

Luna Rose

by Susanne Gervay

I don't want a birthday party this year except my 'best' friend Carla harasses me. 'You have to. Thirteen is the big one.' I give in, as always.

Carla is fourteen already. She used to be skinny with a cute smile. Now she's stunning with deep green eyes and long blond hair that swings as she sways her hips. My hair is still short wavy brown and my eyes are shadowy. Everyone's changed since they've turned thirteen. I don't want to change. Thirteen is an unlucky number.

The party. Carla and I spend all day getting the garden cabin ready with balloons, streamers, glow-in-the-dark moons and stars. Carla's funny as she dances around on tip-toes pretending to be a movie star. We laugh and the knot in my stomach softens. 'The party'll be fun,' Carla promises. 'You're thirteen today.'

I was born one minute before midnight. 'A miracle baby,' Mum says. My parents weren't supposed to have babies. On the day I was due, my mother was crying. I was coming too quickly, too soon. My father drove wildly to the hospital, but he didn't make it. A rose garden just seemed to appear and I was born under the moon. It was a hard birth, but the moon let me go. Mum thanks the moon ever since. She named me 'Luna Rose'.

Carla and I are getting ready together which means Carla spending three hours putting make up on, throwing dresses and tops onto the floor. She's checking out the thirteenth

pair of ear-rings. I bury myself in my quilt, listening to Carla ranting about the boys she hates, the boys she loves, hates, loves, hates, loves. My head's a mess. I don't want to be thirteen. I slip into my gossamer skirt and petal blouse.

Mum and Dad are sitting on wooden chairs outside the house. They're the security - the bodyguards, bouncers and heavy-duty team. Mum's wearing her fluffy caramel tracksuit and looks like an exploding sausage. Dad thinks he's tough wearing his desperate woolly gray sleeveless jacket. He feels his woolly jacket. 'Cool,' he winks. That's right, if he's a sheep. Mum giggles because she really believes he looks cool.

I love my parents but I sometimes wonder if we're born on the same planet. They're so different to me. I couldn't stop laughing when Mum told me about her teenage birthday parties where they played charades, the limbo and danced to the Village People's YMCA.

Mum and Dad are determined that there'll be no gate crashers at my party. Cars slow down when they hear the music and see balloons. Then they spot the woolly jacket security team and zoom off beeping or laughing, except I'm sure a shadowy figure slipped in. Or maybe it was trees in the flickering moonlight.

Carla waits for the right entrance time and flounces into the garden cabin with me tagging behind her. The music's blaring but no one is dancing. Boys are stuck like mud in one corner and the girls in another. Carla spots a cute guy, then disappears outside. So much, for being my best friend. A few guys and girls connect up. The music is loud.

It's so hot inside and I wander into the garden. The moon is golden yellow. The roses smell like honey and I move towards them. I see Dad carrying the blazing birthday cake decorated with moons and roses. Mum's trailing behind him. Carla dances back into the cabin with the cute guy. 'Luna Rose, Luna Rose' floats across the flower beds. I want to go back into the cabin, but suddenly the moonlight catches me. The honey scent is trickling into my throat and I can't speak. They're calling me and I want to go inside, but I can't.

My heart's thudding. Thorns are scrapping my skin. I struggle to get up, but the moonbeams stun me. I want my father's woolly arms to hold me and my mother to stroke my cheek. Carla's voice pieces my ears. 'Luna Rose.' I'm trying to get to her. I want to hear her gossip about boys and how she loves and hates them. But there's only the moon, chilling fingers, another planet and shadows grasping. My eyes close.

One minute to midnight. The music stops. The candles burn out. Carla's screams pierce the dark. Dad wildly searches for me. Mum is crying.

Midnight. Thirteen. Gone.



