

The Solace of the Moon

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“What are your plans since you’ve finished now?” Ruby studies me over her glass of lemonade, using the straw to slowly swirl the ice, which jingles when she lifts her cup, taking a sip. She carefully places the glass back down onto the wooden table.

“Urm... if I’m being honest, I’m not sure.” I lift my head, shakily meeting her cold yet gentle blue eyes.

“What would you like to do?” She tilts her head.

“I don’t know.” I pause, gulping. “I really don’t know.”

I watch people board the bus on the other side of the road.

“Hey, it’s okay,” Ruby reassures me.

I nod my head, cracking a smile. I space out, watching the endless waves of university graduates in gowns passing by; some come inside the pub, chattering in small groups. Back in year 7, I thought I had loads of time to decide what to do. So much time... Now I’ve finished college with hardly a clue.

“You okay, Josh?”

“Y-yeah. I’m fine.” I take a sip of my lemonade.

“To be honest, I don’t really know what I want to do either.” She pauses. “I think I’d like to get into freelance writing, though.” She slightly tilts her head. “Maybe write blogs, articles, things like that.”

Thump-thump-thump.

We both turn towards the entrance of the pub, where a tall man in biker boots is marching over to us. “Hey, meat bags!” Adam grins, but his hazel eyes leap from me to Ruby and back again.

Ruby and I exchange puzzled glances, laughing. “Hey, Adam!” we say.

“Sorry I’m late.” He pulls out a stool, sitting next to me, and cheers,
“Congratulations, Josh!”

“Thanks!”

Adam looks at Ruby. “And you too, you’ve survived your first year of uni.”

“Thanks.” Ruby nods.

“I’m really proud of you guys,” Adam says earnestly. “Especially you, lil bro.” He pats me on the back. I muster a smile, looking away as my eyes start to sting. We aren’t actually brothers, but Adam has always looked out for me. When Ruby wasn’t around, he was my guardian angel watching over me in secondary school. His presence was unrivalled; even the teachers were wary of him at first.

Adam sweeps a hand through his silky dark hair. “You guys want another drink?”

Ruby holds up her glass. “I’ll have the same one as this one.”

“I’ll have something sweet, please,” I say.

Adam nods. “I know just what you might like.” He traverses through the stools and glossy maple wood tables. But he returns quicker than expected, balancing the drinks precariously. He places the drinks in front of us

“Thanks.” Ruby and I say in sync. We glance at each other. We all laugh.

We reminisce on the times we’ve spent together. Adam usually visited me after college, dragging me along to socials and parties, which was exhausting but fun. He’d drag me with him to parties—that was not so fun. I often cringed at the way he would flirt with girls. Somehow, he always seemed to charm them.

During the holidays, when Ruby’s been back home from university, we went to cafés, had delicious parfaits and talked. Adam would occasionally tag along whenever he wasn’t snoozing during the day or working long nights. When Adam first met Ruby, he couldn’t stop talking about her. It made me happy that he liked her. However, Ruby was quite wary of him, leaving after only a few minutes of him being there. Eventually, Adam melted her icy façade. I was relieved that they got along in the end.

After a few hours at the pub, we decide to call it a day. As we exit, the coldness embraces us tightly. I shiver. Ruby shudders, rubbing her arms. Adam just stands in his t-shirt, glaring up at the moon, glistening in its fullness.

“Aren’t you cold?” Ruby asks him, huge clouds puffing from her breath.

“Nah. Not at all.”

She raises her eyebrows and giggles. “What are you?”

Adam tilts his head, smirking—a look I’ve seen a thousand times before. I sigh. Adam... please... not my sister.

“The moon is beautiful tonight.” Adam inches closer to Ruby. She edges backwards, hitting the fencing on the edge of the pavement. “Can you feel its pull?” Adam whispers, holding her gaze. “Because I can...”

Ruby’s face turns beetroot. Silence looms, long and uncomfortable... Until Ruby bursts out laughing, triggering the rest of us.

We follow the pavement round the corner, passing a few corner shops, a theatre and a supermarket, eventually arriving in front of a gate, a block of buildings beyond it.

“Right, I’m going to head back to my dorm.” Ruby hugs me and waves to Adam. Her dark leather coat sways as she swirls around, her boots clattering as she walks through the gate.

She taps her key fob. *Beep!* Then steps through the gate. We exchange one final wave, then Adam and I head for the train station.

“Ruby is adorable...” Adam contemplates.

“Of course *you’d* think that.” I roll my eyes.

“Do you mind if I ask her out?”

My stomach drops. I wince as a brisk breeze rushes past.

“Pfft. What?” I frown.

We arrive at the train station. The glass doors glide open.

“I don’t want you getting all weird with me if I date your sister.”

Silence.

“Sure,” I sigh. Then I lower my voice: “If you two do date, you better not break her heart.”

Adam stares at me for a few seconds. Finally, he nods. “Alright.”

I’d be really surprised if she does say yes but... Adam will probably fold anyway.

*

Arriving home, I head straight to my room. I reach for my phone in my pocket and see a few notifications stacked up on the lock screen:

Messenger

Ruby: Hey, did you get home okay?

22:15

Ruby: ??

22:45

Yeah, sorry for the late response.

22:51

Ruby: Yeah, you better be :P

Goodnight x

22:51

Goodnight x

22:51

Ruby: Me too.

*I thought I'd be used to it by now but
it still feels weird living at dorms.*

22:52

Tbh it gets a bit lonely sometimes

22:53

Yeah, I miss you

22:53

Ruby: I miss you too,
my beloved baby brother.

22:54

Ruby: It was nice seeing Adam today
He's such a jokester.

22:54

Yeah, he's hilarious!

22:55

*He's amazing,
always been there for me.*

22:56

Ruby: *Yeah. Honestly, I was quite sceptical at first.*

22:56

Yeah. You were so cold to him.

22:56

Ruby: *I was just looking out for you.*

22:57

Yeah, thanks sis.

22:57

Ruby: *You're always welcome
my beloved baby brother.*

22:58

I'm not a baby!

22:58

Ruby: *You are.*

Goodnight xx

22:59

I sigh, struggling to hold back my smile.

Nighty Night. Don't let the vampires bite xx

22:59

Ruby: *Oh, don't worry, I will!*

22:59

I giggle to myself, locking my phone, placing it beside the bedside lamp. I switch off the lamp and lay down...

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