

## Detached

Air gusted past her ears, bringing with it a new set of questions from the little one. “Agh! What is it that just flew past my ears, mama?”

The bigger mouse responded with a chuckle, “That is the wind.”

The small mouse looked up to her mother and nodded. In her mind, she began to brew up more questions. With a tiny paw, she gestured to the field before her: “What is that?”

“That is grass,” replied the bigger mouse.

“And that?”

“That is an ant.”

“OK, and that--?”

Mother Mouse held her paw before the little one’s mouth. “Sometimes, we get the most answers, from just watching. It is your turn, just like all the other pups with new eyes, to watch, my little Mei.”

At first agitated from being cut off, the small mouse twitched her ears and wrinkled her nose. She found herself to be uncomfortable with the sudden silence. Looking for something to distract her racing mind, she began to focus on the orb settling beneath the horizon.

Again, unable to subdue her curiosity she opened her mouth. “What--?”

“Shhh,” said Mother Mouse.

Quiet again, little Mei watched as the sky’s brilliant light began to fade into a vast expanse of black that swathed the Earth in the comforting chill of night and brought with it a whole orchestra of bugs that made the dark hum with life. The blades around her quivered in excitement as the world turned over to the winking starlight.

Another orb rose from seemingly beneath the Earth. She felt it reach down toward her with its pale shine, welcoming her to the world. She watched as it glided overhead, joining the stars in a mission to illuminate the sky. Mother Mouse glanced over to her pup, whose wide eyes shone in the light.

“That is called the moon.”

The little mouse suddenly jerked her head away. "You said we weren't supposed to talk!" squeaked the little one, a hint of smugness in her voice.

"Now, Mei, I told *you* that...never said it applied to *me*," Mother Mouse said smiling. They sat silent for a moment.

Mei's head turned back to watch the Earth. Faintly, she asked, "That is the moon?"

"Yes, the moon."

Mei watched as the vast world was unraveled by the milk light of the moon, the beauty entrancing. Breathing in the scenery, she began to feel her body swell with a familiar but powerful force. With every intake of air, her small body filled with excitement, and her little heart fluttered. A soul echoed inside her and spoke: "I play no favorites, but I do love you, Little One."

And as quickly as it had come, the soul slid away, though Mei tried in vain to keep it there by holding her breath--to which Mother Mouse laughed heartily-- and then it was gone. But it left behind a lulling feeling of wholeness, of comfort.

"You heard Her, didn't you, little Mei?" Mother Mouse asked.

"Who was She?" Mei squeaked excitedly.

"That was The Mother, she made me, and she made you."

"She was big and beautiful!"

"She is right in front of you, little Mei."

Bewildered, Mei looked upon The Mother, upon her green grass, upon Her black sky, upon Her rustling fireflies, upon Her hooting owl, upon Her dancing flowers, upon Her lake in the distance. She felt the Earth vibrate beneath her paws, She felt The Mother's wind in her delicate fur, a reminder she was always being cared for, a reminder that this was where she belonged.

Mei felt and saw Her *everywhere*.

The sky began to grow light, and Mei's eyes fell upon a sight she didn't quite understand. "What is that, Mama?" she gestured toward a clump of trees.

"That is an oak tree."

“Why does it have such weird hair?”

“Those are her leaves, they are not hair! They live on the tree, feeding her and keeping her alive, giving us oxygen, and giving her beauty. They give her purpose.”

“Like children, Mama?”

“Yes, like children.”

“Then why does she shed them so cruelly? Doesn’t she love them? Doesn’t it hurt?”

Faced with all these questions, Mother Mouse pondered for a second. “That is a hard thing to answer, little Mei. The tree *does* love her leaves, but next spring, she will have to make new ones. To have space for the new, she must shed the old. The tree never forgets her leaves. If anything, it is an act of kindness to shed them as they are, so everyone can appreciate them for what they were.”

Silence flooded the scene.

“But why?” asked the little mouse.

Silence again.

The duo sat and watched the sunrise together, watched it shyly peek over the horizon just as the moon had hours before.

Then the sound of something shrill pierced the quiet.

Shattering it from the inside out.

And then gone.

Detached.

But still loved.