

Same Moon

O. Sylvis had been walking home from the train station when he'd been texted a video link and switched over from listening to Fizz' *Strawberry Jam* to watch it. It was 9:43pm, and his bones ached. He adjusted his posture, awkwardly, and thought he probably looked like an idiot every time his silhouette caught in the pools of light from the streetlamps. He was alone, desperately alone, truthfully. After a year of dating someone he adored, someone he'd move the sun and moon for, their breakup six days earlier loomed over him the full height of Big Ben. Sylvis was distraught. None of this showed then, at exactly 9:43pm, in suburbia in complete denial of a headache, too. Pain, torment, longing. He was familiar with the path, and the road. The concrete beneath his feet.

He'd never reach home.

O. Sylvis halted in front a gawky bare tree in the midst of what he could effectively call woodland, halfway between the train station and his place. He'd been renting out a place with his high school friend, H. Caroll. He'd almost slipped up and called him a best friend, something they were more likely to call each other back then. Now, they bickered unnecessarily, because they shared the silly sort of responsibilities like taking out the trash and mowing the lawn. Now, they went several days without speaking to one another. Sylvis would slink in after a late shift, usually home at 10pm. He'd slam the front door closed, then swear under his breath. He would tiptoe down the hallway, cautious, nervous, then sigh, shake his head, and flush the toilet four times. Always wondering, always wondering. He was thinking maybe he enjoyed himself.

He squatted amongst the tall, unmowed grass and aimed his phone towards the upper branches of the tree. The lighting was terrible, it was dark save for the sliver of moon, and Sylvis was squinting at the screen as if checking to see if he caught something on film after all. He took a few snapshots. There was a breeze blowing tamely against his bare arms. It was peaceful, this darkness. For him, at least. When he was younger, his parents had awaited the phase in a kid's life where they were utterly terrified of the dark. There'd be request for nightlights shaped like octopi, and doors left slightly ajar, and soft whispers in the middle of night from him, saying, 'Can I just squeeze in the gap between Mummy and Daddy, I'm scared of the devil.' O. Sylvis had never been frightened of what could go bump in the dark. That night, he thought all that courage was paying off.

He captioned one shot with *I'm not blind* and sent it to another friend of his. For a while, he stood in place, watching the little reminder of how long ago he had sent the image flicker from seconds to minutes. It was almost 10pm, but he expected a response. His friend, K. June, had spent most of university bathing in all-nighters. Assignments for her were exhausting and laborious, but she also had

been obsessed with 100-percenting whatever video game obsession she had claimed all her own. Sylvis hesitated, staring off into the nothingness. He was still wearing his watch, but he couldn't read the face, nor did he have any use for it anymore. June was at home, in her inner-city apartment, fast asleep.

A silver car shone headlights in the dark and could've caught a self-assured Sylvis in its beam. He stalked toward the tree, head toward the ground, as if trying to avoid stepping on something. It reminded him of being out in the ocean, tentative paces with every rock presenting that chance it could be the poisonous rockfish. At the base of the monument, this sprawling yet demure tree, he checked his phone one last time—still nothing from June, definitely nothing from Carroll. He ditched his backpack. He sent his final text for the night right then: *if you're up, I'm going to be home late*. He thought, *why would it matter?*

Sylvis' palms were scratched up already from attempting to climb the tree, but he didn't care. Preservation, one of the things he'd been taught in Boy Scouts. He'd loved being outdoors on those camping trips. Flexibility, something he supposed he taught himself. He nimbly manoeuvred his leg at a painful angle, trusting in every sense but his eyesight for the ascent. Maybe he was a true dumbass.

His head was pounding. The branch would hopefully carry all of his weight as he fumbled to his feet. O. Sylvis was five foot eight and had lost a few kilos since graduating university, but he still felt strangely tall, and overwhelmingly out of shape. He was huffing like an enraged dragon in a damp, derelict cave. But overhead, there was glory. There was redemption. There was childhood, too. Using his fingers, all except his thumb, Sylvis blindly felt around for another branch. Blinking frequently, he suddenly envied a koala. There would be some justice in reaching the height, a barked summit, and then falling asleep with his paws around the shadowed figure. All a dream, of course.

Moonlight dimmed as a cloud passed by, and O. Sylvis thought he found the next branch to scale to. He navigated his feet, groaned at the tearing sensation, ignored that, and shimmied further up the tree. This was the sort of confidence he was missing with H. Carroll. They'd moved in together to save money, to split the cost of rent, but also because they had shared a night together a few months before move-in day, and maybe they both hoped something would eventually blossom between the two of them. But Sylvis was always too preoccupied to even ask if any of that mattered—with work, and stalking night monsters, and wallowing in a wrought hatred for the collapse of society. Carroll, he figured, was having plenty of sex without him.

The branch was thinner than expected, and the exhausted, worn-down climber struggled, with flailing arms and foggy vision. One second he thought he was clutching tightly to the limb, and the next he felt the only thing keeping him above the ground was that weak pocket between his thigh and the rest of his leg. O. Sylvis was spinning. He actually was insane. He knew it. Or he'd been stalking something

with the warped mind-control powers he'd only read about in comic books. His phone vibrated in his pocket, then tumbled out of it. New message from K. June.

It would be found in the grass a few feet from his body, almost entirely drained of battery. Someone had been messaging him with urgency, blip after blip, but they all disappeared by the time a police officer wanted to pay them attention. 'It wasn't me,' both H. Carroll and K. June said, when they were interviewed in a dingy backroom, both taking strained gulps of the coffee they'd been handed in nondescript white mugs.

Sylvis fell through the sky, envisioning himself amongst the stars. For his seventh birthday, he'd dictated from the floor of his bedroom where he wanted the glow-in-the-dark stickers placed. With arms behind his head, that was a therapeutic star-gazing, although at that age he didn't know the word *therapeutic*. He knew the word *monster*, though. His death was fairly instant. Perched high in the branches, he gave his body the once-over. *At least I look handsome*, he thought. He desperately craved the chance to stick around and watch the proceedings—would anyone start to think he had been murdered? He imagined the brief conclusion: O. Sylvis, 25, had the life beaten out of him in the middle of the night by an unknown assailant, or assailants.

Being a ghost suited him.

He would wait until sundown each day, observing whomever during the day, and then he would squat in front of that old, black sheep tree, and wonder whether he actually had lost his eyesight before he'd lost all of his other senses.