a loss he didn't even know he'd suffered. I focus on the lines around his mouth, how to tell how much a person smiles. His are deep ridges under a layer of peppery stubble. He's handsome and carries the ruddy suntan of California living, bronze with a hint of red on the nose and forehead. I know from my Internet search about the time he spends offland. I've seen the photos of windbreakers and dock shoes, the visors and Zinc oxide. The links to articles and journals and news stories.

"Maybe she was going to at some point," I say. "You know, after we were born or something." I offer this since I can see the pain closing in around him and already, I care about that.

"Maybe," he says, but we recognize the uncertainty in each other's delivery.

"Are you still *married?*" I say the word married with the same whispery voice he used for *affair*. Why either of us has lowered our voices is amusing as we're the only ones here.

He shakes his head and frowns. "We divorced soon after that. It was already heading in that direction when I went out." He trails. "When I went out to the Salton Sea." Now he sighs and turns his mostly empty coffee cup around and around. It makes a wobbly sound on the intricate table tiling. "We were too young, got married right out of high school. I was in grad school when I met your mom. I went to the desert to collect a sample of the lakebeds for a research project."

My father is taller than I imagined, thin but fit. His name is Hudson, because his mother – my *grandmother!* – was a Rock Hudson fan. The name made it easy to find him. I recognize other parts of my body in his. We share bony wrists and long necks and the rounded curve of our chins that have a small indent, not a cleft, but like someone pressed there for a moment too long. His sandy hair has gone gray at the temples, and he touches it self-consciously, as if still surprised by the trickery of time. I can imagine him young, younger than I even am, dancing in the dark desert heat with Mama.

"So, I read recently about the birds?" It comes out as a question, though

it's not what I meant to say next. "Apparently, they're slowly vanishing. It's like habitat loss or pesticides. Do you ever wonder what life would be like with no birds?" He's watching me closely. "How long would it take people to notice they're gone? This article said there's three billion less now than when I was a kid, but who's even paying attention?" I stop and take a breath and worry that I've alarmed him because this is something I'd have said to Cole or definitely Lizzy, but this is Hudson and even though I am half of him, we are not yet anything to each other.

"Isa," he says, but then stops. He sighs and looks out the window onto a paved lot with a few cars angled across its cracked surface. "Well, I would notice." And I only realize I'm crying when he gently hands me a napkin.

There's no accounting for the lost time, it's simply vanished. We're quiet for some minutes, sipping what's left of our coffees, which feels both reassuring and pedestrian. We've had a version of the ordinary things you might ask someone new to you. He knows about my work, about Lizzy and that I feel lost. He's already doled out his first bit of fatherly advice, that I should take the GED.

"Would you tell me more about my mom?" I ask, because outside of Dane, Hudson is the only other person who has known her. And right now, sitting here with him, she is so clearly missing. "What did you know of her?"

A sliver of sunlight in the café window bisects his smile. "Well, I knew that she loved to paint. She said she always wished she could go to art school. She was very poetic in the way she talked. Everything was a metaphor." He looks far away for a minute. "She was wild for Cole, that was really obvious. He was her little star."

I can see three-year-old Cole there, with the two of them, and it almost makes me envious. "Did she ever talk about her family?"

He clamps his lips and shakes his head. "Only her younger sister," he says, and what comes next is muted, as if I'm hearing it underwater because Dane always said Mama was an only child. "She said her biggest regret was leaving her little sister behind." I must go pale because Hudson

touches my arm, says, “Isa, are you okay?” My breath drags as I inhale.  
*Little sister?*

“Wait, what?”

Hudson’s face turns in concentration. “What part of what?”

“Little sister? I don’t get it. Dane said she didn’t have any siblings, that she was an only child.”

He eyes me, carefully, but shakes his head slowly. “No, she did. I remember it vividly since it made her sad. Her name is Marina. I remember that too because it reminded me of the sea.” His hand stays on my arm. “I’m sorry to surprise you with this. I didn’t know it was new news for you.”

I shake my head and gently bring my arm away, wrap them both in a hug across the front of me. The coffee churns in my stomach, creeps up my chest with a fiery feeling. *A sister. An aunt. Family.* My mind spirals. And then: *Dane! What the fuck, Dane?* I press my hand to my mouth and ask Hudson if he might get me some water. He’s on his feet and at the counter in seconds, returns with a paper cup that I sip from.

“It’s okay,” I say since I realize I haven’t responded to his apology, even though now the words are confusing in their timing, as if I’m reassuring myself. “I just,” shake my head, “I can’t believe Dane didn’t tell us that.” I have to tell Cole this, but I don’t want to tell Cole this. Cole. Cole will not understand this, the same as I don’t understand this. And then I think of the small box of Mama’s things and my mind finds the photo there, a grainy colored square of two girls, laughing, skinny limbs and missing toothed smiles. Messy long hair. A fuzzy red Kool-Aid mustache on the younger one. How we assumed it was a friend because Dane said Mama was an only child. *Marina, Aunt Marina. Mama’s sister Marina.*

“Maybe he didn’t know,” he says, but it’s clear that neither of us believes it. He frowns. “All I know is back then Marina was living in Fresno, where your mom was from. But that was a long time ago.” He sighs and once again turns his coffee cup around and around with his long fingers.

“It’s hard,” I tell him, “when you have to rely on someone else to tell

you about your own life. Your own history, you know? My life has always felt incomplete because of it.” He nods since we are an example of this ourselves, a product of someone’s omission.

“I can help you find her, if you’d like?” He looks eager now and I try to smile.

“Thanks. I need to talk to Cole about it.” He nods.

“I’d like to see him,” he says. “Do you think he’d be up for it?” Cole only said he didn’t want to find his own dad, not mine. I think of the text from him that sits unanswered in my phone, asking me to call him as soon as I’m done. He’d been curious when I set this meeting with Hudson, if cautiously so. I think about our conversation the night after our bike trip when I said, *It’s going to change things. You know what I mean?* But even I didn’t know what I meant. I tell Hudson I’ll ask Cole. “You know,” he says, “I can’t fill in everything, but I can at least give you part of it. My part of it.” And we keep the conversation going because Mama is only half of it as much as she’s always felt like all of it.

Hudson tells me he had one older brother who passed away from pancreatic cancer. His parents are both dead, though only recently. I have just missed them. Alzheimer’s for the woman who would have been my grandma; heart disease for the man who would have been my grandpa. “They were good people,” he says. “My mom was a high school science teacher, and my dad owned a hardware store in town. Everyone knew them both because of it.”

“They sound really wonderful.” And I try not to dwell on these missing pieces because it will stoke my anger at Dane. “What’s your area of work?” I ask, even though I already kind of know. I’ve read a handful of the articles he’s published on the rising ocean temperatures.

“I’m currently studying climate change’s effect on a specific kind of amphipod.” Then, “Krill,” he clarifies, “and how their shortage is affecting marine mammals.” *Krill*. This is different from the articles I’ve read. And then I picture them, the whales, the forty-ton gray whales, beaching on these very shores. They moan their sorrowful song in my ears. It’s like a constellation the way the dots suddenly connect.

“I read about how the gray whales are dying.”

His eyes become thin lines. “In record numbers.” I wonder what he sees since it’s clear his thoughts cloud for a moment. He shakes his head. “We saw it coming, but it was already too late to do anything about it.” And I see Ella sink into the Salton Sea, that splash, the ripple of waves, the floundering old rowboat abandoned. It would take two days for the wind to blow that boat back to shore. “It’s a critical time right now. There’s a window, if you will.” His hand flips in the air, one of my own gestures.

We leave the café soon after since there is only so much emotion either of us can take in one day. Hudson hugs me at my rental car, and I wonder if it should feel different, this hug from my father. There should be something extra special about it, but it’s just a hug, and I have to tell myself over and over, this is a hug from my dad, to make it something special. As he waves from inside his Prius, I dial Cole’s number. He drops the phone when he answers and there’s a long swishing sound with muffled curses before he’s finally on the other end, in apology. “I’m driving,” he says, “but tell me everything.”



Back at the Airbnb I’ve rented, I fish around in my bag for Mama’s things, and I find the photo there, where I knew it would be. I study Marina’s face and compare it to Mama’s. There are many similarities but also uniqueness too. Mama’s face is longer, her cheekbones more pronounced. Marina’s is rounder with a different shape to her nose. Their lips are the same, thicker on top and a slight line below. Cole’s silence on the other end of the line still lingers like cold air in the room, his response to the news of Marina a simple, *okay*. I try to think of someone else to tell them about this, but there is no one.

Instead, I wedge the photo into the edge of a mirror in the bedroom. Mama and Marina watch as I unpack my bags. There are two bags now, one to hold Mama’s things and one to hold Lizzy’s too. Lizzy, my most

recent loss. She sits alongside my first loss, her ashes on this journey with me. They are heavy in the bottom of the second bag. I bring them to the bed and lay them next to me. And then I tell her about my day, about Hudson and Marina. *Can you believe I have an aunt? I might have cousins. What are the kids of cousins called? Not nieces and nephews. Like second cousins? But you know what I mean. I might have some of those too.* Far away, the New York City apartment sits vacant, emptied out of all life. I only kept the things of Lizzy's that would remind me of her - her tattered Joy Division shirt, a handful of art books, the little Buddha statue she loved to rub. The rest I set on the curbside for the quickest pickers. There's no returning there now. I sleep restless sleep, and when I wake two hours later, Lizzy's ashes are still at my side. The rest has shaved off some of my exhaustion from a six a.m. cross-country flight - JFK to LAX . It's almost incredible to think that this morning I was still in New York City. The world has changed in hours.

I get up and place Lizzy's ashes on the nightstand, then go to the kitchen to make coffee. This little rented guest house sits behind a Craftsman-style bungalow, picking up its charm in the eaves and patterned panes. The kitchen is painfully cute, with subway tiling and a wooden countertop. A row of matching knives clings to a magnetic strip behind the French press. Even the kettle is well planned with its pastel-colored belly, a perfect match to the tea towels, which also match the artisan rug under the ceramic sink area. Through the window, the homeowners sip wine perched at a high-top table on a patio under a pergola, wiry with trumpet vine. I was too tired when I met them this morning to remember much except for the way they seemed matched in their looks, her wavy chestnut hair and his deliberate beachy look. Something about yoga and a local health food store, if I needed anything. I check the clock, surprised to find it's five. Her head throws back in laughter. His hand moves to her shoulder. I fill the kettle then fill a glass with water and take it to the small couch where my phone is charging on a side table. The hiss of heat under the kettle is the only sound.

There's a text from Aaron, who has taken to texting me almost every

day since learning of Lizzy's death. Aaron, who has always waited for me to come back, no matter how far away I've run. I unplug the phone and swipe up to read it. *Just finished a job in Ojai, want company?* I start to write back, *I'm really tired*, but then I think of the couple sipping wine, and I'm lonely. I'm lonelier than I've ever felt before. I erase that message and instead say, *Yeah, sure*, and give him the address.

Aaron and I sit at a table overlooking the harbor. He's been here before and knows where to go. Oysters are on ice in front of us, beers in our hands. The nap and coffee have brought me back to life. His opened knees are outside my own. When he talks, they sway, catching me in little traps.

"This is my first oyster," I admit as I copy his preparation and then let it slide down my throat. It's salty and cool, but also kind of gross, exactly like something mined from the ocean would be.

"What do you think?"

"It could be gross," I admit. "I'm not sure we should be eating this." He smiles and touches my arm.

"It's good to see you." His knees trap mine.

"It's good to see you too." Despite my hesitation, I'm glad he's come. And I wonder why I didn't think to call him when I so desperately wanted someone to talk to that I chose Lizzy's ashes instead. We have another oyster, though I've put too much hot sauce on mine, and it burns the back of my nose before going down. My eyes threaten to water over, but the little tide recedes as quickly as it comes in.

"Do you remember the first time you saw the ocean?" he asks, and I do.

"Dane took us to Laguna Beach, but I don't remember how old I was." Cole and I stood small shoulder to small shoulder watching as Ella rushed the waves, unafraid. We hopped around the rocks, touching the silky sea creatures lampooned there, picking up hermit crabs by their shells and marveling as their bodies dropped like mobiles, flailing in the air for something solid. We sunburned that day, even Cole who was always a shade darker than us. We loaded back into the car with crispy skin and

sand-filled hair, our pockets full of seashells and beach glass. I tell him some of this. “What about you?” I ask.

He flips an oyster shell over into the crushed ice. “I was like at least thirteen or fourteen,” he says. “I can’t even remember what beach it was, but I remember the waves were so huge that I thought for sure they would break the surfers in half. There was no way in hell I was going in there. And I remember thinking how that was real water, not like our shitty sea. Like *real* water, ancient water, something that was here before we ever were. Those waves were so powerful, just pounding the shore over and over again.” He shakes his head and sips his beer.

“It makes you realize that we’re not that important,” I say. “And I mean that in a good way, not a sad way.”

He nods. “I know exactly what you mean.”

The harbor is quieting for the evening. A final sailboat slips into place as the sun sets over the ocean’s horizon with a small explosion of pastels as if it’s dipping into the earth instead of merely slinking to the other side of view, dawning a new day someplace far away.

“Do you want to tell me about your dad?” Aaron asks. His hand slips into mine and squeezes.

I take in a deep breath of the clean and refreshing air. “We have the same eyes,” I say. “And he seems sweet and kind.” I look out at the ocean swells that dissolve as quickly as they come. “It turns out I have an aunt. My mom had a sister.” Aaron’s grip tightens on my hand, and he realizes and lightens up. “Marina is her name. She lives in Fresno.”

“Wow.” He stares at me. The waiter comes, and Aaron orders us two more drinks. He wants to know how I’m feeling about all of this.

I shake my head. “I don’t know, angry? Happy? Excited? Super pissed off? It’s like all of that.”

“What did Cole say?”

“Not much.” Aaron nods because he gets that. I think about how I had worried Cole might crash his car, driving as we talked. I made him pull over to the side of the road to hear the news. “Obviously we’re going to find her.” But for some reason I don’t admit that I already have. Lizzy’s

laptop sits open at the rental house with all of the information right there, so easy to find.

“Isa, why did you leave?” Aaron asks. “Like before, why did you run away?”

The quick turn of the conversation is startling. I say, “Sometimes I can see things that’re going to happen,” and Aaron’s eyes squint as he considers where I’m going with this. “Like, sometimes I just know what’s coming.”

“Like a psychic?” he asks, and there’s an amused look on his face until he sees that there is not one on mine.

I shrug. “No, I don’t think so. But I get like visions. Not all the time.”

He’s more serious now. “Did you always have this?”

“Yeah, but only with Ella, like the twins thing people always talk about?” I trail here.

“That’s kind of trippy.” He drums his fork on the table between us. “Like, what kinds of things do you see?”

“I saw what happened to Ella before it did. I had a very clear vision of it repeatedly for a few weeks before it happened. I didn’t do anything to stop it.”

He leans closer to me. “Isa, you can’t blame yourself for that.”

“Well, I saw the whole thing. I mean, all of it. I just thought. I don’t know. I didn’t realize it was her. I thought I was seeing me.”

He touches my hand. “You know, I used to have this dream, all the time,” he says. “It was like I was falling through space and there was this whirling sound, but I couldn’t see anything. A few years ago, I was on a job, and I slipped and fell twenty feet and the whole time it was like I went into that dream. Like, it was the same sensation and sound, everything. I landed on this mound of mulch, and it saved my life. I never had that dream again afterward.”

“Wow, shit.” The oysters turn in my stomach, and I worry for a moment that I might be sick. “That’s pretty intense.”

“There’s no way I could have known from that recurring dream that it meant I was going to fall like that or when it would happen or even if it

would. My point is that you couldn't have stopped it from happening."

This is where he's wrong. I could have told Cole to stop teasing her. I could have run after her and held onto her and pulled her to the ground and sat on top of her to keep her from getting in that boat. I could have rushed into the water myself, dove under the salty layers and searched for her arms, her legs, her hair like a sea creature in the darkness there. But like the poisoned birds, I only stood there stunned. My silence makes Aaron think I've taken his point. He says, "So, when will you see your dad again?" as if the conversation hasn't just ripped me up.

"Saturday for dinner at his house," I reply with a slight coldness. "Cole is coming too." The part about Cole isn't yet true, but it will be.

"Cool," Aaron says. He sits back and squints a bit at me. "I could stick around for a couple of days. I mean, I just finished up that job." It's more than an offer of friendship, and I can read this easily in the way he seems nervous in suggesting it. Our drinks arrive and I sip mine and somehow not answering is answering yes. His knees rest against mine.

I awake in the night, restless and unable to quiet my mind. The night is silent, almost irrationally so. No sounds of a city and not even the whisper of wind or a rustle in the garden outside the window. No sirens or cars or the other din of noise my ears once tuned to so that it became a constant, like white noise, hushing my thoughts. Only faintly is the sound of Aaron sleeping. I stretch and try a new position. But it all just wakes me more. I finally get out of bed and feel my way out of the room. I walk through the modest beam from a stovetop light in the kitchen, towards the front door.

Out in the night, I sit on the front step and close my eyes. There's a breeze, but it's warm and it lifts up parts of my hair and tosses them away. Out here, in it, there is sound. The air in the orange trees, a critter stealing a bloom from the garden. The low drumming of a moth against a pane of glass. The birds roost in the thick shrubbery that lines the modest property, hidden from view, but I can feel them there, alive and resting.

When Lizzy found out she was sick, she said, *I'll come back to haunt you.* It was her dark sense of humor, a way to cope with the news of the tumor

in her kidney. I told her she could just not die instead, but even then, I knew that we had found out too late. That the tumor was only one thing in a mesh of many other things. But now I call to her in my mind, *Where are you?* because she has not yet come.

A lone light shines in one of the rooms in the bungalow, likely a nightlight with its small and delicate orb. And then I see a child in the window, his hand pressing against the pane. I lift mine in a little wave and he does the same, and we both stare up at the dome of sky above us, an endless black abyss clinging a splattering of stars and half of the moon. I hear it then, a shriek or ding, a full and fast shrill from somewhere above, from the sky or the stars or the moon. It's a blip, so fast I might have imagined it. But I know it's her, a radio burst from an outer realm, because we have always been like two stars locked in orbit, whispering back and forth a secret language of tiny explosions and echoing murmurs. I glance back, but the boy is gone. There is only Lizzy in her own galaxy, brighter than the blazing chatter. She shows me the whole universe in a single sound.





**Kerri Schlottman's** novel *Tell Me One Thing* is forthcoming from Regal House Publishing in January 2023. She is the author of three additional indie published novels. Her writing has recently been featured in *The Dillydoun Review*, *Belle Ombre*, and *Women Writers*. Her work has been honored with the Dillydoun International Fiction Prize (second place), Dzanc Books Prize for Fiction (longlisted), and the 2021 University of New Orleans Press Lab Prize (semifinalist). Kerri holds an MA in English from Wayne State University in her hometown of Detroit and has worked with artists in various capacities since 2001. She has also been a factory worker, a massage therapist, and taught art to incarcerated youth. She lives in the NYC area with her husband, their beloved dog Jupiter, and many, many books. [www.kerrischlottman.com](http://www.kerrischlottman.com)  
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