

The Last Moonicorn
by Christopher Graeme

(A tale of dark whimsy, and pies.)

On her way to the Earth, a green girl from the stars
Paused for a pie on a moon around Mars,
And while she was munching, that mild Martian morn,
She saw from her saucer a horse with a horn.

”Good day,” said the creature, approaching, serene,
“From where have you wandered? I see you are green.”
“Up there,” said the alien girl, dripping sauce,
“And who might be asking?” she asked the strange horse.

“Alas”, said the creature, face fallen, forlorn,
“I fear, you’re addressing the Last Moonicorn.
“Alone here on Phobos!” he sobbed, through full eyes,
“The Martians have made all my friends into pies!”

The Star Girl looked sheepishly down at her crumbs,
And said, as she twiddled all three of her thumbs,
“My dear Moonicorn, what a tragical end
“For such beautiful creatures! May I be your friend?”

They walked for a while through the Moonicorn’s land,
Past the Pacifist Pools to the Solitude Stand,
And they stood there in silence and gazed at the flame
Until darkness descended and Phoban night came;

Then he finally parted his lips to reply.....

When a terrible tumult tore open the sky!
And into their crater, with almighty CRASH!
Rammed rickety rocketships made out of trash!

“Run!” cried the Moonicorn, “Martian attack!”
As out screamed a horde, howling “ACK! ACK! ACK! ACK!”
And nuts and bolts flew as the Martians debarked,
And their Space Spears they threw, and their Arc Pistols arc’d!

Red Martians, blue Martians, Martians of puce,
Orange and pink Martians, shouting abuse,
Martians of every colour you’ve seen!
(Except that not one of the Martians was green.)

”But how have they found you?” she squealed as they fled
“I thought you’d implied that they thought you were dead!”
“Oh woe!! NO! NOT WHOA!! For your life, do keep pace!
“I’m found from afar by this horn on my face:
“Its Astral Reflection Intensity’s denser;
“They home on our horns with their Moonicorn Sensor.”

And sure enough, trundling in front of the horde
Came the Horn Tracking Truck, with the Sensor on board.
Its misshapen aerials poked through its shell.
(It made “bleep bleep bleep bleep bleep” noises as well.)

“Quick! Climb up upon me!” the Moonicorn cried.
The Star Girl clung on to his gold-speckled hide,
And they sped to her ship, and they dived through the hatch,
And the girl, with a whirl, locked it fast with a latch.

None too soon! For the Martians were hot on their feet,
Haranguing the hull as they slavered for meat,
But the Star Girl had leant with full force on the throttle,
And up shot the ship like a cork from a bottle!

BUT ...

... their sudden ascent took a terrible toll,
For the saucer was tumbling out of control!
And rising up, rapidly, blocking the stars
Was the devilish disc of the Mad Planet, Mars ...

... While, hurtling behind them, eyes squished in their sockets,
The Martians pursued in their ramshackle rockets,
And formed a formation which forced her to founder:
She crashed in a crater, with Martians right round her!

And so they were captured, and so they were bound,
The Moonicorn thrown on that gritty red ground,
And the Martians embarked, with their captives in tow,
On their march across Mars, to the channels below.

Fearsome furlongs of treacherous trenches they trudged,
And the bonds that were binding them couldn't be budged.
Then they stopped. And before them, its opening wide,
Was a cavernous cave, and they led them inside.

“It’s the factory! I know it!” the Moonicorn wept.
“I can smell in these passages pies have been kept!”
But the tunnel was silent, except for their walking.
“ACK! ACK!” barked a Martian; translation: “NO TALKING!”

So, deeper they drudged, through the dust and the death,
In a darkness so dense they could barely draw breath,
Until suddenly, CRUMP! and then CRACKLE! and SPARK!
And fizzing fake flambeaus dismembered the dark.

Then the Star Girl and Moonicorn spotted, with dread,
The bowels of the monster, approaching ahead.
And the grumble now growling from deep in the hill
Told the truth: there was life in this factory still.

And into the factory's guts they were led,
And, despairing, the Moonicorn lowered his head
For he knew now the end of his species was nigh:
Very soon he'd become the last Moonicorn pie.

Then the Martians unbound them inside a small coop,
And it dawned on the child she'd be soon in the soup.
"Oh, Moonicorn, darling, I fear they will serve
"An amuse-bouche! A starter! I'm Star Girl hors d'oeuvre!"

But the Martians delayed, and the horse knew not why,
And he wailed, "Woe is me! I am ready to die!"
"But the factory hasn't warmed up, I think, quite,"
Gussed the Star Girl, "I estimate we have one night ...

"... Still, we'll know when it's dawn."
She looked upwards, and laughed,
For high over their heads was a vast venting shaft.
Then, beneath that great chimney, beneath the dark night,
She kissed his nose, grimly, and whispered, "Good night."

She awakened quite pleasantly, roused by the scent
Of freshly baked pastry ... Oh! No! But that meant ...
And yet, though the bakers were wakeful (if bored),
The rest of the Martians still slumbered and snored,

The Moonicorn gazed up the vent to the sky,
Determined, once more before death, to espy
His Phobos, oh Phobos! His lonely home moon!
(The sunrise approached. He'd be minced and mashed soon ...)

And, what joy! What a treat! One last darling delight!
For, before he was meat, dangling in the dawn light,
Not just Phobos he witnessed, its pools burnished blue,
But trembling Deimos, Mars' moon number two.

But, no... What was that? That brief glimmering glint?
It couldn't be! No! Yes? A hornflash?! A hint
Of a hornflash?! It must be! Again! Yes! The flare!
On Deimos? Impossible! Yet, it was there.

“Another horn! Star Girl! We have to postpone
“This pie-die day! Up! I'm no longer alone!
“We must flee and be free! It is nearly the dawn!
“I'm only the Second-to-Last Moonicorn!”

And, feisted in fervour and redoubled rage,
The Moonicorn smashed from their slaughterhouse cage,
And flashed, with the Star Girl astride, at full flog,
Past the Martians, who woke in his wake from their fog.

And they sped to the saucer! Took off! Were up high!
Before one of the Martians had figured out why
The ship-maintenance Martian, the fuddy old fool,
Had forgotten to fill up their rockets with fuel.

“But, how,” asked the Star Girl, “could you see so far?”
“We just do,” he responded. “It’s just who we are:
“Like the Martian’s device we have Moonicorn Sense,
“Seeing astral intensity bounce (when it’s dense).”

And so, without incident, Deimos arrived.
Could his instincts be true? Could one more have survived?
As the saucer's hatch popped, could his eyes be deceived?
As he stepped out, he stopped. And then, OH, HE BELIEVED!

For awaiting their craft, on a low lunar rise,
Was a Moonicorn Mare, with such beautiful eyes,
And a coat of spun silver, with lavender gloss;
And her mane was of mother-of-pearl candyfloss,

The Star Girl looked on from her spacesaucer door,
As the Moonicorns whinnied, like never before,
And they pranced, and they danced, and her joyful friend knew
He was not the Last Moonicorn! For they were two!

But magical moments have tragical ends,
And the Star Girl reluctantly halted her friends:
“Please forgive me, but sadly we’ve no time to waste.
“The Martians will soon be refuelled — we’ll be chased.”

The Moonicorn Mare looked forlorn, but stayed mute,
While the Moonicorn asked “How much time, do you moot?”
And the Star Girl computed, with Newtonish sense,
“An hour, maybe two,” then looked pensively tense.

“We could run ...” posed the Moonicorn, then shook his head.
“No. They’d surely catch up. If we do that, we’re dead.
“And, in truth, there’s no space in the saucer for three.
“Love, alas! Love, alack! I have led doom to thee!”

Oh, the Star Girl and Moonicorns were in a scrape,
With no prospect of rescue, defence, or escape,
When a speck of a spark lit the Moonicorn's horn,
And a desperate plan for survival was born:
“There is one last option,” he whispered, quite hoarse,
“But it's terribly, terribly dangerous, of course.
“The Martian's horn sensor is tuned to find horns,
“Horns alone, not the bodies of whole Moonicorns...

“In your ship you could lead all the Martians astray,
“With our horns as your bait, and then throw them away,
“And destroy them somewhere, in the space between stars,
“And the Martians would, meatless, fly back home to Mars.”

As the creature's suggestion sank into her head
The girl stammered, "But without your horns, you'd be dead!
"For surely your horns can't be taken alive.
"Can an amputee Moonicorn ever survive?"

"There are tales," said the Moonicorn, shaking his hair,
"Though they tell that survival's horrendously rare,
"But what chance have we otherwise? The Martians are nigh,
"I would rather risk death, than end up in a pic."

And the Moonicorn Mare clearly knew what he meant,
For she silently nodded her sombre assent.

So, nobly, the Moonicorns knelt there at noon,
On the day side of Deimos, Mars' number two moon,
And the Star Girl, with solemn and serious force,
Sliced off, with a scalpel, the horn from each horse.

Then a deafening thunderclap rattled that place,
As each horn was pulled free, and the look on the face
Of the Moonicorn male, and the mare, his new mate
Made the Star Girl turn pale, as she knew now their fate.

For it dawned to them all that their gamble they'd lost,
And the lovers must now pay the terrible cost.
So they lay down before her, both stallion and mare,
And surrendered their souls, in the Star Girl's sad stare,

And a tear trickled down from each Moonicorn's eye,
As the Star Girl stood silently, watching them die.
And they pressed tight together the hilts of their horns,
And awaited Forever. The Last Moonicorns.

Then the Star Girl felt vengeance-fire scorching her skin,
As a furnace of anger ignited within,
And she blazed with desire to destroy her friends' foes;
Iridescent with ire, in her saucer she rose!

With their horns in her hands, she wept wild for their waste,
And she sped to the Planet of Red with hard haste,
And she skim-circled, baiting for Martian attacks,
Screaming "COME UP AND GET ME,
YOU PIE-GRINDING ACK!s!!"

And, oh, how the Martians took up the girl's call
When their horn sensor siren alerted them — ALL
Of the Martians — the reds, and the puces and browns,
And the factory workers, still in their white gowns —
EVERY MARTIAN crammed up any crate that could fly,
Craving cruelly for one final crumb of that pie.

Then manically, madly, that saucer she flew,
Hot-pursued by the Martians of yellow and blue,
In their rickety, ramshackle rockets of junk,
How she flew! Like a petulant pyre-powered punk!

And she whooshed from Mars orbit, this Moonicorn fake,
With a million Martians, it seemed, in her wake,
And she throttled it sunwards, for all she was worth,
Till she came within sight of the Blue Planet, Earth.

Every Martian behind her gnashed nasty black teeth,
And they pulled alongside her, above, underneath,
And in front now! It seemed that her moment was near,
So she DIVED! DIVED! DIVED! DIVED!
into Earth's atmosphere!

As her saucer smashed into Earth's blanket of air,
It glowed red hot, then white hot, but she didn't care,
And it carved like a comet through Earth's sunside sky,
Whipping back into dark, as she started to fry,
And the blistering heat was now broiling her brain,
But she couldn't stop now, so she dived down again,
And the Martians around her dived too, in their lust ...
... But their rocketships largely were made out of rust!
They could never withstand this red ram of raw heat,
But before they could pull back, admitting defeat,
The Star Girl EJECTED the Moonicorns' horns,
And they pierced through the nearest two ships like great thorns!
And the gashes they tore in the garbage-ships hulls
Were so ghastly, the air crisped the crazed Martians' skulls!
Then those two ships EXPLODED! With shrapnel galore!
And their junk ripped huge holes in more ships, and then more
Ships exploded, as each hit the bits of the last!
Till the last ship exploded, in one final BLAST!

And the people of Earth were enthralled for an hour,
By that magical Martian-born meteor shower,

But the Star Girl, whose saucer was somehow okay,
Pulled back out of the atmosphere, and flew away.

So, the Star Girl returned to the place her friends fell,
And there saw them, embraced, as if under a spell,
And she covered their beautiful bodies with clay,
Then lay down on the ground, and abandoned the day.

The following morning, upon that clay mound,
A shimmering, sparkling seedling she found.
She smiled, bittersweetly, her memories torn,
But returned to the sapling the very next morn.

The sapling? The tree! Every day the plant grew:
The most magical marvel of any she knew.
In a week it was fulsome, and fiery, and fruity,
Each globe dangling down from its branches a beauty,

Such fabulous fruit that they rippled and rolled,
New life locked inside them! Such things to behold!
Yet the Star Girl resisted temptation to take them:
She felt, if she bit them, she somehow might break them.

And so, for another week, ripened each ball;
Not a breath of wind blew; not one fruit was seen fall ...
... Till the third week, when, suddenly, every fruit fell,
On a blanket of leaves, which had fallen as well,

And the naked tree withered, and shrivelled, and shrank,
Till the tip of the top of the last of it sank
Through the clay, and the Star Girl, who'd watched it depart,
Felt another great sadness enfolding her heart.

As the sun set that day, Phobos rose in the sky,
And the Star Girl gazed up, and she started to cry
For the very first time since her fine friends had died.
And she lay on their clay. And she cried. And she cried.

In the morning, she woke, as the sun warmed her through.
She sat up. She looked round. She saw something quite new:
Every fruit from the tree, as the sun stroked its skin,
Split wide open, exposing the kernel within.

“But these kernels are not pits, or stones,” gasped the girl,
“They are eggs! They are eggs! Eggs of mother-of-pearl!”
And what eggs! Tiny eggs, but so perfectly formed,
And she watched as the sun reached full height, and they warmed.

And then, all of a sudden, at once, and at noon,
In the blaze of the sun, on that small Martian moon,
... Every eggshell exploded! And BOOM! They were born!
Each egg spawned a perfect, minute Moonicorn!

That day, from the clay of a moon around Mars,
The Moonicorns leaped again under the stars,
And she played with them, afternoon, evening and night,
With such joy, and such magic, such mystic delight.

And the Star Girl departed, with love, in the dawn,

For she knew she had not known

The Last Moonicorn.

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For Megan
my Star Girl

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