

Under blue, quilted sky, dark and quiet, blue blanket night skies, she heard a bird, the angel voice, Miss Momma on folded wings, “This moon is for you, Little Girl. See, it glows from the inside out, peepin’ through cotton tufts to light your way. Take this pieced and paneled map, nine patched and keep it close.”

One red eye, the morning sun, opened over the low hills of poplar trees and peered through the finger branches. Little Girl gave back the day and unto Caesar what was his. She washed and hung and laid them straight, the sheets to bleach in the noon day’s sun, all lined up like school girls in their Sunday best. The sky turned across the earth, and shadows, long cast from poplar trees, faded when she wasn’t looking.

“This moon is for you, Little Girl. See it glows from the inside out, peepin’ through cotton tufts to light your way. Take this pieced and paneled map, nine patched and keep it close.” And in stillness, when Little Girl did nothing, that’s when she was really doing something. When she let her eyes go soft, she saw the road hidden in plain sight. Miss Momma had pieced the way to go, and when Little Girl was big enough that when she pulled the quilt to her chin, her toes stared open to the night air, her feet were ready for walking. She would follow the code stitched in time, saving nine.

The morning sun, pink and weary-eyed purple, woke the rooster’s crow that chased the owls away. Little Girl lit the fires and gave to Caesar what was his. She swept the porch and all of yesterday into the yard. She beat the rug like dust was the dickens, and when the poplar leaves waved goodnight, Little Girl heard Miss Momma on the wind.

“This moon is for you, Little Girl. See it glows from the inside out, peepin’ through cotton tufts to light your way. Take this pieced and paneled map, nine patched and keep it close.” Little Girl read by the moon from left to right and started at the top. The first patch of her quilt was the deepest dye of indigo blue with acorns scattered among oak leaves. Little Girl gathered up the night, and in the darkness, the deepest dye of indigo, she walked the miles to the grove of oak trees where acorns fell for cookies.

The morning sun stayed distant in low clouds creeping and turned a blind eye so that Little Girl was invisible in the fog and rain, sleeping and sheltered from the grey day in the oak grove. When the last clap of thunder closed shut the day, all the rain clouds, tired from their work, drifted to sleep. The moon with silver stitching shimmered through.

“This moon is for you, Little Girl. See it glows from the inside out, peepin’ through cotton tufts to light your way. Take this pieced and paneled map, nine patched and keep it close.” The second panel of her quilt unrolled stripes in yellow, then green and yellow, five of each. Little Girl walked straight and true, five miles in silver night where a corn field lay in rows of yellow, then green and yellow. Little Girl walked in faith through the corn, the whole world on its ear. Her first friend, the scarecrow, straw-stuffed on his wooden cross, pointed to a chicken coop long deserted of hens and fox.

The morning sun, shiny and new, flashed the sky to turquoise, and Little Girl snuggled in dry cornhusks and clean straw in the chicken chapel. Like stain-glass windows, day glistened through the quilt in “thank you, Jesus” rays and danced the colors all around until Sunday supper evening came.

“This moon is for you, Little Girl. See it glows from the inside out, peepin’ through cotton tufts to light your way. Take this pieced and paneled map, nine patched and keep it close.” The third panel of her quilted map was a star. Star light, star bright, first star she saw that night. The sky was black and infinite, and only the North Star twinkled. Little Girl followed the Big Dipper and sang her way, each verse to lead her on until she and the stars both were silenced with song of chickadees.

The morning sun glistened dew on jewels of a berried thicket. Chickadees called her welcome, and into the thicket Little Girl crawled, careful of thorns to snag her map. In the warm belly of the berry-jeweled thicket, Little Girl was lullabyed by daytime sounds.

In the fourth night, more birds for Little Girl to follow. Flying geese, their wings of fabric were sewn in winter grey on the fourth panel of her quilt. When the moon was for her, glowing from the inside out to light her way, she took her pieced and paneled map, nine

patched, and keeping it close, followed the geese with wings on her feet. And when the flying night was over, the geese left Little Girl in far flung hills somewhere distant and unknown.

The morning sun shimmered through hill and hollow and dissolved the wings on Little Girl's feet. She sent up a prayer from the mountaintop, sure to make a fast delivery, and fell asleep beneath the cloak of her quilt.

Whispering from close and wild heaven, "This moon is for you, Little Girl. See it glows from the inside out, peepin' through cotton tufts to light your way. Take this pieced and paneled map, nine patched and keep it close." In the fifth square was an echo of everywhere she looked. These hills, round and winding, dipping into valleys and curving into bends. Little Girl had prayed to find her way and now she was lost. Which way down or up and over? Little Girl looked around and around until the hills were spinning. She sat on the quilt and cried because she didn't know what else to do.

Just then Little Girl heard a sound chugging through the valley... around the bend... over a hilltop, "You're already there. You're already there. You're already there." A tin man's pipe smoke curled and billowed around the mountain. A train was coming, saying, "You're already there. You're already there." The sixth square was plaid... railroad tracks! Little Girl snatched up the quilt and ran to meet the train, calling, "I'm already there. I'm already there." Little Girl chased the steam engine, towering with its clouds of smoke, over a hill where the whole world came into view, and there was a log cabin promising, "Little Girl, you're home." But the morning light glared from the smoke and made Little Girl squint her eyes. In an instant, the train was gone... around a bend or over a mountain or in a valley... but gone. The day had broken, so Little Girl slept... her heart broken, too.

"This moon is for you, Little Girl. See it glows from the inside out, peepin' through cotton tufts to light your way. Take this pieced and paneled map, nine patched and keep it close." But Little Girl was tired, and so she didn't budge. "This moon is for you, Little Girl." Little Girl tried to keep on sleeping. "This moon is for you, Little Girl." Little Girl half opened one eye to see a zebra walk past in the night. She thought she must be dreaming when she saw

another, but it was the distant rumble growing louder and louder that sent Little Girl to her feet. An elephant, as real and grey as the moon above, almost stepped right on her. Those next few moments in the night, all of Africa walked past. Little Girl had no choice but to follow. She walked for hours, lit by moon glow, following Africa.

Before the last star put out its light, she was at a river, the seventh square on her map. It was the most beautiful river Little Girl had ever seen. Lions and tigers, peacocks and zebras, elephants with their babies all drank at its banks. Little Girl dove into the waters and splashed for joy. She swam across the river, quilt piled high in a fancy twist upon her head, and climbed through the cattails on the other shore. The morning sun was waiting there, and so Little Girl slept in the reeds like the baby Moses.

“This moon is for you, Little Girl. See it glows from the inside out, peepin’ through cotton tufts to light your way. Take this pieced and paneled map, nine patched and keep it close.” This side of the river, the moon lit the pebbles of a road, and so Little Girl walked on ahead. Her feet were sore and swollen, and her quilt, nine patched, pieced and paneled, was ragged on the edges, but Little Girl walked on. And when she came to a crossroads, she had seen it coming, the eighth panel of her map. Something inside was pulling her like a magnet to the right. She felt it tug at her heart and draw at her lungs, to the right, to the right. Little Girl closed her eyes and put one foot over the right side of the crossroad. That was it. She clutched her quilt to her belly and ran down the road as fast as she could. She wasn’t waiting one more night to see the ninth panel. It was a log cabin, and Little Girl was getting there before sun up because this moon was for her! She ran down that crossroad and not once looked back or to the left. She could feel herself glowing from the inside out, running and peepin’ over cotton tufts, lighting her own way. She took her pieced and paneled map, nine patched, nine patched. “This moon is for you, Little Girl.” Miss Momma stood on the steps of a log cabin, her round face smiling like the moon, her arms stretched wide, and Little Girl leapt into her waiting hug. “This moon is for you, Little Girl.”