

THE MOONLIT PAGE

A Complicated Lake



Mara had ten minutes before she needed to go back to the shop.

She thought that would be enough time to watch one circle.

A pine cone had dropped from a branch beside the boardwalk. It made a small plop, settled on the water and sent a ring out from its middle. Behind that ring came another, then another.

Mara chose the first one.

It widened past the reflection of a post. She leaned her forearms on the railing and followed its thin edge towards a patch of reeds.

A duck crossed the water farther out.

Its wake reached the ring before the ring reached the reeds. The neat curve became several small moving lines. Mara could no longer tell which one had belonged to the pine cone.

She looked back at the cone.

There were still faint ripples near it. She chose another and watched it approach the next post. The water curled around the wood, making a pattern more complicated than the one she had started with.

“All right,” she said, very quietly.

The lake offered no simpler version.

Instead of following a ripple, she watched the cone itself. One pale scale showed above the water. As the cone turned, the pale patch went out of sight and came back again.

This was easier.

It drifted slowly towards the boardwalk, turned once more and disappeared beneath the edge.

Mara moved a few steps along the railing to where she could see past the end post. She kept her shoes on the boards and waited.

A man passing with a folded newspaper paused beside her.

“Something interesting?”

“A pine cone.”

He looked at the water.

“At the moment it's offstage,” she added.

They waited together until it emerged, slightly farther out than Mara had expected.

“There it is,” the man said.

He carried on towards the benches. Mara looked once at the time, then stayed for another turn of the pale scale.

The cone touched the post, swung gently away and went on across the strip of sunlight beyond the boardwalk.

To remember

1. On a short break, Mara sees a falling pine cone make rings and chooses one ripple to follow.
2. A duck's wake and then a boardwalk post complicate the patterns, so she changes from tracking ripples to watching the floating cone.
3. When it drifts beneath the boardwalk edge, she walks along the safe boards to a better viewpoint; a passing adult joins the brief wait.
4. The cone reappears, turns its pale scale into view and drifts past the post into sunlight.