

Sinking Feeling

A Short Story
by
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Luna's knuckles hovered a few inches away from the stranger's apartment door, her hand flexing and unflexing anxiously.

She looked at the apartment number. 308. 300 less than hers. Exactly what it needed to be.

Luna double-checked the time on her phone, making sure it wasn't so early that they might still be out or so late that they'd be asleep. She hoped 10:44 PM was pretty close to the sweet spot.

It'd taken her a few weeks to work up the nerve to come down here since she'd moved in, and everything else on her to-do list was done: The wi-fi was all set up, her bedroom was decorated with a tasteful number of commissioned pieces of fanart, and she had figured out where to turn the shower knob so that she'd neither boil alive nor freeze.

And, y'know, she had a job. But that's not half as important as the other things, right?

Anyways. Knuckles. Apartment door. Stranger(s). The knocking that needs to happen.

...And yet.

Luna stood there, staring at the door.

She knew that if she waited long enough, she'd end up knocking.

Because she knew that if she didn't, then something worse would happen.

Something worse always happened, after all.

There are moments in one's life, Luna thought, when one knows that the outcome will be bad, but you need to press on anyway. Sometimes, the best you can hope for is the least painful defeat. Luna had learned not to hope for victory; even the concept of a tie required a suspension of disbelief.

She looked at her hand, poised to reveal herself to whoever might be behind that door, and wondered how this would play out.

The longer she waited, she thought, the worse it could be.

They might open the door with her standing there, or someone else walking down the hall could find her, or her phone could go off, revealing her presence, or...

As she considered everything that could go wrong, Luna took advantage of the self-distraction and gave three quick knocks followed by one solid one.

Much to her relief, Luna did not die of fear.

There were sounds of movement inside. Luna was glad; she wouldn't have to go through this rigmarole again later.

“...Hello?”

A masculine voice.

“Shit,” Luna said under her breath.

“...Excuse me?”

“Uh, hi,” Luna said. “I’m not here to sell you anything or whatever. I’m your upstairs neighbor, and I have a weird request.”

“Oh, sorry about the noise,” they said. “She’s... The bass practice won’t be happening anymore.”

“No, no,” Luna said. “I’m not that upstairs neighbor, I’m... I’m three floors above you.”

Silence.

“Listen, this probably won’t sound real even if we can see each other face-to-face, but it can’t hurt the odds. Why don’t you open your door?”

Another silence.

“What if I say no?”

“Then I’m going to insist, and I’m very good at it,” Luna said, launching one of her ready-made responses. So far, this was going well, all things considered. “I’ve already come this far, and I don’t plan to give up.”

“Do you promise you’re not trying to sell me anything?” they said.

“Promise,” she said. “Plus, that’s illegal in this building, and I very much don’t want to get thrown out, so you’re double-safe.”

“...Alright,” they said, unlocking the door. It let out a small squeak as it opened, revealing a man whose frame nearly filled the doorway. Luna winced and made a quick prayer.

“What’s up?” he asked, wearing a look that sat somewhere between annoyance and, nope, on second thought, it was just annoyance. This

relieved Luna; if he had seemed eager to talk to her, she would be far more nervous.

“Right, I, uh... I’m Luna,” she said, sticking out a hand and putting on a fake smile.

The man stared at her for a moment, trying to get a read on the situation. “Frank,” Frank said at last, shaking Luna’s hand, enveloping hers with his saucer-sized palm. “Nice to meet you.”

“Sure,” she said. “So, uh... Right. Frank. Tell me. Do you read comic books? Specifically superhero comics?”

“...You promise you’re not here to sell me anything?” he said.

“Super-duper promise,” she said. “But, see, my... Well, I’m trying to find a frame of reference for what I’m about to talk about, and that’s the best one.”

“...Sure,” Frank said, now visibly suspicious. “I haven’t kept up with comics for a while, but I’m aware of them.”

“Good, OK,” Luna said. “Listen. I have an ability. A... I mean, you could call it a superpower if you were being generous, but before you get excited, it sucks. It sucks a lot, Frank.”

Frank had, up to this point, worn a scowl on his face. At this statement from Luna, it broke into an honest-to-goodness bemused scowl. “Right. Well, I’m sure it’s not that bad. I bet once I hear it, I’m gonna say, ‘No way, Luna, your totally-real power is super-cool, and was definitely a good enough reason for you to come knock on my door at eleven o’clock at night.’”

Luna could work with snark. “I’ll bet on the second part,” she said. “And against the first.”

“Sure, sure... Hey, you wanna come in?” Frank said, gesturing inside. “It’s kinda awkward talking in the hall, so...”

Luna took two steps back. “I’d... rather keep talking out here for now, if it’s alright with you.”

Frank looked from her to his open apartment door a few times, a baffled look on his face. Then, realizing, his eyes popped open huge and he threw up his hands, palms out.

“Oh, crap,” he said, embarrassed and showing something beyond a gruff front for the first time in the conversation. “Sorry, I didn’t even think what that sounds like! I, uh... Yeah, totally. Hallway is great. I love the hallway. What could be better than a hallway?”

Luna nodded. “Thanks,” she said. “And it’s nothing personal.”

“For sure,” he said. “Sorry, I’m not in a great headspace right now.”

“Yeah, me too,” Luna said. “I... rarely am.”

They split an uncomfortable silence between them.

“Anyway,” Luna said. “To get back to the matter at hand.”

“Yes, please. Tell me about your allegedly terrible alleged superpower.”

Luna nodded. “I... Hoo, buddy. This is a weird sentence to say out loud, no matter how many times I say it.”

“Take your time. It’s not like you interrupted me just before I went to bed, so time is no object.”

“You’re sure you’re not gonna laugh at me?”

“Why do people always say that?” Frank said. “If I laugh, I’m sorry, but it’s a natural reaction.”

Luna bit her lip and looked away. Frank realized he’d screwed up.

“...With that said, Luna, this is a no judgment zone, Luna. Tell your story.”

Luna nodded. He could just walk away from her at any point, so he’s at least curious. Better than nothing.

With a deep breath, she plunged in. “So. Every new moon — meaning tonight — something... happens to me.”

Frank blinked a few times. “...New moon, so you’re not a werewolf,” he said.

“Oh, God, thank you,” Luna said. “You don’t know how often I have to go off on that explanation tangent.”

“Yeah, no, I’m good,” Frank said. “So what happens instead?”

“Right, uh... In the middle of the night, while I’m asleep, I... fall. Through whatever is beneath me. For a little under a foot per year I’ve been alive.”

Frank stared at Luna.

“...And?”

“That’s all,” she said.

“That’s all?” he said. “You just... phase through the ground? Or the floor, or whatever?”

“Yeah,” Luna said.

“A Kitty Pryde kinda deal?”

“Yeah, exactly! ...Well, mostly. Because I can’t really control it. Falling asleep does that to a person. And, uh...”

“Every new moon?” Frank said, interrupting her trailing “uh...”

“Yep,” Luna said. “Pretty much every time.”

“...’Pretty much?’”

“I mean, I can’t remember when I was a baby, and...”

“Sure,” Frank said. “Can you control when it happens? Early in the night versus later in the night, I mean?”

“Not really,” Luna said, glad to see him engaging in the idea. “It’s always when I’m asleep, usually right when I nod off. If I try to stay up, something inside me forces me to close my eyes before sunrise. Plus, if I fight against it, I always end up with a wicked headache and get super-disoriented, and...”

Frank put up a hand. “OK.”

“OK?”

“Yeah, OK, I can see why it sucks.”

Luna shook her head. “That’s not even the worst part.”

“What’s the worst part?”

“I fall. Meaning just me. Not my clothes.”

Frank, to Luna’s relief, didn’t give much of a reaction when she said she loses her clothes. “Well, yeah, that sucks,” he says. “Means you can’t really sell tickets to this thing. Unless you’re trying to attract total creeps.”

“...You are scoring so many points right now,” Luna said.

“I gotta score points somewhere these days,” he said.

“*That* sounds like a story.”

“Oh, it is, but yours is more interesting right now,” Frank said. “Do you have any idea why this happens to you?”

Luna shook her head. “I never knew my birth parents. One night, so I’m told, I was found on I-20 one night when I was barely a year old, naked as the day I was born. Which, at that point, wasn’t very long ago. Anyway. I guess that I fell asleep while my parents were driving one night and they hadn’t figured out the pattern yet. Or maybe it hadn’t started yet, and that was the first time.

“...Or maybe they knew and they wanted an easy out.

“In any case, they never found me and I never found them, so my whole life has been a series of foster homes and orphanages trying to figure out what to do with me, and everyone eventually getting tired of me and passing me off to the next person.”

“...Huh,” Frank said. “So at this point, you end up... this is gonna be a guess, but twenty-five feet below your bed completely naked and with no practical applications of this ability. And since my place is three stories below yours, you need to make sure you’re not gonna land on anything too sharp when you do end up falling. What do you need me to do?”

Luna blinked. “You believe me?” she said. “Just like that?”

“If you’re lying, it’s the best lie I’ve heard in a long time,” Frank said. “And your actions make me pretty sure that it’s true. I mean, why would you go through all this trouble otherwise? If this is a joke, it’s the most elaborate set-up I’ve ever seen, and if it’s real, then you’re going to be in my living room in a few hours. In either case, I’m in for the long haul.”

“...And you’re not freaking out? About the fact that there are people with real, honest-to-God superpowers, no matter how mundane they may be?”

“Well... I’ve had a pretty brutal week,” Frank said.

“Yeah?”

“Yeah. Not, like, falling-through-solid-matter weird, but... Hey, do you wanna come in and hear about it? I mean, if everything goes according to plan, you’re going to be in here anyway, so...”

Luna shrugged. “I guess I am. Sure; I’ve told my story, and now it’s time to hear yours.”

Frank's apartment was, in a word, spartan. Luna had just moved into hers and it was more lavishly decorated than this one, which looked more like a half-furnished hotel room. That said, it had a few homey touches: The end table next to the couch in the living room had a few books stacked on it — a sci-fi book Luna'd heard of, but never read; one of the Harry Potters; an annotated collection of Bob Dylan's lyrics — and she saw a purple stuffed frog perched on the coffee table, lying on its side and looking a bit pathetic.

No TV opposite the couch, though. And Frank didn't strike Luna as a "Oh, *I* don't even *own* a TV" guy.

"It's not much, but it's home," Frank said, "I'd give you a tour, but you already know the layout. Have a seat, if you want," he added, gesturing toward the couch.

"Thanks," Luna said, taking a seat on the side next to the stack of books. "Oh, is that book any good? I keep hearing people talk about it, but I don't know if I want to invest the time."

"Oh, yeah, Harry Potter?" he said. "It's a bit of an underground hit. Not a lot of people have heard of it. I think they're talking about turning it into a movie? That'd be wild. It's got magic and stuff."

Luna scowled to avoid smiling. "Uh-huh. I was talking about the one with spaceships, asshat."

"Wait, you haven't heard that Rowling retconned spaceships into HP?" he asked. "Anyway, I haven't gotten very far yet, so I can't give you much of a review. Check back in... Oh, three or four months?"

"Slow reader?"

"Trying to be better," Frank said. "Gonna be easier now without so many distractions..."

"You can keep up this vague business as long as you want, but I'm not leaving until I get details."

"Fair enough," Frank said, throwing his hands up. "...You want a drink?"

"Some water would be great, actually," Luna said. "Tap's fine."

"Oh, no no no... Only the finest filtered water for my guests," Frank said, pulling a pitcher out of the fridge and grabbing a glass from one of the

cabinets. “Don’t know about you, but the water from my sink has a funk to it I can’t stand. Don’t know if it’s my faucet or the city water, to be honest. Filter takes care of it, though.”

“Well, I appreciate you taking care of the funk,” Luna said as Frank poured. “That’s downright neighborly of you.”

“I guess we’re kinda like neighbors, huh?” Frank said, replacing the pitcher and bringing Luna her glass. “Although I’m more down-down neighborly than down-right neighborly...”

Luna gave him a playful glare as she took the glass. “Yes, your puns are very good. By which I mean they’re very bad. Now get to telling your story. I’ve already told mine, so according to the court of story-sharing law, you are legally obligated to spill them deets.”

“Yes, thank you, counsel...” Frank said, sitting down opposite her on the couch. “So.”

He paused, staring at Luna, lips pursed.

“...So?”

Luna watched as Frank’s cool, confident demeanor slid away. He looked away and blinked a few times.

“...Shit,” Frank said, maybe trying to hold back tears.

“Whoa, dude, if it’s that fresh, you don’t have to tell me!” she said, setting down the water and scooting closer. “I know I opened up to you, but mine’s been cooking my whole life and is, y’know, required to explain why I’m here. You just met me, and—”

“No, no, I think this’ll be good,” Frank said. “Like... Maybe this was meant to be? Or maybe I’m just using you as a convenient sponge for my feelings?”

“...OK, that sounds gross, but I get it, and I’m here for you,” Luna said.

“Sure,” Frank said. “I thought I was starting to get over it, but... My, uh... My fiancée dumped me? Or maybe I dumped her? I’m not really sure, to be honest.”

Luna blinked a few times.

“You’re not sure?”

“She wanted to have sex before we got married, and I didn’t want to. I... Well, I said I wanted to save myself for marriage, but now I’m not sure. Anyway.”

“So we’re jumping directly into your sex life, then,” Luna said.

“Can’t tell this story without it,” Frank said. “I’ll skip the more... graphic details if you’re not comfortable with that.”

Luna looked him over. “Frank, it looks like *you’re* not comfortable with that.”

Frank sighed. “Yeah, you’re not wrong there.”

“Anyway, you held your ground, and she left?” Luna said. “Because if so, this last half-minute or so has been a pretty substantial waste.”

“No,” Frank said. “We... We tried it, and I hated it. During and after. It felt wrong. Not morally... I mean, maybe a little morally, but it mostly made me feel the way you do when you ate about a dozen Oreos an hour ago. Nauseous and guilty.

“When we were done, I looked at her, and I hated her. I didn’t want to hate her, but I did, and it made me feel horrible.”

“So you just... hated it?”

“Yeah,” he said. “It was my first time, so I don’t have much of a frame of reference, but it sucked. She said it was fine and normal, but I had this part of me that refused to look beyond it. Something inside me utterly rejected the whole thing, to the point where I get angry just looking at her.”

“So that was it? She broke up with you after that?”

“Not quite,” Frank said. “We tried a few more times, but it got worse for me and she could tell. Finally, she said she couldn’t see herself long-term with somebody unless she had sexual chemistry with them, and I can’t really blame her, so we broke it off.”

By this point, Frank was in slouch mode, staring off into the distance (which was in this case the wall, an unimpressive eight feet away), giving the two of them a pseudo-therapy vibe. Luna was fine with that. She didn’t have many people who trusted her enough to have this kind of conversation.

She certainly didn’t trust anyone enough to admit this much.

“I’m sorry,” Luna said, trying to find helpful words.

“...Thanks,” Frank said.

Luna nodded. “Do you still hate her?”

“Not...” Frank trailed off, landing on a sigh. “From an objective standpoint, no, I don’t. But since then, whenever I see her, I just feel like crap. I wish we could’ve gone back to what we had, but I know what her expectations were, so that would never happen. I guess I just wish I knew what happened, y’know? Like, was it just guilt, or was it something else?”

“You think you’re ace?” Luna asked.

Frank shrugged. “I dunno. That’s the thing, I have no idea. My dataset is kinda limited right now. I honestly think it was something between me and her, because masturbating is fine... oh my God I can’t believe I just said that to someone I just met a few minutes ago.”

Luna smirked. “No judgment zone, Frank.”

“Right, right... Anyways, I can’t be sure. The trouble is, if I want to explore more options, I’m gonna have to find someone willing to accept that I’d hate them afterwards, so...”

At this point, Frank made eye contact with Luna and turned an even brighter shade of red as he realized what he was saying. Luna was tempted to prod him, but decided to give him grace; he had been kind enough to not tease her too much earlier.

“Since I’m gonna be falling into your apartment once a month from now on, I can’t have you hating me,” she said. “So don’t even consider it, bub.”

“Right,” Frank said, smiling. “Anyway, here we are on moving day, and I was alone. Dealing with my mostly-empty apartment and getting ready to go to bed, hoping tomorrow might be better. Until you showed up.”

“Ahh,” Luna said, looking around. “So that’s why...”

“Yeah,” Frank said. “Haven’t really restocked yet.”

“Well hey, at least you have some books to keep you occupied,” Luna said. “And, y’know, you now know that you can survive heartbreak, which is also pretty rad.”

“Those are both good things, yeah,” Frank said. “Can we stop talking about me now, though? I’m sure you have a few stories to tell about your... what do you call it? Power? Ability? Curse?”

“Burden,” Luna said. “Because burdens aren’t inherently bad, but they are troublesome and impossible to ignore.”

“Must make it hard to travel,” Frank said. “You have to plan everything around the moon... Did you go to college?”

“I stayed local and got my associate’s,” Luna said. “I know just enough C++ to be dangerous, and my new job agrees. Now I’m here, because the place I was staying before was only two stories, which doesn’t work for my new life situation.”

“Who were you staying with?”

“A pair of twins I knew from an orphanage I went through when I was nine,” Luna said. “Tyler and Alex. She went by Xandra for a while, but Alex definitely fits her better. They’re older — about eight years my senior — and they sorta adopted me as their own. They don’t have any weird pseudo-superpowers, but they thought it was genuinely cool went they found out that I do, and also didn’t try to poke and prod me, which is rad. And they’re the only ones I can say that about in my life so far, which sucks. They’re kinda loud and obnoxious and rude, which is probably why they never got adopted, but they always treated me alright.

“They got a place together after they aged out of the system, and despite their lackluster social abilities, they managed to get a pretty decent two-story townhouse. They let me crash at their place when I aged out, which has saved me from... God, I don’t even know what I’d do if I didn’t have them. They’re the only way I was able to get my degree, that’s for damn sure.

“But, their house is too short for my needs, so I knew I needed to move out. I slept in the attic on drop nights for a few months, but with winter coming in, it was just way too cold. They talked about renting a taller, skinnier house to help accommodate me, but I told them this would be easier. Plus, y’know, it’s time for me to move on. And for them to move on.”

Frank nodded. “Did you ever have any mishaps?” he asked. “Like, did you ever fall asleep in front of the TV? And what was it like on the floors below you when it *did* go right? I mean, moving from place to place, it must have been a whole thing every time.”

“I always made sure I was in my room safe and sound on drop nights,” Luna said. “...That didn’t mean I didn’t goof off a few times, though. Sometimes accidentally, but sometimes not. One time, I managed to get myself stuck in the floorboards; *that* was a nightmare for everyone involved. Most of the time, though, I would just crank up my bed one inch higher than it was last time, go to bed, and wake up the next morning naked on the couch, one story below. Which probably sounds really weird, but for me, it’s pretty much routine by now.”

“...Except when you need to explain it to a stranger, because he’s about to experience it in his bedroom first-hand.”

“See, that’s the beauty of it,” Luna said. “I can pull my bed into the living room, and you won’t have to see me at all. I’ll just land somewhere on the floor here, and it’ll be fine.”

“On the floor?” Frank said. “Won’t that hurt?”

“It’s not so bad,” Luna said. “Right after I fall, I kinda have this... buffer? Like, when I fell in the floorboards, I was actually *in* the floorboards. Half of me was sticking out of ‘em. They kinda... morphed around me. When I fall, it’s like there’s a split-second where the universe checks to make sure I’m not about to catastrophically die, and then it drops me.”

“At least it extends that courtesy,” Frank said.

“I know, right?” Luna said.

“...Woulda been nice to get that last week.”

Luna sighed. “Yeah, I bet.”

“So you just have to live with it? There’s no cure or treatment?” Frank asked.

“I’m the only person that’s ever had this happen to them,” Luna said. “At least, that’s what every doctor I’ve been to has told me. A few news stations have wanted to do a piece about me — ‘The Magical Falling Girl’ or

whatever — but the fact that I'm naked at the end of it makes it unsuitable to air, and even then, why even cover it? So I fall every month or so. Big deal. Am I helping anybody by doing it? Is it gonna save lives? Is it even entertaining for anyone? No. It just happens. It's pointless.”

“...But it got us to meet each other,” Frank said.

Luna nodded. “Yeah. I guess this is the one good thing it's done.”

“So, *nobody* else thought this was cool? It's just me and your two awesome friends? I mean, who wouldn't want a supernatural kid?”

“They thought I was a hassle,” Luna said. “The agency would tell them about what I needed, and they were usually nice to me, but usually after one or two new moons I was off to another house or to another orphanage. A constant shuffle, always and forever.”

“Did your friends think it was cool, at least?”

Luna shrugged and looked away. “I... didn't really have friends. Other than Tyler and Alex, the other kids I was placed with treated me like a weirdo, and that was before they knew about my whole deal. Like, I *knew* people, but generally, nobody ever made the effort to know *me*.”

Luna knew that, most of the time, this would be followed by a fervent disagreement, that “surely she must've had *some* friends,” because she's “just so well-adjusted!”

But Frank didn't say anything of the kind.

He just nodded and said, “Yeah. Yeah, I get that.”

“You never fit in either, huh?”

“Up to a certain point, I did,” he said. “Back when we would talk about *Dragon Ball Z* or whatever. And a lot of me wants to blame it on me being trepidatious, but I think that I just suck at making friends. My ex was my oldest friend, and all my friends were also friends with her, which sucks. Plus, well, she was mostly here for my rockin' bod. Obviously, of course. I mean, you have eyes.”

Luna smirked. “I don't want to objectify you, but yes, you're not repulsive to look at.”

“Oh, thank you, Luna. Your words are like a balm to my soul,” Frank said.

They sat there in silence for a moment. Luna took a drink of her water.

“So what do you mean ‘pretty much every time’?” Frank said.

“What?” Luna said.

“You said you fall pretty much every time. Which means there was probably at least one time you remember when you didn’t fall. What happened then?”

“Oh, it was... When I was eighteen, and Tyler and Alex said I could stay with them, I didn’t fall that month. I kinda hoped I’d aged out of it, like a peanut allergy or something, but no, next month, things were back to normal. Why do you ask?”

“No reason,” Frank said. “So. What do you need to do to prepare?”

“I just need to bring down some clothes,” Luna said. “If that’s OK?”

“Totally OK,” Frank said. “You can stash ‘em on this very couch, if you want.”

“Cool,” Luna said. “And, I, uh... Thanks. You’ve been really cool. Do you want money or anything?” she asked, reaching for her wallet.

“For what? You falling into my apartment? I wouldn’t hear of it.”

“You ‘wouldn’t hear of it’?” Luna said, still reaching into her pocket. “Are you sixty years old or something? I...”

Her eyes went wide for a second or two, and then squinted razor-thin as she realized the truth.

“Ah, shit.”

“What’s up?” Frank asked.

“I put my keys in the wrong pants.”

“You what?”

“I put my keys in the pocket of the pants I’m gonna leave down here,” Luna said. “But I left those pants in my apartment, because I thought that coming down here carrying a change of clothes was super-weird, so...”

“OK, OK,” Frank said. “Well, don’t worry, we can...”

“Shit,” Luna said. “I always do this.”

“You always do what?” Frank said.

“I always fuck it up somehow. I always find stupid way to show off how screwed up I am, and now you know that I can’t even keep track of my *keys*, and you’re probably worried about how much more of a hassle I’m gonna be.”

“What are you talking about?” Frank said.

“Everybody thinks I’m worthless,” Luna said. “Even at my job, they give me the worst projects and barely pay me anything, and they don’t even know about my burden. They just hate me for no reason, I guess.”

“Hey, hey, hey,” Frank said. “That’s not them hating you. That’s you starting a new job, and needing to build up your clout. Everyone goes through that. Hell, I’m still going through that, and I’ve been at my job for four years.”

Luna sighed. “Fine. But that doesn’t change the fact that the huge majority of regular people hate me.”

“Do they?”

“Yeah,” Luna said. “Unlike most people, you’re not a total jackass that thinks I’m something to be poked and prodded, or that I’m a freak that doesn’t belong with regular people.”

“Well, then, fuck regular people,” Frank said. “Fuck the concept of regular people, for that matter. Anyone who thinks that you need to fit into their idea of what a person should be can go straight to hell.”

Luna stared at Frank, wide-eyed.

“...Did I say something wrong?” Frank asked.

“No, no, not at all,” Luna said, a tremor in her voice. “I...”

She smiled.

God.

How long had it been since she smiled?

Not the performative, “I’m a productive member of society who doesn’t cry herself to sleep more often than not” smile.

An honest, authentic smile.

She was happy.

For the first time in years.

This was the happiness that comes from someone else wanting you because they think you're a worthwhile human being.

But more than that, they want *you*, and there could be no acceptable substitute.

In this moment, Frank was emanating an aura of acceptance and understanding that Luna had never felt from another human being, including Tyler and Alex.

And she immediately burst into tears.

“Ohh, hey hey hey!” Frank said, looking around for a tissue box. “I’m sorry! Don’t fuck regular people! Unfuck them! I... You—”

Luna just wrapped her arms around him and buried her face in his shoulder. Frank froze for just a moment before pulling her closer to her and cradling her head in his baseball-glove-sized hands. “You’re OK,” he said. “You’re better than OK. You’re great.”

Luna heaved huge sighs as joyful tears poured out of her eyes. “I... I...”

“Don’t talk if you don’t want to,” Frank said.

“I’m getting snot all over your shirt,” Luna said.

“I know. I’m gonna take it to a lab and they’re gonna make magic falling juice out of it.”

Luna coughed out a laugh through her tears. “Cut me into the profits?”

“Of course. Ten percent.”

“What a deal.”

“Yeah, I know. That’s how capitalism works.”

Luna’s face was warm and stuck on a smile. “I just... I was so worried about talking to you, and you’re actually... Not terrible. And just by being not terrible, you’ve made me so happy.”

“And you’re way better than not terrible,” Frank said. “And full disclosure, you give *amazing* hugs, even when you’re sobbing, so there’s no way I’m losing you as a friend.”

“Glad to hear it,” Luna said, burying her face in his other shoulder.

“Just using me as a tissue, huh?”

“Mm-hmm.”

“Right. Well, in that case, you’re only getting eight percent.”

Luna sighed and closed her eyes, sinking into Frank’s chest. It wasn’t that the pain of years of loneliness was gone — it was still there, in some ways worse now.

But now Luna knew she wouldn’t have to fight it alone.

“So, what are we gonna do?” she asked.

“What do you mean?”

“About my keys,” Luna said.

“Well, that’s a fair question,” Frank said, his voice vibrating through his chest, soothing Luna’s heart.

“Well, let’s see...”

She felt her shoulders slump.

“We could call the super. I think he’s got a key to everyone’s apartments for such an occasion.”

Her head drooped.

“Or we could look up locksmiths in the area, see if they could help.

Or...”

Ah, crap, she thought.

She felt herself falling asleep, but too late to jerk herself back awake.

She drifted off, and a moment later, Frank watched as she disappeared, leaving a pile of clothes behind.

“...Huh,” Frank said.

Luna woke up almost instantly, landing on the bare hardwood floors of the unknown apartment building. She squinted around the dark room, thankful that it wasn't filled with journalists or children with incensed parents or the Pope or other people that might be horrified at her naked body.

First thing: Could she move all of her limbs? Arms? Check. Legs? Check. Good. Not stuck in anything.

Second thing: Was there anyone else in the room?

"Hello?" she whispered.

Nothing.

The room was exceptionally dark; this apartment's floor plan didn't have windows directly into the living room, so the outside light didn't give her any clues. The only things she saw were the blinking LEDs of a router in the corner, and...

Wait a minute.

That was definitely her PS Vita charging next to the router.

She couldn't see any details, but nobody else owns a Vita, so it was definitely hers.

How was she in her apartment?

She felt around by where she thought her couch should be and, reaching on the cushions, she found the bundle of clothes she had packed to bring downstairs once she had the all-clear. This was definitely her apartment.

She flipped on the lights, grabbed the clothes, threw them on, and got ready to head back down and grab her stuff from Frank. He probably thought she had sunk down to the floors below! Which would've meant he'd be knocking on strangers' doors, asking if there was a naked woman in there, and...

A knock came at Luna's door.

...That wasn't nearly enough time, was it?

"If you're not here, I'm gonna be so embarrassed," Frank said. "Though probably not as much as you, if you're five or six stories below, and..."

Luna opened the door. Frank stood there, her old clothes bundled in his arms and snotstains on his shirt.

“Hey,” he said.

“Hi,” Luna said.

“You changed.”

“You didn’t.”

“Didn’t have time,” Frank said. “But I think it goes with my dishevelled-mopey-guy look, so thanks for helping me accessorize with your snot.”

“Any time,” she said.

“And you have your keys again.”

“I do,” Luna said, pulling them out of her pocket.

“How do you feel?” he asked.

“...How did you know I was up here?” she asked.

“You were happy,” he said. “Based on your observations, happiness makes you float.”

“That’s it? You got all that from a single data point?”

“Yep. An educated guess.”

“...So I’ve been so sad all but one times before this that I sank instead of floating?” Luna said.

“I guess so,” Frank said. “I mean, there’s almost definitely something else going on here. But I don’t make the rules.”

Luna nodded. “Hey, at least I’m not naked in a stranger’s apartment.”

“I dunno, that might’ve been exciting,” Frank said. “You didn’t answer me, though.”

“Eh?” Luna said.

“How do you feel?” Frank repeated.

Luna smiled.

“Light as a feather,” she said.

Fin