

Praise for *Find the Moon*

“Beth Fehlbaum vividly writes about teens in impossible situations. Her characters try their best to use every ounce of their strength to cope with unfair and neglectful circumstances. But Beth's writing goes further than the inner struggle of abused and forgotten children. The miracles forged from group involvement and support are realistically depicted in this and all the other Fehlbaum novels. Kylie in *Find The Moon* is this lost character until she finds and uses the always-there-if-you-look-for-it group support to cope with abuse and build meaning for a better and bigger future.”

~Dr. Matt Jaremko, Co-author with Beth Fehlbaum of
TRAUMA RECOVERY: SESSIONS WITH DR. MATT

“Both heartbreaking and joyfully uplifting, this is the story of the bravery and resilience of a girl who has lived life at its absolute worst and found her way out, often in spite of herself. Kylie is a superhero, braver and stronger than she ever believed she could be. I couldn't put it down.”

~Debbie VanZandt, Librarian, Tuloso-Midway
High School, Corpus Christi, TX and Vice-President
Teen Bookfest by the Bay

“Equal parts grit and grace, *Find the Moon* is a harrowing, hopeful triumph! Once again, Beth Fehlbaum proves herself a rockstar truth-teller at the top of her game.”

~ *Steven Parlato, Author of THE NAMESAKE and
THE PRECIOUS DREADFUL*

Find the Moon is one of those wonderful novels that compels readers to close the back cover, saying, “That’s me.” Beth Fehlbaum has written *Find the Moon* with unique authenticity. It is a story you will believe, and one that will stay with you. This novel is going to be around for a while!

~ *Chris Crutcher, recipient of the
Margaret A. Edwards Award, the ALAN Award, and
the NCTE National Intellectual Freedom Award.*

FIND THE MOON

BY
BETH FEHLBAUM



Names, characters, businesses, places, events, and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events, is purely coincidental.

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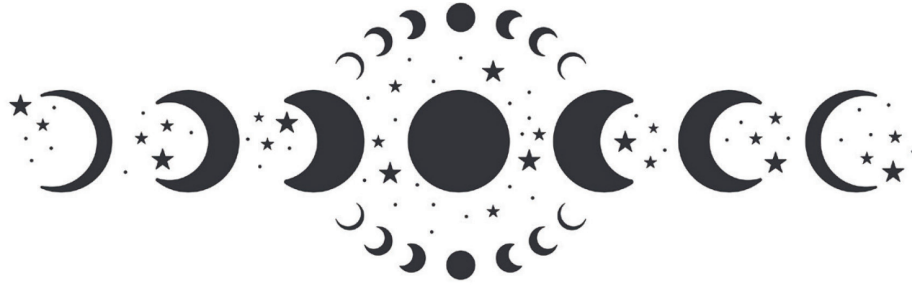
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“And the moon said to me - my darling daughter, you do not have to be whole in order to shine.”

~ Nichole McElhaney

*For Fantasia Bryant, Riley Horton-Wilson, Hazel Madison
Montgomery, Aliza Perez, and Meagan Runyon, whose
passion for the creative process is proof that art is love and
love is art. The world is better for having you in it.*

Chapter One



Late August

This year will monumentally suck. What kind of lunatic English teacher gives homework the first day of school? *Seriously?* The last ten minutes of class, Ms. Moses goes, “You each have a different quote, and there’s no *wrong way* to do this. I want your answers to be *the authentic you*.” She even formed air quotes with her fingers around “authentic,” and we all made big eyes at each other, like, *This bitch is crazy. I hate* these “get to know you” assignments. Jesus, I’d rather have boring-ass reading passages with multiple-choice answers.

I read the instructions again: *Analyze and relate this quote to three personal examples from your life: Know thyself, know thy enemy. A thousand battles, a thousand victories.* –Sun Tzu.

Thunder rattles the bus, sets off screams and giggles from the little kids in the back. My friend Chyann elbows

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me. “Hey, you wanna come over later?”

No, your stepdad’s a friggin’ pervert, and I avoid those guys when I can. I pretend to consider the invite. “I dunno; let me see if—”

“—Your mom says you can?”

Sure, that’s it. I cram the homework into my bag. The bus lurches to a stop in front of my house, and I start up the aisle.

She calls, “Come over if you can!”

I nod, but that’s a lie, too.



Glittery purple rain boots jut out from our trailer skirt. The faded pink housecoat just above the pasty white legs identifies the owner of those boots as Mrs. McCain, the curtain-twitching hag who lives next door. She must be looking for her terrorist chihuahua, Prezzi, A.K.A. “You Little Shit.” He has a thing for the skunks that live under our trailer.

The second my feet hit the ground, the brown rat-dog rockets from a gap in the sheet metal, arcs ’round me—all tiny razor-teeth and high-pitched snarl—then it’s right back to his skunk hunt.

Mrs. McCain pulls herself upright; it’s a miracle our porch rail doesn’t break off in her hand. She lasers beady eyes at me, shrieks, “Don’t hurt Prezzi!”—furrows her eyebrows, which appear to have been applied with a thick black marker. “Where’d he—?”

I point; Nosey-Bitch squats to the ground, lifts the loose trailer skirting and glares into the cave-like space. “Dammit! *You!* Little! *Shit!* Get out of there!”

Our front door swings open, and my stomach goes

squenchy. Ever since Mrs. McCain accused Mama of breaking into her trailer, it's like the old woman is looking for a reason to call the cops on us. If she goes to jail again, what'll happen to Aliza 'n me? My little sister wasn't born last time Mama went to jail. I was sent to a group home for six months.

It was awful.

Aliza steps onto the porch. She's wearing a floppy straw hat, one of my t-shirts as a dress, teetering on Mama's super-high heels, and carrying an Easter basket. She's covered head-to-toe with shimmery eyeshadow, smears of red, and strokes of black. I don't wear makeup, but Mama does, and she never lets Aliza play with it, which means... *Oh, crap. If Aliza's been in Mama's room, it means she left her alone. Again...*

My sister blinks, bends and scratches her foot, straightens, glances curiously at Nosey-Bitch, looks past her to me, and breaks out in a clown-mouth-sized lipstick grin.

I laugh.

The old lady bends at the waist, puts her hands on her knees and oozes fake friendliness: "Well, hey, there, little one! Are you playin' dress-up?"

I rush up our shaky steps, brush past Nosey-Bitch, and gush, "Liza, you look so pretty! Let's go inside!" I glare at the old woman, so obviously trying to get a good look inside our house.

She sing-songs, "Oh, *sweet* little Aliza. I'd *like* to visit with *your* mommy. Is she *home*?"

I snap, "*Of course* she is!"

Aliza practically sings, "*No*, she's *not*!" then spins, her arms in the air, shows off her outfit. "I'm ready. Let's go shoppin'!"

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I step into the house. “Mama went to the store today, baby. Come inside, and I’ll—”

Aliza puts her hands on her hips: her nails are painted up to her wrists. She blasts, “Mama’s not here, and *I hungry!*”

I reach for my sister but she ducks, whirls. I press words past gritted teeth: “Come inside, and I’ll make you something to eat.”

She stamps her foot. “We don’t *have* nothin’ to eat!”

I lunge once more for Aliza’s hand but Mrs. McCain snatches it first, pulls her close. “When’s the last time you ate, sweetie?”

Aliza grunts—her equivalent of *Step off!*—yanks her hand free, zips into the house. I start to close the door but my neighbor blocks it. “Your sister is hungry, and your mother isn’t here. Do you need *help*, hon?”

I press our door against the ancient one’s foot. “My mother *is* here. She’s asleep.”

Mrs. McCain narrows her eyes. “How do you know that? You just got home.”

“H-her job—it’s at night—s-so—she sleeps during the day.”

“*Who’s* watching that baby while you’re gone, makin’ sure she’s safe and fed and taken care of?”

I *THUD* the door in Nosey-Bitch’s face, turn the lock, bite my lip. *Go away-go away-go away.*

The porch whines in protest, rocks our trailer as Mrs. McCain navigates the wobbly steps. I slide to the window, watch as she starts toward her house—dead stops—catches me spying. I gasp-lurch from view, wait a few beats then peek again to see Mrs. McCain ascend her trailer steps, “You Little Shit” on her heels.

Aliza emerges from the hall closet—her usual hidey-hole when she’s freaked out. She’s ditched the hat and heels but found the can of Spaghettios I hid so she’d have something to eat. My sister squeals, giggles, holds the can high. “Look, Kylie! I gots ’ettios!”

I drop my backpack onto the chair, notice Mama’s purse on the sofa.

“Did ya hear me, Ky-Ky? I gots ’ettios!”

Sickening dread whispers, *Where’s Mama?*—but I put on my happy voice for Aliza. “You can eat after you take a bath!”

Aliza hugs the can of O-shaped pasta against her chest. “Eat first!”

“No, after.”

“Aw-w-w, *ma-a-an!*”

I pivot-nudge her toward the bathroom. “You’ll be able to eat more when your face is clean. When did Mama leave, ’Liza?”

Aliza holds the can overhead, rocks as she walks. “Um-m-m... *after* I eated cin’mon toast, but *before* I eated peanuh-buttah-jelly.” She cuts me a side-eye, curls her mouth into a little knot, lowers the can and hugs it against her chest, sighs, “I *love* you, ’ettios... Ky-Ky should let me eat you now...”

I tickle ’Liza’s ribs; she drops the can, squeals and skitters into the bathroom. My mind races with terrifying *Mama*-possibilities. “Take your clothes off, baby, and”—I cross to my mother’s bedroom—“I’ll be right there.”

I nudge the door open; it catches on god-knows-what on the floor. I take a deep breath, flip on the light, and tiptoe into Mama’s chaos. I look beside her bed, under it, inside the closet—just to be sure she’s not passed out—or

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worse. There's a Mama-size lump under the dirty clothes and tangled blankets. I step to the bed, hold my breath, press on the mound, and feel a whole-body sigh of relief when its softness gives way.

I move to the nightstand. Prescription bottles overflow from a wicker basket. I scan a few labels, notice the names: they're not Matilda Briscoe *or* Matilda Smith—the other name she uses—so whose are they? I open the top drawer, snort at a spring-cleaning issue of *Good Housekeeping* magazine. I read the name on the address label: Florence McCain. I toss the magazine aside, reveal a dozen or so medicine bottles beneath it, all with Mrs. McCain's name on them.

Aliza sneaks up behind me—"Um, Kylie-e-e, I'm gonna tell Mama you were in here!" I slam the drawer, turn to my sister. "You were, too."

Her eyes grow huge: instant tears. "Don't tell, 'kay?"

I hate it when she cries. It *kills* me. "I won't." I crouch like a runner on the starting line. "Betcha can't beat me to the bathtub!"

Aliza giggles. "I can, too!" She skitters out the door.

I follow her, close the door behind me. Mrs. McCain's voice echoes in my head: *Who's watching that baby while you're gone, makin' sure she's safe and fed and taken care of?*

I whisper, "Nobody."



I settle into my chair beside the front door. Thunder vibrates the window just above my head. I rise to my knees, check the seal on a duct tape-repair I made over a jagged

crack. Seems to be holding up... maybe I should try duct-taping a piece of sheet metal over the gap in the trailer skirt so that Mrs. McCain won't have her rat-dog's skunk-hunting as an excuse to spy on us. I angle my face against the glass, watch for another flash of lightning, scan the skies for the moon. Not that I really expect to find it in the daytime, but if I can, it'll calm my nerves just a little. Always does, and—I don't know why—but it always has. Just one of my weirdo habits.

I pull my spiral notebook from my backpack. *Hmm, now what would be a perfect title for the wacko Ms. Moses' assignment?* I've got it: "WTF?" I shake my head, knowing full well that I *can't* leave the title so plain. I stretch, shade the letters to make them pop off the page. *Much* better. I drop to the next line, write: *I authentically despise your assignment, and I know exactly what you're up to.*

Aliza calls, "I finished, Kylie."

I scan the quote again. *Know thy enemy...?* WTF does this teacher think I am, a warrior? I return to the title, darken the lines on the *F* to make my opinion of this lame-ass assignment extra-super-clear.

Aliza whines, "I *said* I finished."

I remain focused on my work-of-art title. "Put your plate in the trash, then."

A Spaghettios-stained paper plate plops onto my homework. "I *can't* throw it away, Kylie. I *busy* watchin' *Curious George*."

I fling the plate like a Frisbee toward the kitchen then glance at the TV screen. As usual, it's just wavy static punctuated with blobs of color. "Yeah? Point to Curious George. I don't see a silly little monkey." I return to my work: *You want to know about me, but there's nothing to tell.*