



By the Light of the Moon  
Luna Luciana  
June 13th, 2016



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A Bear Tale by Ali Lawrence



On September 28th, 2015 a wild red moon orbited so close to Earth it eclipsed the Sun.

Nearer than ever before, it shone like a star. Like a fiery, hot star - except, it was the moon.

Promising the harvest.

Promising the night.

Promising to light up the dark.

High above the gold of the eastern mountain tips, but low and close, burning bright into the sky, we traced its luminous shadows. Full of force, a howl, endings and beginnings - we watched it rise and heard its call, and so we made you.

Like your sister, you had been waiting for us and not the other way around.



The first week of October you were a tiny wonder I was having deep in the secrets of my mind.

By the 7th, a Wednesday morning, Dada, Rafi and I laid in bed getting ready to start the day when all of a sudden I burst into tears unexpectedly. Feral motions had swept my entire body. Dada had already moved into the kitchen to start his coffee with Rafi close behind him. Without even realizing it, I had drifted into the bathroom and was unwrapping a pregnancy test.

A few minutes later a plus sign filled the tiny space made for enormous answers. Without hesitation I ran into the hall closet and grabbed a little gift bag and a plastic bag and called for Rafi. Her little feet came fast. I asked her to carry the present into the kitchen and give it to Dada.

I followed closely behind. Sweetly he accepted the bag and took out the plastic ziploc, slowly making out the shape of its contents.

"No way, no way" he repeated at least ten times in sincere disbelief before throwing his arms around me and then Rafi, giving all of us the kind of hug that only he can.



You were given a due date of June 12th after a quick and preliminary phone appointment.

Early into the pregnancy it was clear that contending with Rafi's birth was going to require some dedicated care. Coincidentally, upon migrating over from Walnut Creek Kaiser to our beloved Oakland I was offered an appointment with Dr. Minikel, the surgeon who had delivered Rafi.

She was everything we had remembered, but more. Having had some initial pre-natal appointments already with our previous doctor, we dove right into the deep end with Dr. Minikel, swimming the collective memories of Rafi's birth. She let us ask as many questions as we liked, and there were a lot. Never did she hesitate to support my dreams of a VBAC, she'd only offer the most necessary pieces of information and occasionally respond with, "well, if you were my sister, I'd say this to you..."

We welcomed her fine balance of warmth, knowledge, honesty and realism into this pregnancy. Both Dada and I trusted her and felt safe in her care.

Wanting a VBAC was something I was sure of, but to attempt and hopefully achieve this outcome, the right kind of self-care, encouragement, support and healing were all non-negotiables.

The hunt for the ideal doula began with a dedicated search for a specialist in VBAC deliveries. With decades of experience and lists of recommendations pointing right to her, Holly quickly emerged as our perfect fit. We met in person on a rainy afternoon in March. Her kind, maternal and confident energy assured us that she would make a great guide to us in this process.

As the weeks went on I searched for you in my dreams. I'd close my eyes and try to imagine who it was we'd be meeting in late spring. With you growing inside me came waves of powerful feelings - despite their acuity, you remained a little mystery we loved chasing.

And then somewhere in my second trimester in the dark early morning hours, Rafi awoke before the Sun to come cuddle in bed. We laid there with our heads touching, completely still. I wondered silently if Rafi would have a brother or a sister over and over again like a song on repeat. Moments later in her sweet and quiet morning voice, she looked up at me and asked, "brother or sister, mama?"

And so Rafi became our oracle.

Just like with Rafi we decided not to find out if you were a girl or boy until we finally met face to face, so we had only old wives tests and our Rafi for clues.

According to her, sometimes you were a boy, sometimes a girl, and on occasion, you were a dragon - the family favorite.





You felt beautiful inside me, calm and gently growing, allowing me to dance my entire pregnancy. Helping me to stay healthy and agile when results came back in my third trimester that my body wasn't processing sugars, all but eliminating them from my diet - you kept me fit, despite my deep longing for cupcakes.

At 31 weeks an ultrasound showed us that you were breech. I panicked, fearful that this would interfere with a VBAC delivery - Dr. Minikel suggested moxibustion, a practice used in Eastern Medicine. As fast as I could, I sought out an acupuncturist who specialized in pre-natal care.

Yume made house calls.

Within a few days she was in our living room, arranging our couch pillows and teaching Dada exactly where to hold the moxie at my pinky toes and showing him the most yin pressure points of my body at my ankles. As perscribed by Yume, we burned the moxie for seven days total. On the fifth, I woke in the middle of the night to a powerful shifting sensation in the center of my body.

You had turned.

One day adrift in April, I just couldn't quiet my mind. Thoughts about your birth were swirling around, I was practically levitating with anxiety. It was midday and nobody was home and I wasn't getting any work done anyhow so I went outside and laid in the grass, closed my eyes and started to breathe. I imagined being in labor. Dada beside me, Holly and your God-mama Megan at my feet. As my breathing deepened, so did every detail. The room completely in focus, the sound of everyone's voice echoed, and soon, I was allowing the birth to take place in my mind, free from fear. And right into the crystalline of my daydream, you arrived, so serene, a girl - the entire universe folded into the smile still stretched across my face when I opened my eyes.

I kept that moment close for the remaining weeks of my pregnancy, and each time I felt afraid or uncertain, I would close my eyes, breathe and remember where I met you first.





On Thursday, June 9th I had my final ultrasound with Dr. Minikel. I learned that I was about 1 cm dilated and 80-90% effaced.

I had every intention of taking it easy until you came...

That Saturday Rafi and I went to Ama's in the morning. We pulled Rafi in the wagon to the park where we ran into some family friends. Rafi was full of joy, her sweet little giggle filling the air all around us.

Once we left Rafi went to Ama's for a nap and I went for glorious pre-natal massage. As soon as it was over I rushed back to Ama's, picked up Rafi and drove us to the pool where we met Dada.

The air rippled with heat and a body of water was the only thing that made sense. We three (plus you) splashed around for the rest of the afternoon.



The next morning I woke to heavy cramping. I checked in with Holly and Kaiser and they both confirmed that this was nothing unusual for someone to feel on their due date. It was June 12th after all. The advice nurse said that until the contractions were five minutes apart for an hour, to just go on about my business.

We met Cheka, Teo and Drew at the Farmer's Market and took the kids to the park. Cheka laughed at my spacey behavior and swore I was in early labor. Despite my tired body, my mind was full of energy and I was already wondering what we should do later that day after Rafi's nap. But by 3pm I was on the couch watching a movie and trying to remember when my last contraction was. I called Megan and she agreed, just like Cheka had observed earlier in the day, I was in the beginning stages of labor.

I was full of distraction, it was as though each contraction came out of nowhere, without any rhythm, until about an hour later when they spiked in severity and frequency.

If you were really coming we decided that it would be best for Ama to come and get Rafi for dinner and keep her for the night.

We waited for Ama with a strange mix of sadness and excitement. We hoped that Rafi would somehow understand it all.

When the front door closed behind Ama and Rafi, I cried.

This version of her was leaving forever and her life was about to change so profoundly in a way so far outside of my control.





Dada and I ate dinner and I showered, cramping the whole time. By 7pm, once all the activity had ceased, my contractions began to organize. I was using an app to monitor their frequency. By 9pm they were about 8 minutes apart and stopping me in my tracks. By 10pm I was in bed moaning through each contraction and Dada was keeping track of their consistency on his phone, as I could do nothing more than brace myself. By 11pm Dada deemed it time to go. It took at least another hour to get into the car, everything felt impossible to do, including loading myself into a passenger seat.

The drive was miserable. We called Holly to report that contractions were five minutes apart.

I breathed, moaned and clenched my fists through each contraction the entire ride.



At 1am we arrived to a virtually empty Labor and Delivery floor. We waited several excruciatingly long minutes to be escorted into triage. Holly swept in shortly after, all smiles, just as the nurse started to check my vitals.

The doctor on duty came in to check my cervix. I was 3.5 cm, very stretchy and 90% effaced. Expecting more dilation by then, panic took over. Memories of the same disappointment I had in early labor with Rafi took over. Just like in that moment with you, I had been sure there was more progress by the time we got to the hospital. The tears came fast.

The doctor wanted to send me home. We suspected, however, that after some time with my chart she learned I was a VBAC patient and instead, about 20 minutes later, we were admitted and I was rolled into room number 3.

In triage I had made a request for a dose of fentanyl to help ease the pain and help me rest, particularly after learning I still had a ways to go.

The door to our labor room opened and there was Doug, our nurse.



Doug was already hard at work getting my antibiotics ready as I had tested positive for Group Strep B as well as my dose of fentanyl.

My initial surprise of a male Labor and Delivery nurse vanished with his incredible competence and easy bedside manner, I knew right away I was in good hands.

The midwife on duty, Katie, came in to meet me. As soon as the initial rush was over and I was as settled as I could be, I laid on my side to rest.



Through each contraction I imagined ascending, step by step; my body the path, my body the container for everything. I reached into the quietest place I could find and searched for bravery and stamina. I surrounded myself with the love and guidance that I had been cultivating since the moment I learned you would be mine. And when fear hovered, I wove it in with hope - holding onto my dream of a natural birth. It was a dance. While pain took over and I was so hot I thought I might melt, I kept traveling back to the place where you and I first met and continued on our trip forward together.

At about 3:40am it felt as though there were no breaks in the contractions. I could hardly keep up - the intensity sent me into deperate pleas for any kind of help. I called out for an epidural, but my trusty team coached me right past that request by offering me a shower, signaling me to keep fighting, reminding me that I was making progress and to remember to trust my body and rely on my strength.

"Why aren't they stopping?" I cried out at one point. Holly then touched the top of my hand and quietly said, "I think you are in transition." Triumph and fascination swept over me. This was the threshold, the frontier - the bridge that would take me to you.

Katie came back at 4am to check my cervix, I was 6 cm and at -1 station. Your heart rate was dipping during contractions so I was given oxygen by mask. It soothed us both and soon the decelerations resolved.

I began to feel pressure. Doug got on the phone to call Katie in again to check my cervix. There was a feeling of knowing in the room. Dada stood close at my left feeding me ice chips, fanning my face and wetting a small towel with cool water at my request that I wore on my face. Holly was to my right by my feet, encouraging me while Doug moved about the room monitoring my medical needs. The team was perfectly in sync.

Katie arrived and checked my cervix at 4:20am. I was at 9 cm with just a rim of cervix left. She asked if she could check again while I contracted. I breathed in deep, the contraction came, she checked and then found that I was complete at +1 station.

My body held all my determination, fear, excitement and power.





At 4:35am Doug got me ready to push. He grabbed my hands and said, "OK mama, here's what we're gonna do. Each contraction you're gonna take a deep breath and hold it like you are diving under water and then you are going to push so hard like you're going to the bathroom. You're just going to focus on pushing, not yelling. We aren't spending any precious energy on anything else but pushing. And you're gonna do that three times every contraction."

And with that, Doug became my guide.

The excitement eclipsed the fear and joined forces with the pain. Each contraction became an opportunity. It was so hard.

I was so tired. But you were coming. The clock on the wall directly in front of me said 5am and I thought, I'm going to meet you by 5:30am.

A few sets of pushes later Doug announced that he could see the top of your head and guided my hand to you so I could feel you for the first time.

A moment later I looked up and Doug was on the phone calling Katie back in - I heard him say that we were close.





The room became my daydream. I was pushing, Holly was at my feet on the right, Doug on the left and Dada by my side. In my mind, deep inside, past every part I had ever known, I found the path to you. Past fear, past everyone and everything else that existed. I called in support from the universe, I looked to my inner sky for strength, healing, courage and love.

And before Katie could come in to catch you, your head was guided out by Doug and in the next contraction your body into the brightness of the world and right into the arms of the male resident standing by.



I reached for you right away, lifting my body up to see you between my legs. "oh my god, it's a girl." I announced to the room. "Welcome, you made it honey." As you were passed into my waiting arms, my entire body was a universe of joy.

"I did it, oh my god, I did it. Welcome to earth."

Your eyes were wide open. Not crying, you were so sweet and calm. Resting softly and aware and when you were ready you began to nurse. My perfect little fit.





Later that day, Ama and Bumpa brought Rafi to the hospital to meet you.

The door swung open and in she flew right into bed with you and me. She asked to hold you. We gently rested you into her arms. She held you so carefully and looked at you long and hard and without a space between her heart and mind she said, "I love you so much, baby sister."





Once we were three and now we are everything.

Luna Luciana Acampora

June 13th, 2016

5:24am

8lbs. 2 oz. 20.75"L

Born into the first quarter of a new moon,  
in an election year full of loss, transition and tumult.

Joining this beautiful world, full of suffering-  
bringing with you a meditation on light, so that we may learn to see,  
despite the dark.





