

A TRIP TO THE MOON

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I looked out over the water and wondered if anything truly existed beyond the horizon. Reports of monsters beneath the waves and gods above the clouds had been around since the dawn of time, but I wanted to know for sure. So, on the morning of my thirteenth birthday, as the sky turned pink and gold, I stole a ship from my father's fleet and sailed with my friend James past the pillars of Hercules into the West Ocean. On the twelfth day of the voyage, a storm blew down from heaven, so fierce the water itself was lifted in a spout from the ocean, and our ship with it. James and I lashed ourselves to the masts with heavy ropes, closed our eyes, and prayed.

When we opened our eyes again, we were on the shore of an unknown land. A group of men appeared and took us through a dense jungle to a palace at the top of a great mountain. We were marched through long empty corridors, until we came upon a blue carpet that was thrown aside to reveal a door cut into the floor. A silver key was produced by one of the men and the door in the floor was opened, revealing a long downward staircase. James and I were brought to the bottom, where we stepped into the

most wonderful crystal cavern. A sad-looking man was sitting on a throne made of gold.

“I am the King of the Moon,” he said. “Who are you?”

“The *moon*?” I said in shock. “We are on the *moon*?”

“Of course you are on the moon,” replied the King. “Where did you think you were?”

“The Earth!”

“Why would you be on the Earth?”

“It is where we live. It is where we came from.”

“The Earth? Then how did you get up *here*?”

“It must have been the storm,” I said.

“Well, you must have great powers,” said the King. “You will help us win the battle.”

“What battle?” asked James.

“*What battle?*” repeated the King, shocked. “The battle against the Sun!”

James got a familiar look on his face, and I knew he was not satisfied with this answer. “Why are you fighting with the Sun?” he asked. “You shine because of the reflected light of the Sun.”

I smiled at James, whose vast learning was one of the reasons I wanted him by my side on this trip. His friendship and loyalty were the other reasons.

“The Sun is a Monster who believes there should *never* be darkness or night!” proclaimed the King of the

Moon. "Without darkness, there is no *night*, and without night, there is no *sleep*, and without sleep, there are no *dreams*." The King of the Moon stood and raised his fist to the sky. "And without dreams, everything dies."

The ground beneath our feet began to rumble.

"Ah," said the King of the Moon, "the spiders from Mars have arrived."

The battle raged for five hundred years. The spiders from Mars spun webs between the planets and we rode in our ship across the galaxy. The Soldiers of the Sun, made of light so bright it hurt to look at them, were relentless as the war raged on. The Men of the Moon were overpowered and many died bravely around us. As the blinding enemy advanced on us, we found ourselves unable to fight them directly, and we thought all was lost. But James saw our shadows cast against the sails of the ship, and he realized these shadows could fight when we could not. James's shadow was bravest of all, leading the charge. I watched in awe as it single-handedly drove back the Soldiers of the Sun, until peace was called and balance was restored.

The King of the Moon, exhausted from the fight, asked James to take his place on the throne of the Moon. James said yes, as I knew he would, and vowed to be a good king.

On the morning of his coronation, he grabbed my

hand, and without saying a word, we had an entire conversation.

—*Stay.*

—*I can't. I don't belong here, but you do.*

—*I'm not sure I can do this on my own.*

—*I know you can.*

He reached out his hand and I held it. I closed my eyes so he wouldn't know the other thing I was thinking: *How am I going to live without you?*

I boarded our ship and sailed back to Earth on a cloud.

I wondered how much the world had changed in the five hundred years I'd been gone . . . and was utterly shocked when I saw my father, alive and well, waiting for me at the dock when the ship returned. He was angry I'd stolen one of his precious ships, and he pulled me from the vessel and dragged me home, where I was punished and sent to my room. Even though I had been fighting among the stars for centuries, only a few days had passed on Earth. No one believed my story, and when James's mother came to me, weeping on her knees, wanting to know where her son was, she found no comfort in learning he'd become a king. Out of her mind

with grief, she told me James must have fallen overboard and drowned. She blamed me for his death.

I can still hear the sound of her cries as my father led her from my room. “Murderer!” she called. “Bring me back my son!”

But James could not come back. He was on his throne, making sure the universe was safe for dreaming.

