

Under 25 winner OutStanding LGBTIQ Short Story Competition 2017

High Tide by Alex Soule

The sea was an all but still blanket of navy, a soft rush of water all that could be heard as the minimal waves crept up the sandy shore. The sky was clear of all but stars as the moon's glow left a trail of white along the water. The moon was once more full, her strength teasing the water and pulling the tide further up the beach.

Nor was the tide the only thing the moon was calling, for at the furthest reaches of the lunar path upon the water the ocean began to froth and boil. It only stilled as a woman broke the surface, her hair hanging lank with the weight of salt water and tangled with weed. She gazed upward, a smile brightening her face as she took in the full moon. She drank in its soft light as she made for the empty shore, her smile growing with every stroke until her bare feet hit powdery sand.

"You're late," a soft voice said as she pulled free of the surf.

"No, you're simply early," the ocean spirit responded turning to face the voice's owner. The beach was no longer empty for a woman whose skin glowed with all the power of the full moon sat upon a sand dune watching her. For a moment the women simply smiled at one another before the spirit of the moon rose fluidly and rushed forward to embrace the spirit of the ocean.

"I've missed you dearly," the moon spirit said, cupping the other's face with cool fingers.

"And I you."

The pair rested their foreheads together, taking a moment to relish the other's presence. A month had passed since they last had met; a brief respite in the sea of loneliness that was their lives.

They broke their embrace with a kiss, soft at first as though neither dared to believe that the other was actually there. The ocean spirit was quick to deepen it however; desperate for the moment to last a lifetime even though she knew in her heart that time was not on their side.

"It isn't fair..." she breathed as she pulled away.

The moon spirit didn't need to ask what she meant. "Life isn't fair; you should know that better than most. The ocean is treacherous and unforgiving after all."

"I know, but to see you for only six hours a month? Why must we be kept separate like this?" Her voice held all the strength and fury of the wind tossed oceans in the height of a storm, "the spirits of the earth and the sun have every summer together; they have months while we have to put up with mere hours."

"I'd gladly accept mere hours. One second with you would make up for any number of years apart."

The ocean spirit rolled her eyes, "don't go tempting fate. To lose any amount of time with you would be a fate worse than death."

"Then be grateful for what we have, you are only free to walk the earth when the tides are at their heights whereas I am bound to my realm at all times

other than when the moon is full. We are lucky that these times cross for even the smallest of times. Our lives are complicated and we have our duties to uphold, remember that."

"You should know by now that I would gladly give up my duties and my immortality for you."

"But to do so would be to cut our time short. We have lived for lifetimes and will live for lifetimes more, we have billions of years ahead of us, and each filled with six hours a month where we can meet. Forever with you is a gift even if we must spend most of it apart. Besides, just look at how the world has changed in all our years together, maybe one day we won't be forced to be apart."

The ocean spirit couldn't help but smile at the thought as she took the moon spirit's hand. The idea that maybe one day they would be free to spend forever together without strings attached was intoxicating. "And you'll be there when the time comes? Forever?"

"For forever and all that follows it."