



Mehtab and the March of
the Moon Bears

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for Conservation Optimism

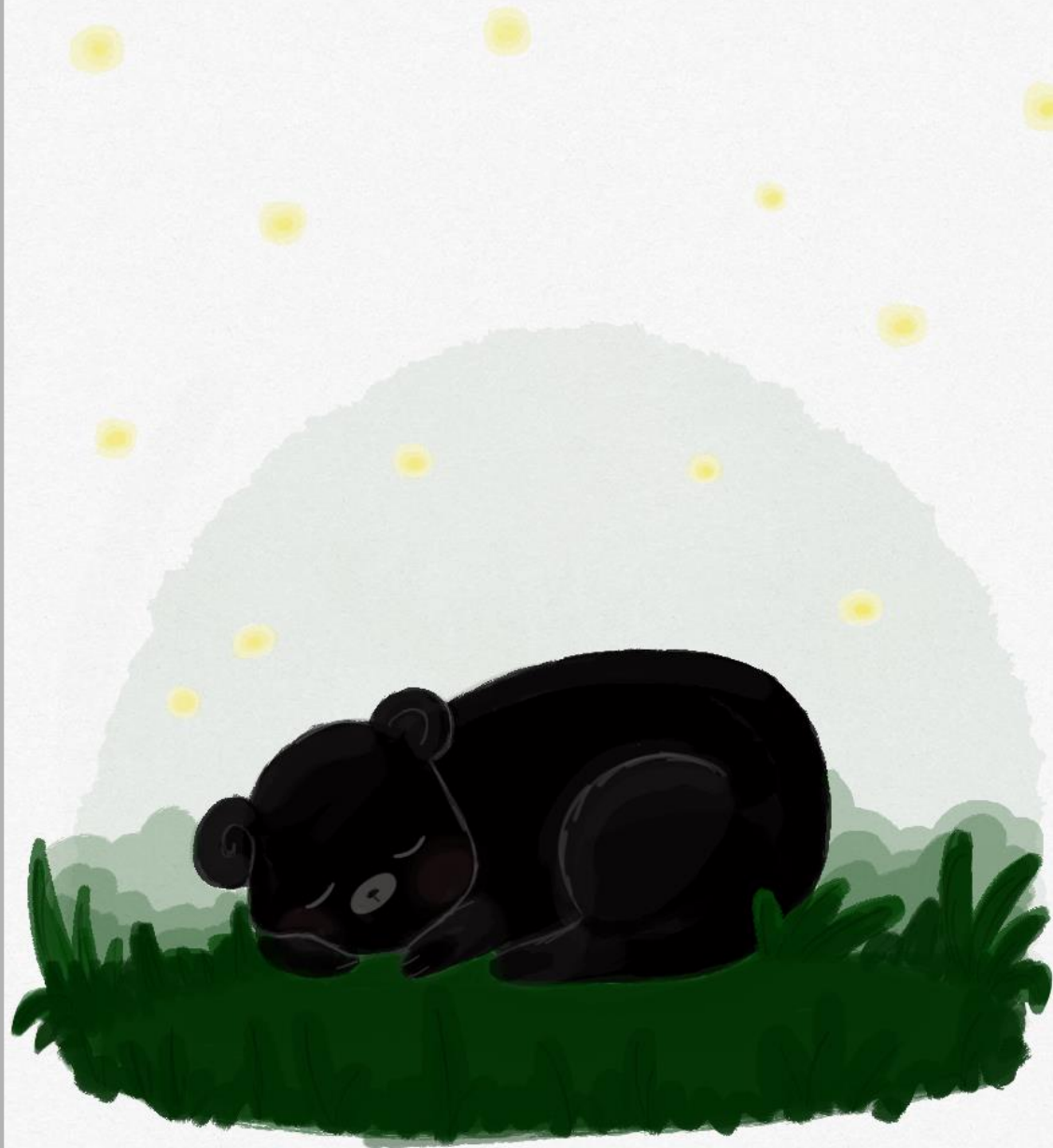
A young boy sat on the roof of his house, tracing the craters in the moon as it shone in the evening sky. The air hummed with the chirping of summer bugs, and a gentle breeze had almost made him drift off to sleep when –

“Raawgh!”

There was a cry from the woods beyond his home!

The boy quickly slid down the tin roof. With a short jump onto the ground below, he made his way cautiously towards the trees in search of the source.





Looking around the woods, the boy soon discovered a small figure curled up in the tall grass just beyond the trees. As he approached, the fluffy little creature turned to face him and let out a cry like the one he heard before.

“Raaaawgh!”

The boy stopped. Now that he could see its face, there was no mistaking it. In front of him sat a bear. He had been warned about the scary black bears that lived in the woods, but seeing the little one in front of him, it looked more scared than he was.

The boy took a deep breath and slowly approached.

“Hey there little guy,” he said, holding out his hand as he knelt down beside the small bear.

The bear tilted its head, revealing cream coloured fur in the shape of a crescent on its chest, and looked at the boy.

“Look at your chest!” the boy exclaimed. “It looks just like the moon.”

“Rrrrrgh,” the little bear purred, no longer crying.

“Here, look.” The boy tucked back his messy dark hair to reveal his own mark: a pale crescent-like shape branching down from his temple to his cheek. “We match!”

The little bear shifted closer to the boy, nuzzling his hand, and let out a cheerful cry.



"My name is Mehtab, and it means 'moon'! Can you say 'Mehtab'?" he asked, petting the bear's head.

"Mmrrrrraaaaarrghm," the bear growled.

"Close enough!" Mehtab chuckled. "My parents named me that because of my little moon. Do you have a name?" he asked. The bear looked back at him blankly. "Let's see. Maybe I can call you Chaand. It also means moon. What do you think, Chaand?"

The bear crawled into Mehtab's lap and gurgled happily.

"You're so cute, Chaand," Mehtab cooed. "Why were you crying before? Are you lost?"

The bear nodded, sniffing slightly.

The pair were interrupted by the sound of angry voices.

"It couldn't have gone far! It's just a bear cub after all!" one voice yelled.

"I'll go look this way!" the other called back. "We have to recapture it."

"Oh no, Chaand! Is that why you're lost? We have to get you out of here!"

Mehtab whispered to his little companion.

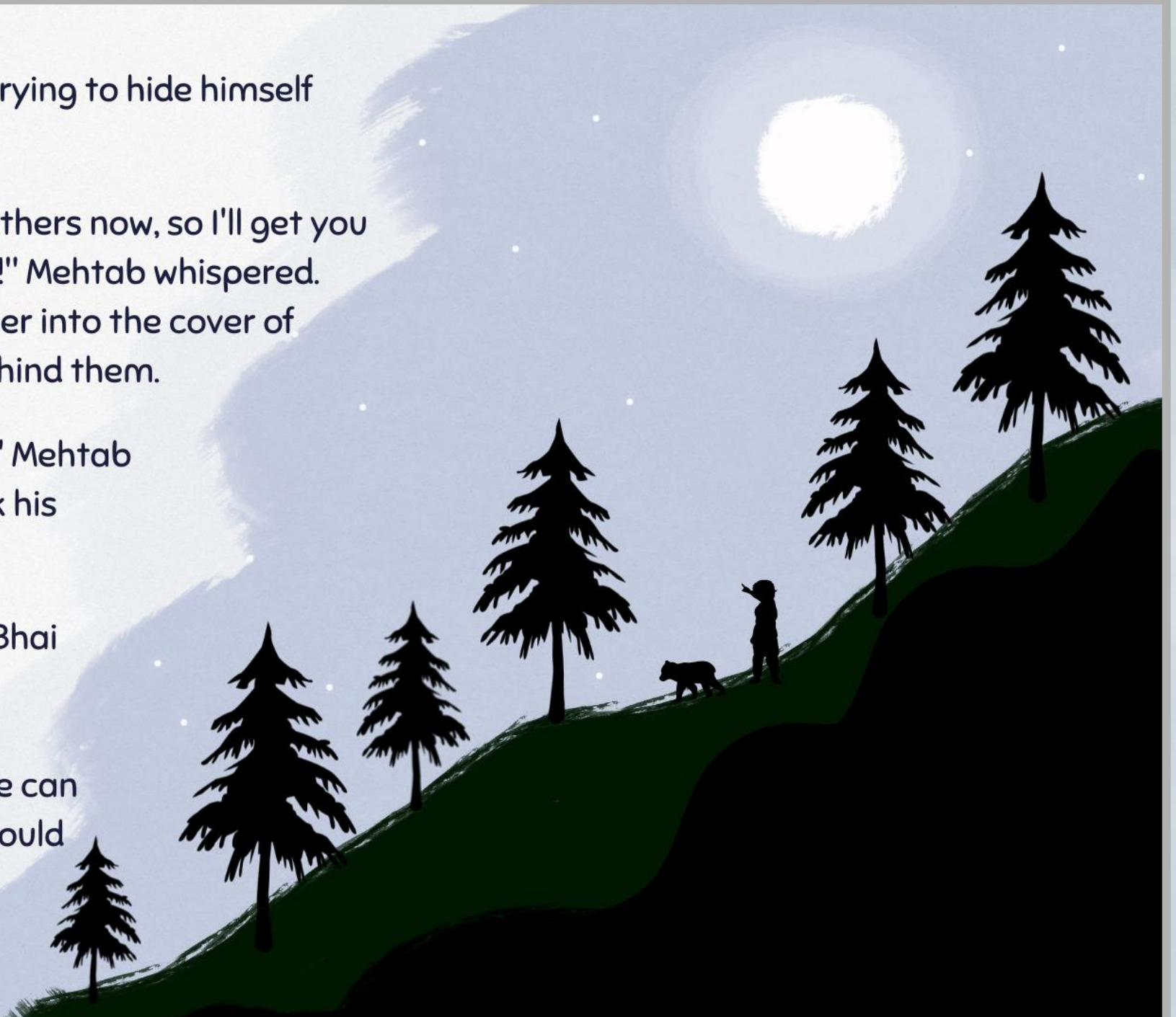


Chaand tucked his face into Mehtab trying to hide himself away in fear.

"Don't worry Chaand. We're moon brothers now, so I'll get you to your family. I promise on the moon!" Mehtab whispered. With that, the pair quickly snuck deeper into the cover of the trees, leaving the angry voices behind them.

"So, is your family here in the woods?" Mehtab asked after some time. Chaand shook his head.

"Oh, right. It's going to get cold soon. Bhai said when it gets cold, some animals migrate to where its warm. The other bears must be down the mountain. We can climb down tomorrow. For now, we should probably get some rest. We've been walking for a while."



So Mehtab and Chaand found themselves a cozy spot to sleep for the night in a little clearing. The moon was still glowing brightly above them, and the stars were all twinkling too.

The glow bugs of the forest surrounded the two friends with their own little moons, shining like little stars. It made them feel so close to the sky that they might just touch it.

"Chaand." Mehtab whispered after a while. "Even when you go back to your family, I promise to say goodnight to the moon every night. That way, it will be like I'm saying goodnight to you. Will you do it too?" Mehtab asked his fluffy friend.

"Mrrraurgh," Chaand growled in agreement.

"I'm glad," Mehtab said with a yawn. "Goodnight then, little moon."

"Ruuurgh," Chaand growled back sleepily.



It was early morning when Mehtab woke up, but Chaand was nowhere to be seen! The boy quickly got up, worried for his little friend, and started to look for him.

After searching for a while, he noticed a trail of berries leading him to a tree. At the tree's base were giant leaves used to hold a pile of berries like a plate, and up in the branches of the tree...

"Chaand! There you are!" Mehtab exclaimed. The bear cub lay softly snoring in the trees, content with a big meal of berries, obvious from the berry juice covering his paws and spread all around his mouth.

Upon hearing Mehtab's voice, Chaand promptly woke up and made his way over to him.



"Did you put these berries here for me?" Mehtab asked the little bear. Chaand grunted cheerfully in response. "Thank you, little moon! That's so thoughtful of you. You must have woken up really early to do that, right?" Mehtab said, sitting himself down beside the bear and eating a berry. It tasted delicious. A little sweet, a little sour. Even tastier than candy.

"Ruuuurgh," Chaand gurgled, slurping the remaining berry juice from his snout and paws.

"That's right. Bhai said that black bears like to wake up at dawn to look for their food. That's why you got up so early. Even too early for me, and Mama always says I wake everyone up too soon." Mehtab giggled to himself at the thought of his mother tickling him as she did to get him back into his bed.

With their bellies full of delicious berries, the pair set off down the forest of the mountain once again. They walked and walked with Chaand on Mehtab's back, in his arms, or sometimes walking by his side until the moon was out again. They had almost reached the base when they came across the most amazing sight.

Just ahead of them, a row of black bears marching on into the night, the summer bugs lighting up their path, and the fur of their crescents gleaming in the moonlight.





"Wow..." Mehtab breathed. By his side, Chaand cheered, letting out a happy growl. From beyond, a bear slightly bigger than Chaand turned to see him, and made its way towards them. "Is that your brother?" Mehtab asked. Chaand nodded eagerly before running over to the other bear, catching him in a bear hug.

"Mehtab!" came a voice from behind him. Mehtab turned to see his own brother racing down the mountain towards him. "Mehtab! We've been looking everywhere for you!" he said, pulling Mehtab into a hug too, as soon as he reached. "I was so worried about you."

"Bhai! I'm so sorry! I had to help Chaand." Mehtab said, wiping his tears. His brother looked over to see the little bear making his way back to Mehtab and the pair hugged each other tightly.

"I'm going to miss you so much, Chaand!" Mehtab cried. Chaand growled back sadly, snuggling his friend.



"You do know they only go away for the winter, right?" the older boy said with a kind smile.

"Really, bhai?" Mehtab exclaimed, wiping away his tears. Within his embrace, Chaand's ears perked up too.

"Really. They'll be back next summer, when its warm again!" his brother said, walking over to Mehtab. "So you have to take care of his home while he's away like a good boy, right?" he asked.

Mehtab nodded eagerly, giving Chaand one more tight squeeze before carefully placing him on his brother's back. "You be good now, Chaand. Don't eat too many berries, and don't get lost again because I'll be waiting for you, okay? Making the forest safe for you again." He sniffled.

Chaand cooed back in response, waving from his brother's back as they made their way towards the rest of the bears. Mehtab's own brother came over to pick him up over his back.





"I'll see you soon, Chaand!" Mehtab called out.

"Mmrrrraaaarrghm!" Chaand roared back happily.

"Goodnight, little moon!"

"I'm so proud of you, Mehtab," his brother said as the two set off on another adventure back home.

End

