

Man on the Moon

by Franklin Goodish

We tell the kids.

They cry, and the little one hugs her older brother.

We agree to give it another month "as is".

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We tell the kids.

She bawls, and balls up hands into fists. He shrugs and then pats her little head and whispers something that even months later I won't work up the nerve to ask him about. They nod at us and leave the family room.

We look at each other and silently agree on another two, maybe three, weeks. Tops.

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We summon the kids.

They won't come into the family room.

We huddle, decide the where makes no difference.

They don't look up from their playroom TV.

She rolls her eyes. He blinks hard, maybe stifling a tear.

He hits a button and the frozen show blares to life.

We go have a Corona in the kitchen, my half poured into a glass. We agree she can have the house. We'll devise the agreement up so that other than child support the money I send her won't be taxed alimony. Fuck lawyers," we say before clinking.

She finishes up hers. "You never wanted kids anyway," she says before going to her bedroom.

I sit in mine, listening to "Old Man" once and then "Cats in the Cradle" repeatedly. Hundreds of times listening to it over the years and still no idea what he's saying. Is a little boy blowing the man in the moon? I get up from bed and look it up. Okay, that makes sense - "little boy blue and the man on the moon". Or does it? Maybe the boy wanders where his dad goes and assumes because planes are involved that the deadbeat is going to the moon? Hmm. I even listen to the Ugly Kid Joe version. I fall asleep perplexed and disheartened.

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The thumping wakes me up.

It takes a minute to realize I'm in the apartment, not the house.

"SO YOU DON'T FORGET ME" the note says. It's halfway sticking under my apartment door. Under the writing, a red tiger devours the head of a purple giraffe, or perhaps stegosaurus.

I shiver on the tiny wooden "deck" I've yet to adorn. The boy pedals his bike out of the parking lot and up the hill leading to the street that eventually leads to the house. It's 6 a.m. but still dark enough out that I am tempted to yell "BE CAREFUL!" or "WEAR YOUR COAT!".

I tape it to the wall in my room.

In the shower, I remind myself to put a note in the calendar to thank him for this latest one next weekend when I get to be his dad.

