

# full moon child

Mint Kang, 2004

Whispers in his head.

*"...moon full moon oh coming soon soon is the moon is full soon..."*

A high, thin, male-female-neither voice.

*"...fly across moon oh soon soon soon full moon fly..."*

His head, aching. Swelling from the inside, his whole body swelling and aching. They said it was growing pains. Fifteen, just fifteen, just right for growing pains, adolescent boys are such a pain. Eating non-stop and growing out of clothes that were new a month ago. And don't forget the acne, all the oily teenage glands, face erupting in hundreds of little volcanoes.

What had happened to Alexis, the girl next door?

He walked down a street in bright sunlight and a man bumped into him, a man with moving iridescent streaks under his skin. Everyone moved aside, moved away from the living glistening trails, all except him standing there dazed by the sunlight and not understanding.

There were girls at school who kept their windows locked at night.

They giggled and gasped and shrieked among themselves: "What if one of *them* decided to come in? They do anything, oh, you *know!*"

And policemen on night patrol, smart uniforms and shiny shoes and guns with live ammunition inside. There had been fighting, explosions in the moonlight, a building destroyed. People had disappeared by night, always by night.

*"...oh full moon fly soon fly fly moon coming soon..."*

How he ached. The maths teacher threw a piece of blackboard chalk at him yesterday. ("I've been telling you to open your textbook for the last five minutes! When did you last dig out your ears?")

White chalk, that bounced off the top of his head. The girls giggled.

Later he looked in the washroom mirror and found a white smudge in his hair.

What had happened to twelve-year-old Alexis?

*"...fly full moon coming soon oh soon fly with moon..."*

Growing pains, hair gel, acne. Some of the boys in the next class got hold of a pack of cigarettes and tried smoking them in the washroom. They choked on the first puff, coughed, gasped. One of them threw up. The discipline head said the act was a punishment in itself.

His head aching, swelling inside, brain bloating with itself. He

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teased one of the girls in the science class, put a caterpillar on her shoulder and it crawled down her neck. She screamed, squashed it, screamed some more. The science teacher called him an immature larva who had most of a life cycle to go before he grew up. Then called the girl a pupa who hadn't been exposed enough and made her handle mealworms. She ran away shrieking and the whole class laughed.

Later he saw the man with the iridescent streaks again, on a missing persons flyer. Gone in the night, like so many others. His wife was looking for him.

No one had looked for Alexis. She would be sixteen now. One year older than him. Maybe she had acne too. Or perhaps she had learned to smoke.

What had happened to her?

There was an accident near the school. A motorcycle that cut a corner, a lorry that was speeding, then an ambulance and a police car and attendants taking a white-draped body away. One of them picked up a shoe, white tennis sneaker torn off in the crash. A youth of nineteen who had just bought his first motorcycle. The discipline head lectured the school on it at morning assembly. The importance of road safety.

*"...fly with the moon coming soon never going away the moon..."*

Two days after the accident, a big fuss. The nineteen-year-old motorcyclist had disappeared. No, his body had disappeared. Gone from the morgue. There were sensational rumours of body snatchers. Grave robbers. Maybe the youth's body was being dissected in someone's garage and his organs sold on the black market, whichever of them hadn't been squashed by the lorry.

Had Alexis been kidnapped by organ thieves?

His head ached, his body was sore. Sunlight dazzled his eyes. The world refused to belong to him. Walking along the corridor to his classroom he was suddenly dizzy. He stepped on his own foot, walked into the wall. The form teacher said he had a fever and sent him home, where his mother fussed and complained and made him drink chamomile tea.

Growing pains and a fever.

In the middle of the night he woke, saw the full moon through his bedroom window. A figure danced across it, black shadow silhouetted in white light. He heard distant laughter.

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“Alexis?” he opened the window, looked out, called.

The figure came down from the moon. It ran past in the air, silvery-gray hair in two long, long, living tails that wriggled and jumped and made patterns around each other. Under the tails was the face of the nineteen-year-old motorcyclist, laughing at him.

Not Alexis. He closed the window. His head ached.

*“...fly with MOON...”*

There were disappearances. An entire family vanished, the house empty, not even a note left. The oldest son had been a monitor in one of the senior classes. Rumours buzzed through the school. They had left because of one of the daughters. No, because the oldest son had done something.

Something had been done to him. The girls gasped and shrieked. “I went out with him once!”

One of the monitor’s classmates, very knowledgeable: “He didn’t do anything. They left to get away from him, you see,” and voice dropping, “he was one of *them*.”

Alexis’ family had not disappeared. Alexis had.

He ached. Growing pains. After school the boys from his class played soccer and charged madly across the muddy field. He rushed up and down with them, slipped and fell over in the mud. When he got home there were bruises down the middle of his back, along his sides, under his arms. His mother scolded him about the mud on his clothes.

*“...mother of us all oh the mother follow behind the moon flying soon...”*

Whispers in his head, more and more urgent. The bruises on his body did not fade. They stayed purple and swollen, like blisters. He found himself looking at the missing persons flyers, over and over. One of them was a twelve-year-old girl with colorful braces on her teeth. Her parents wanted to know where she was.

He went next door and sat on the swing Alexis’ father had put up. They had played on the swing when they were children. He pushed her off once and she cut her elbow on a stone in the grass.

*“...children of full moon flying soon soon oh coming soon flying with moon...”*

“Alexis? Is it you? What are you trying to tell me?”

The caterpillars in the science lab turned themselves into tight brown

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rolls of chrysalis. The science teacher cut one of them open to show the class how a caterpillar turned into a butterfly. Two of the girls ran out of the classroom and threw up.

“I thought they just sprouted wings,” he said, and the teacher told him to try sprouting a few wings of his own.

Later he played soccer again. He was too sore to run fast. His friends called him a snail and someone kicked the ball through the window of the discipline head’s office. All of them got four hours’ detention.

Walking home that evening he saw a young woman standing in the middle of the road. The moon rose over the trees and she stretched out her arms to it, higher and higher and higher until they were as long and thin as the telephone lines strung on posts beside the road. Then a police car came around the corner and the young woman ran away. In the headlights her body was a transparent mesh of long thin silvery lines braided together.

The police car gave him a lift home. “You shouldn’t be out so late,” the driver told him, “there are a lot of strange things around at full moon.”

*“...full moon coming soon coming coming fly all the children flying with the moon...”*

Someone said they had seen the monitor from the senior class, the boy whose family had disappeared. He was wandering around one of the shopping malls with a girl in a long black dress. Then the dress flew up in a draft and it wasn’t a dress but layers of insect wings growing out of her body.

“I told you,” the monitor’s classmate said, “he’s one of *them*. What do you think he looks like at full moon?”

Someone else said they recognized the girl in the black dress that wasn’t a dress. Her face had been on one of the missing persons flyers last year.

Why hadn’t Alexis’ parents sent out a missing persons flyer?

His head ached, the bruises on his body were huge and sore and swollen. He couldn’t touch them. He sat on the swing, stared at nothing.

*“...coming soon changing soon full moon children of the moon oh the moon...”*

The young woman who had stood in the middle of the road and reached up to the moon was a salesgirl in a department store. He watched her smile at customers for a whole afternoon. She wore a dark blue

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uniform with a white name tag and inside it her arms were smooth rounded human arms, her body was a normal body like his or anybody else's.

That evening when he sat on the swing next door Alexis' father came out and chased him away. Alexis' parents had two more children. One nine, one twelve, just like Alexis had been when she disappeared. They wanted to forget Alexis. They wanted to forget Alexis' friends.

In his room he sat and stared at his maths homework. His hand picked up a pencil and all over the paper he wrote:

*"...changing with full moon children coming soon Alexis coming back soon Alexis with full moon..."*

The moon waned. His head ached, hurt, bulged with itself. His body was a mass of raw nerves. The bruises on his body were black and bloated, gave off a faint acidic smell. Touching them he snatched his hand away, bit his lip to keep from crying.

At school he stumbled into walls, fell over steps. His hands fumbled and dropped things. The sunlight scraped his skin raw. The girls giggled, called him clumsy. The maths teacher threw chalk at him, demanded to know who Alexis was, and the whole class laughed.

The chrysalises in the science lab began to open. He stood and stared at them until the science teacher chased him out. Delicate wavering legs and bright unfolding wings filled his mind, mixed with the hurt in his head and the whispering voice:

*"...fly fly oh fly butterfly changing with moon calling Alexis soon soon..."*

He couldn't think. Staggering in and out of the world he stepped into the road before the lights had changed. A car stopped in front of him, brakes screeching, and the driver shouted. Came out and shook him until he fell sideways, dizzy. "—Stupid boy! Are you trying to kill yourself?"

Whispering in his head: *"...never fade never die fly forever with moon changing soon coming soon..."*

His friends went to the video arcade to play computer games, shooting moving targets to huge crashing gunfire and splatters of simulated blood. Music rattled on in the background, fast, tuneless, loud. He was dizzy and his head hurt. Looking away from the spinning screens he saw a girl standing by the door. She turned towards him and he saw her face, older and different and still the same.

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“Alexis!” he jerked forward, fell, staggered up. She turned away and walked out of the arcade. “Alexis, come back!”

He ran after her, out of the arcade, through the door, out into the afternoon brilliant with sunlight and no shadows anywhere. The sun pierced his eyes. Blind, he fell backwards. The world slid away.

In snatches he saw what happened; the ambulance, the attendants with their stretcher. “I’m not dead,” he tried to say. “It’s the guy on the motorcycle who’s dead. I saw him.”

Then it was white all around him, a hospital, doctors touching the swollen bruises with shocked faces. “How long has he had these?” they were asking, and: “—like nothing I’ve ever seen before! Not contagious, surely—”

The whispers in his head exulted. “*Coming soon!*” they cried, and were silent.

“Alexis,” he insisted. “Where are you?” and a nurse shook her head, said there was no one called Alexis.

“There is,” he said. “There is,” and the world slid away again, to come back in bits and pieces—injections, hands lifting his head, turning him over, brushing cool sticky ointment on the bloated black swellings along his body. His parents’ frightened faces asking the doctors what was wrong with him. The moon, a widening crescent from the window of the hospital ward.

The moon. A dead boy running across the face of the moon, laughing. A woman raising her arms into the moonlight and becoming something that was not a woman any more. *What do you think he looks like at full moon?*

“Alexis,” he called. “Alexis!” and still she walked away without looking back. “Alexis,” tears running down his face. “I don’t understand!”

Sunrise. Sunset. Sunrise. Sunset again, the dim time before moonrise. And a girl standing in his ward, same face, different face.

“You don’t understand,” she said.

“No,” he whispered.

The moon rose, full and white and erasing color from the world. It filled the ward, covered her in its light. He watched as the edges of her body smoked, spread, became pale bluish mist that flowed from her eyes and nostrils and mouth.

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“Now you understand,” she said, and the words settled around him in a cold blue haze.

“I’ll have to go away too,” he said. “Like you did.”

“Yes.”

“How?” he said. “I don’t know how to do it.”

His voice coming from his throat was high and thin and neither a boy’s nor a girl’s. Then he did know how. He pushed away the white sheet and stood up, wearing only the white hospital trousers. In the moonlight the bloated marks on his body wavered. They swelled outwards painlessly.

“What am I?” he said.

“Look,” she said.

The swellings spread and opened. He stretched out his arms, six of them, long and delicate like the legs of the new butterflies. Arching forward he felt the drifting weight rise between his shoulders, layers of quivering brilliance. Color flowed off them and painted the white walls of the ward, orange and green and red and blue.

“I can fly,” he said.

Alexis rose in mist, stood on the window ledge. “Fly with me,” she said. “We belong to the night now.”

“The night and the moon,” he said.

“Yes.”

There would be no big fuss. No police report, no missing persons flyers. No one would look for him. He was one of *them*.

“Fly across the moon,” he whispered. His wings embraced the air. He stepped into the sky after her.