

THE PIRATE WHO TRIED TO CAPTURE THE MOON

by Dennis Haseley

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There was once a fierce pirate who loved nothing. He lived alone on an island, where he strode about in armor, waving a broadsword, and watched for ships to capture.

Through his glass, he spied the ship of horses. Red stallions galloped on its decks, black colts leaped above the waves.

He chased the ship in his steady galleon. From his cannons he shot bits into their mouths, and the horses reared. From his guns he shot saddles, and the horses rolled, until one white mare dove into the sea.

The fierce pirate chained the ship to his island and laughed. But then he saw the moon tossing through the clouds, sailing as it pleased. The pirate waved his sword, thumped his armor, and said, “Someday, moon, I’ll capture you, too.”

Then he piled his deck with sticks and twigs, watching for the ship of birds no one could catch.

When it came into sight, with its escort of eagles, its sails like wings, he waited till it landed. Then he caught the ship that no one could catch. And he laughed. He laughed until the sea was empty and there was nothing sailing anywhere—except the moon, sailing in the sky.

The pirate knew it was time to capture the moon.

He climbed up his mast and waved his sword above his head, shouting, “Moon. Follow me!” Moonlight shone on his armor. But the moon drifted free.

So the pirate shot at the moon. *Boom! Boom! Boom!* But the cannonballs just fell straight into the sea with hardly a splash.

And still the moon sailed across the sky.

The pirate stormed down to the ship of birds and tied a raven to his head, hawks to his arms, herons to his legs, and a crow to his chest. Slowly he rose through the moonlight, waving his sword. But the birds grew tired. Their wings failed, they fell

through a cloud, and the pirate dropped into the sea like a piece of clay, while the moon sailed across the sky.

The pirate paced back and forth, back and forth, to and fro. He walked in circles, day and night, until he passed an old ship of books he had captured long ago. He searched its broken decks and shredded sails until he found a book that told all about the moon. Then the pirate laughed.

He took that book and six horses and sailed for land. He harnessed the mares to his ship and ripped across the earth—over fields and streams, leaving a scar. Slowly, the pirate who loved nothing moved over the land in his ship, looking for everything the moon loved.

The moon loves to shine through curtains, said the book. It loves to float in pools of water. It likes to peek over small hills. The moon loves poetry.

So the pirate slashed curtains from farmhouses and drapes from mansions. He cut curtains from stages and loaded them on his ship.

He scooped frog ponds and reflecting pools and swimming holes into barrels.

He chopped at small hills with his sword and shoveled them into his hold.

He captured poets and everything else he knew the moon loved.

He swiped candled from the tables of Italian restaurants and he grabbed sadly playing violins from under the chins of gypsies.

He kidnapped lovers as they gazed at each other softly, walking hand in hand.

He netted baying wolves and children who danced all by themselves in the middle of the night.

And then the pirate sailed the bursting ship back to his island and waited.

Clouds moved across the sky. The wind blew the empty sea, and finally the moon rose. But when it looked down, it saw that everything it loved was gone. So it moved down to look a little closer. It saw no curtains, it saw no small hills.

So again it came a little closer.

The pirate laughed and stood up to sharpen his sword.

The moon looked and looked through streets and in villages and down empty wells. There were no pools of water. There were no poets, no lonely dancers.

So it came closer still.

And the pirate yelled out, “Moon! I have captured every ship and everything you love. Now I will capture you!”

Then he threw open the hatch. And the moon saw everything it loved streaming out of the pirate’s ship onto the pirate’s island. Kitchen curtains, long candles, violins playing sad music, moody poets, lonely wolves, and dancers who danced in the middle of the night. The moon gave a little sigh and came closer to the island, and the pirate watched.

I didn’t know the moon was quite so big, he thought.

And still the moon came down, closer, still closer. The pirate started to feel afraid. He tore through the book that told all about the moon, but he couldn’t find a place that told how big the moon was.

And the moon came down, growing larger, larger than the pirate’s ship, larger than his island, larger than anything the pirate had ever seen.

He trembled and thought, if I return everything I’ve captured, that will surely stop the moon. So he cut the saddles and the bits from the wild horses, and a shadow passed across the moon as the birds streamed away.

And still the moon came down. So the pirate freed the madly playing violinists and the howling wolves, the poets chanting and the pools bursting from their barrels, and he sent them sailing home.

Moonlight spread over the waves, it covered his empty island. The pirate lifted his trembling sword as the whole sky became the moon....

And then the moon stopped. And waited.

The pirate stared into its light, and a wild shiver ran through him like a wave. He forgot about being afraid. He forgot about being fierce. He lowered his sword, he dropped his armor, and he whispered, “Moon, wonderful moon, it is you who have captured me.”

For at that moment, in the middle of the night, the pirate began to dance.

And the moon glowed through him and above him. Then, slowly, it started back into the sky, growing smaller, growing distant, until once again it sailed as it pleased. It drifted over the sea and over the island where now there was someone new the moon loved, who loved the moon.