

## ) METZTLI-MORI (

In the dark-curtained kitchen, Mori took a slow sip of her horchata. She sat cross-legged with a small, scribble-scuffed journal in her hands—the brainstorming journal. Her brows were furrowed with thought, but mainly annoyance. Not because of the levitating dishes noisily washing themselves clean or the strange, soft rhythmic clattering of jars in the cupboards. No, siree. All that was hardly a bother.

*It's gonna be another blisterin' bright day, so make sure to break out yer sunscreen 'n yer moonscreen, folks!*

The radio burbled on with the rest of its upsetting weather report. With a sigh, Mori recalled just how lovely the moon once was. Sure, sunlight was okay, but moonlight provided the proper conditions for her aesthetic! Oh, and her work.

Ever since a few days ago, the moon slunk in like a cheap imitation of the sun. Nighttime reduced to the glow of a glorified glowstick. A bargain bin star. While the moon's new lighting was significantly weaker than the sun, it still made night non-existent. This was awful for everyone, especially the nocturnal, the goth, and Mori.

All the townsfolk held their respective theories as to how the moon was suddenly emitting its own light: aliens, the apocalypse, chemiluminescence. But Mori was pretty sure someone had deliberately enchanted it to spite her. It wasn't too farfetched, seeing as most of the townsfolk disliked her for some reason or another. Though who could be powerful (and foolish) enough to cast a spell like that, she couldn't say for sure. Besides her and a handful of other folks, few in the town cared to understand magic, let alone practice it.

On the wall behind Mori, an iridescent skull began to rattle.

*Mori!!!!*, it cried, jaw shut but quivering.

*Mori please answer!*

Only one person would dare to call her.

Mori stood up with another sigh, this one purely for dramatics. Leaning against the wall, she took the skull into her palm.

“Whaddy want, Santi?”

The skull's jaw opened with a sharp creak.

“I flubbed up Mori! Flubbed! Up!”

Mori rolled her eyes, “What now?”

The skull went silent for a moment. Mori raised it to her ear, hearing little snuffles from the other side.

“Santi?”

“Well, um, you know how the moon glows weird now...”

“The moon?” Mori paused, then her eyes widened.

“It was...accident...” Santi’s voice was hardly a whisper.

“Oh, grot, you think that was *you*?”

Santi’s silence was confirmation enough.

“Look, sure you like to pull pranks and whatnot,” Mori said, “But your magic can hardly enchant a pebble.”

“So it...wasn’t me?”

“I don’t think you could do something that destructive yet.”

“...dangit.”

“Excuse me?” Mori glared at the skull hard enough that Santi could feel it.

“Nothing! That’s-um, that’s really good actually, I was afraid I—”

“Enchanted the moon and ruined my life? You wish you could do that.”

“Nuh uh! Mori, I don’t want that! I miss the moon.”

Mori looked to the kitchen window, seeing the slightest vein of bogus moonlight creeping in from underneath its curtains. The light seemed to be pointing down at the counter where several ceramic vessels sat forlornly, thoroughly devoid of proper moonlight for Mori’s work.

“Psh. You and me both, kid.”

“If it wasn’t me...” Santi’s claws tapped against the receiver, as he could work out an answer through morse code. “Then what d’you think coulda happened?”

“Hm. I have an idea, but it’s nothing concrete yet.”

“Woah! What’cha thinking?”

“Well, detective work isn’t my forte, so take this with a grain of salt.”

“The pink kind or regular?”

“...Santi.”

“Hehehe.”

“Uh huh. So, I noticed that maybe—”

The skull in Mori’s hand jolted up as if it had been shocked, its eyesockets winking with white text.

“Gotta take this, stay there ok?”

“Ooh who is it?”

“Wow, nosy. Why don’t you guess?”

“Aw, c’mon!”

“I was joking, it’s none of your business.”

Santi hummed, disregarding that notion as usual.

“Hm, if it’s not me...” Mori could hear the synapses sputtering in Santi’s brain. “Oh! Then is it that person you like—”

“BYE, SANTI.”

With a push of one of the skull’s teeth, Mori answered the other line. The skull’s mouth momentarily closed, then opened with a swift click of its jaw.

“Yoooo! Mori, Mori, you there?”

Mori’s voice replied less steadily than she would have preferred.

“Hey, Xi...”

“¿Que pasa, calabaza?”

“I hope you’re saying that ironically,” Mori replied, mostly prevailing over the smile that sought to grace her face.

“Rhyming is something I do most sincerely.”

“You a poet now?”

Xi snapped their fingers instinctively, “Always have been, baby.”

“How’s that going then?”

“Like the chill of an autumn dawn down the spine of life itself.”

“Wh...huh?”

From the skull came the sound of a pencil skittering across paper.

“Sorry, ah, that was inspiration striking. Things are goin’ ok.”

“Your workshop group being nice to you?”

“Absolutely! They’re real sweet and, um, it’d be cool if you wanted to meet ‘em sometime...y’know...if you’re interested...”

“Hm, as soon as I can make the trip out of town, I’ll be sure to say hi to y’all.”

“Can’t wait! And don’t worry, you don’t gotta write nothin’ with us.”

“Sounds good to me.”

“Yeah, it’ll be great and OH WAIT!” Xi’s exclamation nearly rattled the skull off Mori’s palm.

“Before I forget, I wanted to ask you for another spell if that’s ok?”

“Of course, which one though?”

Xi’s voice softened, “Well, um, I wanted to talk to my tia...”

“Ah, so a spirit-memory conjuring?”

“The Memento Mori!”

“That has never, ever been its name.”

“It should be!” Xi’s words practically grinned themselves.

“*Memini* works just fine, you goof.”

“Hehe, yeah. If you would put me down for a *memini*, please, that’d be sweet.”

As if reminded of the lunar lament, the empty ceramic vessels on Mori's counter seemed to shiver.

"About that..." Mori frowned, "I'm out of my usual elements and I can't say when the moon'll be fine again so..."

"What's that about the moon?"

"Xi, c'mon."

"No joke, whatcha mean? Moon's gotta be in a certain phase or something?"

"It's not that...you're telling me you aren't experiencing all hours of night as gauzy neon yellow?"

"I...no? Not at all. You guys doin' ok?"

Xi's confusion was too genuine to not concern Mori.

"It's not a huge deal for some folks, but this gaudy moon hex has been looming over our town for days now."

"Wait, wait, wait—the *moon* has a spell on it?"

"That's what I think, though who could've done it is what I'm trying to figure out."

"Any ideas?"

Mori thought about this for a moment, then replied, "I could only tell you with certainty who isn't a suspect."

"Dang. How's Santi doing with all this?"

"He's fine but he thought it was his fault for some reason."

"Probably 'cuz he was trying to make his coat glow-in-the-dark again."

"Oh, grot, I told him to just use a flashlight."

"Nothin' wrong with a little experiment in ingenuity," Xi said with a nearly audible wink. "You gonna go 'n brainstorm?"

"Already did that, it's more like I gotta go investigate some things now."

"Right, gotcha. Good luck and lemme know if I can help at all, ok homie?"

“Certainly, *homie*.” Mori said, only slightly ironically. “I’ll give you the details about this mess and the *memini* spell as soon as I can.”

“No worries, I’ll be here for ya! Oh, and tell Santi ‘hi’ for me!”

“Will do. Thanks, Xi.”

“Byeeee!”

“Bye...”

Mori watched the skull shut its jaw and immediately re-open. *Oh, right.*

“Santi, you ready to go?”

In between crunches of something, probably spicy chips, Santi replied, “What? Are we going to Xiyomi’s?”

“Wh-” Mori sputtered, “who said anything about that?”

“I just thought since you were talking to them, we’d probably go to visit finally?”

“Maybe another time, nosy. We’re gonna go and something else in light of, well, Xi told me something real strange about this whole glow-moon deal.”

“Ohh! Ok, I’ll get my bag ready then.”

“It won’t be a long trip, so don’t pack too much.”

“Can I bring snacks?”

“One.”

“Oh, tough. But I’ll try my best.”

“I’ll be right over, kid.”

“Ok!”

The skull silent at last, Mori hung it back on the wall and grabbed her journal from the table. She turned to a set of blank pages and, with her favorite *Sphinx Ink* pen, began to draw.

On the first page, Mori quickly created a short trail of footstep-like shapes leading to a blocky structure: a short range teleportation spell to reach Santi’s house. To the second page, Mori added similar markings but with a longer trail that ended at a

rounded triangle with frills on its sides: a teleportation spell for a longer distance, one that would take them to the mountainside and closer to the region's fabled temples.

If Mori's intuition could be trusted, then a visit beyond the town's limits would give her more clarity as to what exactly was going on with the moon. Proximity to the temples wouldn't hurt either; maybe they could find some help there if observation wasn't enough.

Mori took a final sip of her cooled horchata, placed the empty mug in the sink and paused as it began to lower itself into soapy water, then turned to her journal once more. She held her hands over its open pages and began to recite a short incantation. The first set of glyphs lit up a faint fuchsia, time seemed to hold its breath. Mori closed her eyes. If one happened to look at her in that moment, they'd see the fuchsia glow plume out from the journal and pour itself over Mori. Then sooner than one could say *calavera*, Mori was gone.

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