



# WHY THE WIND HOWLS

by Alex Dial



LONG AGO, WHEN THE SUN WAS YOUNG and not very bright, and everything sat in a cool shade, and nothing much changed, the World was a pair of lovers.

Back then, the Earth was unified. It sprawled unbroken, a single, massive island of stone and soil, its mountains reaching into the thin air, its valleys resting below. The Sea was a vast, dark brine. It was still in those days, having suffered less, but though still, it moved more than the Earth.

Neither were yet home to much life — but not for lack of trying. Life is a tricky thing, and they were young. They weren't yet ready for parenthood, but that wasn't their fault. They were missing something important. But change was coming, and faster than either could guess.

The Earth and the Sea had been together a very long time, as long as either could remember. They were content to hold each other fast, gaz-

ing into one another as they spun their waltz in the dark, and they were the World.

Back then, the Earth and the Sea shared the atmosphere together, and so there was no wind. Just a single held breath.

The Earth loved the Sea. The Earth couldn't imagine another partner. Earth relished the way the Sea cradled its still shores, changing its stone to sand with a gentle, eternal caress. But the Sea was older and deeper than the Earth, and while it loved the Earth, too, it dreamed at times of another to hold in the dark.

The Sea loved the Earth. It savored its partner's unyielding structure. The Earth had a *shape*, and, to the Sea, that was a wonder without end. But despite their deep and abiding love, it had long bothered the Sea that neither could remember the day they had met. Theirs was a story with no beginning.

Earth didn't mind. "What matters is that we are together when our story ends," Earth would say.

“I will never leave you, my love,” the Sea replied — and that was true — but its longing continued to grow. The Sea wanted to *fall* in love. It wanted a love story that began. It wanted to reveal someone and to be revealed in kind.

In those days, for something to exist, all it took was a wish. Even something small could create life. But the Earth and the Sea were not small. They were gods. And when gods made wishes, they came true — one way or another. Just like that, the Sea quietly wished a lover into being. It wished for someone new. Someone strange and beautiful. Bright, hot, and contradictory. Someone fiery and frozen. Someone salient and *swift*.

So came Theia. Burgeoned on the supernal power of the dreams of the Sea — borne of a wish from a god — she did not come gentle.

Theia was a comet of iron, gold, and glass. She hurtled through the weft of space, wreathed in burning ice. She was a breakneck bolus of cosmic fate, and she quite literally came out of nowhere. She sailed right

past the Sun, who hardly noticed her, its eyes half-closed as it dreamed, gazing, fascinated into its own growing heart. The Sea likewise was distracted, basking in the coally glow of the Sun's gentle rays and the solid embrace of the Earth, itself dreaming of yet more love from beyond.

There was no one to warn the World.

Young Theia didn't know much about herself or her destination. Hers was not such a purpose. She knew what she needed to know: she was approaching her destiny – gods feel these things like one might feel a sneeze coming on. She couldn't see in the dark, but she didn't care. Theia was in love. She was comfortable with blindness. She hurtled, unaware of the trail of herself she left in her wake.

“I am Theia, come to love you with all that I am!” she cried. “I answer!”

Her voice, a streak of dust and icy fire, broke away from her in the cloying dark of that long twilight like a trail of burning breadcrumbs. She roared, songlike, with a manic glee that she would one day pass on to her

living grandchildren. “I am come! I find you! Receive me, my love! *I am Theia, and I answer!*”

Theia’s serenade, swallowed in the silence, did not alert the slumbering lovers. Neither Earth nor Sea could hear her coming. But, as with all wishes of consequence when inevitability arrives, the Sea could *feel* her.

The raw cosmic force of Theia’s desire reached out to the World and pulled. The Earth – solid, still, and unaccustomed to the gravity of guests – simply did not notice, but Theia’s caress stirred the Sea from its unfathomable rapture, first with ripples. Then with waves.

So it was that the Sea, in the darkness of night, was the first to realize what was coming. The Sea shouted to the Earth, “Darling one, lookout!” The Sea rose up higher than ever and reached for the Earth, throwing itself across its ancient lover in a vain attempt to shield Earth’s shores from the cataclysmic metamour, but the love-drunk Earth, heavy and hard, was too slow, and Theia crashed into its back with all the force of her cosmic purpose.

“I LOVE YOU” she sang. There was a blinding light and a brief apocalypse, and what little life there was on Earth, painstakingly cradled and fragile, mostly ended.

The shock was so great, and the light so bright, the Sun was startled from its reverie, and it turned its blazing gaze on the new throuple as they reeled in great wobbling circles, staggering through space, trying to sort things out.

The Earth was broken. What parts of it weren't whirling off in white-hot shards into space were cracked and bleeding fire. The Earth exhaled for the first time ever, and it showed no sign of stopping. It said nothing to the Sea as it split and slid away from itself, molten and fractured. Seeing the Earth letting go of its breath — *their* breath — the Sea drew all the World's air into itself and roared.

“I will *never* leave you!”

And the Sea rose again and crashed down on the Earth in an embrace so complete the Earth vanished from view and the fires went out. Things



were quiet for a moment, and the Sea held the World's breath and waited. Just one cataclysm can kill a god, but not if that god has a healthy marriage, and so the Earth awakened and the Sea relaxed its grasp.

The Earth was jealous, and in pain, and it does not, as a rule, like surprises. But above all else, the Earth is patient. Though Theia was adrift in the dust, unconscious from the force of their union, the Earth had seen the way the Sea had responded to Theia's pull. Besides, they'd made quite an impression on each other.

While Theia slept, the Earth and the Sea spoke privately.

"I am so sorry, darling," said the Sea. "I should have told you about my desires."

The Earth knew the Sea had meant no harm with this wish for another lover, and it replied, "Theia has brought us closer. Your waters churn as I have never seen, and where Theia struck there is gold in my veins."

"Yes!" said the Sea, "And the pull of Theia's love made me dance on your shores like I never imagined I could. I am sorry I was so forceful."

“I love you,” said the Earth to the Sea.

“I love you,” said the Sea to the Earth.

“Shall we wake her?” Asked one.

“Yes, my love,” said the other.

But Theia never woke up. Her meeting with the world had taken her life, but such had been her purpose. The Earth and the Sea grieved for her.

Their neighbor, the Sun, had watched this drama unfold and grown up in the process. It said to itself, “The best gods take action when their neighbors are hurting. I wish I could help them.” And just like that, it became a star. “Siblings,” said the Sun, “this is for you,” and it wished itself brighter, bathing the Earth and the Sea with light. Shine a light on something long enough, and life will emerge. And so it did: countless new children emerged to celebrate the union of Earth and Sea, and the World rejoiced through the pain of their calamity.

But Theia's pale corpse was behind the world when the Sun gave its gift. Her body drifted in the only shadow that was. She floated beyond, cold and still, while the Earth and Sea blossomed with new life.

When Theia's lifeless body finally drifted into the light, it sat still for an age. Then, finally, an eye opened — just a tiny sliver — and peered at the Earth and the Sea from a cool, bright crescent. The Earth and the Sea held their breaths for twenty-eight days as she slowly awakened. She leaned on the light of the Sun for balance.

The Earth and the Sea called out to her, and she regarded them with caution, peering that borrowed light.

“Theia?” she asked. “Who is Theia?”

By now, she had fully awakened, and she shone — boldly nude and a perfect circle — at the Sea and the Earth.

“My name is Luna,” said the newborn Moon. “And I do not know you.”

Theia was gone as quickly as she'd come, like most wishes. The Earth and the Sea released their bated breaths in a great sorrowful wind. Their

cry blew across the Earth and over the Sea, and they held each other tightly while Luna, beautiful and strange, watched close by from behind her changing face.

Luna slowly closed herself off to Theia's lovers once more, drifting back into the cold darkness. When she all but disappeared, the Earth and Sea lamented again.

"First our lover, and now our neighbor," rumbled the Earth. "Her blood has yet to cool in my veins."

"My darling, my beautiful wish," heaved the Sea. "I am a murderer for dreaming so carelessly!"

And their cries were carried on the wind.

"Look!" Said the Sun. "She awakens!"

And indeed, in his warm regard, Luna opened herself, just a little, and the Earth and Sea recognized her silver smile, and they laughed with joy, and their laughter was carried on the wind.

Luna remembered her love for the Sea that month, and made a vow everlasting on her brightest night, when she was most herself.

“I will never leave you,” she promised, and she reached down with silver hands and caressed the Sea, and the Sea heaved and swelled with passion, bathing the Earth in the process. They were happy.

“My darling Earth,” said the Sea. “Please forgive my intemperance. I never meant to hurt you. You and I are still the World, and we always will be, but I love her so much, as well. We are bound. Tied.”

“You need not ask forgiveness,” replied the Earth. I can see that you are bound, and I want you to be happy. As you and I became the World, so you and Luna create the tide.”

But as Luna’s light faded, she left again that month, passing into the shadow once more. When next she opened her eyes, she remembered nothing until the Sun could fully wake her again.

“I will never leave you,” she promised once more.

Luna would repeat this dance of light and darkness forever, every month falling into a slumber in the umbra of the world, only to come to her senses and renew her vow as though for the first time.

“I will never leave you,” Luna says each time, and the Sea reaches up to meet her.

“Now our story will always be beginning,” says the Sea to Luna, who simply laughs and reiterates her certainty that this time things will be different. Still, she keeps her secrets and her space, and to this day she leaves the World for the darkness every month without ever telling them where she goes or what she sees. She never remembers, but she always returns.

The Earth and the Sea now pass their breaths back and forth, trading the wind and all its echoes. It carries all the things Earth and Sea had felt since Theia had come and gone: Fear, pain, guilt, joy, grief, growth, and love. A howl.





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