

Full Moon

Alexander was supposed to be dead, an expiration label stamped on his forehead for sundown. And yet he stood, proud and smiling. What did it feel like to cheat Death, to be unbound from the rules of life? He stared at the moon, high in the sky, full and gray and shining brightly in the cloudless sky. If he squinted, he could see a trio of horns that poked out of it, equal distance from each other, like volcanoes erupting from the face of the moon. They were his lifeline.

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Not half a moon cycle ago, Alexander received a letter. A waning crescent moon hung in the sky then, yellowish and waxy and small. Maybe it was the perspective in comparison to the grand willow that stood outside his house, or maybe it was the fact it looked so much larger in his life than it did before. Alexander's eyes darted across the page, the looping script of the best doctor money could offer on the page. He caught words, floating and popping from the page, *dying...heart...beating...the next waning gibbous*. The next waning gibbous, past the next full moon. One last drink of the silvery moonlight and he too, would depart to the stars.

Like a last hurrah, the final burst of energy animals got before they died, the moonlight would come to sustain him one last hour, twelve hours, and it would end.

It would end, *he* would end.

Alexander could not end.

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Alexander set the table for his family, preparing for their monthly moon meetings. They came from far and wide, little sprites from the corners of the world. Every twenty-eight days under the brightest moonlight they sparkled and glimmered from the night nutrients, and made a trek through the woods to band together and feast. It was the once a month time that moon-sprites like Alexander could meet again. Lonely and small by nature, like their patron the Moon, the small few hours they spared were greatly treasured. *How disappointed they would have been*, Alexander thought, *if they came today and I was already gone. Left with just a bottle of my ashy remnants, my soul to the stars.*

What he would do for his family, to remain together just a little longer. He was sure they'd want it too.

He glanced again at the sky, trying to gauge the time. The moon glowed proudly, huge and round.

Maybe a little too large.

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The last time Alexander had met with his family again, he nearly collapsed. He had arrived at his sister's abode, a hole in the ground beside a rushing waterfall, staggering and haggard from the journey. Despite the moon being as bright as it had ever been; clear and pearly, it was his heart that gave weak *ba-bumps* too fragile and timid to propel him forward. When he reached her doorstep, he closed his eyes-*just for a second*-and a late-arriving aunt had brought him inside, slumped on the mat at the entrance.

Alexander had pleaded for her not to say anything, but throughout the familial banter and activities, she eyed him closely.

"I'm fine, honestly," he lied, "I got chased by a monster on the way here. Honest."

But the second he had returned home, taking care to nourish himself an extra lot before leaving, he'd called the doctor, asking about the painful squeezing sensations in his chest.

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"Alex! My God, you look so thin!" A tall, lanky sprite walked through his door, not bothering to knock or announce herself. Waltzing straight to Alexander, she pinched his cheeks, shoving a large wrapped tin at him, "I made cookies for today! Special day, special day!"

Alexander winced slightly under her touch, "Hi mom-" he was interrupted by his cousin, who slapped him on the back, a jock-like greeting.

Alexander's house was filled to the brim with laughter and fun. Smiling contently at the scene: his sister entertaining a couple newly born nieces, his grandparents talking to their daughters, an uncle grilling the steaks on the stove, he couldn't help but think of how lucky he was. There was nothing he would trade for his family, not even the world.

They were gathered together, the clock striking a terrifying *gong* to signify midnight, when the television, which had been playing a kids' cartoon, paused. There was a *beep* like an alarm, and an automated voice came over the speakers, a red banner flooding the screen:

We come to you with breaking news. The moon is falling at rapid speeds towards our planet.

Alexander's family looked at each other, confused. His uncle was the first to break the tense silence, a roaring laughter. "What the hell do they mean, the moon?" He nudged Alexander's sister, seated beside him, "What are we in, Chicken Little? As much as I love the moon, no one here is gonna try and steal it like that."

Alexander's sister smiled half-heartedly, motioning him to quiet down, "I think that was Despicable Me, uncle." The newscast continued:

Do not panic; we have the worlds' best astrophysicists currently at work to remedy this peculiar issue. We have reasons to believe this action was manmade.

A pause, and then the newscaster shuffled her papers, *If you are the reason for this, please stop.*

And a blink, the cartoons connected back again on the television.

And all at once, everyone started talking.

"The moon is falling? What does that even mean?"

"Does that mean we'd be more powerful then?"

"Hey Alex, what the hell is happening anyway? Aren't you the astronaut wannabe here? Who's messing around in your lab?"

Ten pairs of eyes pinned on Alexander, a hush falling over the chatter.

"I? I dunno-I mean, yes but-you wouldn't understand. I think. Anyways, don't you think we should just-well-the moon's still out there so let's just have some fun okay?" he stammered, a shameful blush blooming beneath his cheeks, "I love y'all so cherish it, all-right?"

They all nodded, and no one seemed to notice his fidgeting fingers, wringing in the pains of his lie.

Alexander was supposed to be dead. Standing alone, outside at the dawn the next morning, everything felt weird. It was the way the skin stretched unnaturally over his bones in his clenched hand, holding still the doctor's letter. The way his family, for the first time, slept over at his house. The way the moon shone still, in the bright sunlight, the size of a basketball in the bright daylit sky, available still-and forever-for him to soak its shine.

The creak of the door startled his thoughts, "Alex? Is that you?"

A small brunette sprite stepped outside, eyes bleary with fatigue. "Oh, hey sis. What's up?"

"Did you do it?" All of a sudden she seemed to appear right before him, piercing gaze.

"Do what?"

"You did this, didn't you? Mess with the-freaking-planets?"

"What are you talking about?" Alexander shrunk away from her. It was naive of him to think his thin facade the night before got through to everyone.

"Don't play stupid. I'm not dumb and neither are you. Did you stop the moon?"

"So what if I did, look we're all so happy now. Together and everything-"

"We're going to *die* if you-"

"I was going to die." He thrust his letter to her, "and it's not fair. Why can everyone else have something I can't? Life?"

"Get ahold of yourself. You're being selfish and you know it."

"Selfish? Is it so awful not to want to be closer together? You know, all the other folk-the other sprites and the monsters-they aren't restricted to this once-a-month. It isn't *fair*, Andi."

"It isn't fair," she agreed, "but we all make the most of it. So get it out of your head, Alex, and move the damn rockets. You're off your rocker."

Alexander didn't move. His sister gave him another shove, a panic growing in her eyes, "I'm being serious, we're going to die. God, Alex, *please*."

A smile grew on his face, toothy and wild, "You can't make me." He opened his bony face towards the moon, close enough so you could see the craters on it, "You can't make me." He gave an ironic laugh, "It isn't fair. But I've done the math. There's four days left." He turned to his sister, a crazed look in his eyes, "Just make the most of it, I guess."