

Matt wrestled with his decision. To escape Alfred's unblinking gaze, he glanced up. What he found in the night sky forced a bitter laugh.

"What's so amusing?" Alfred asked.

Matt jabbed a finger at the gibbous moon. "It's the same moon as the night I got blown back here."

"It certainly is," Alfred said with a nod. "It's as inescapable as the earth we stand on. We can't quit the moon, we can't quit the earth, and we can't quit our own skin."

The strange talk puzzled Matt. "What's that supposed to mean?"

Alfred answered pensively. "I can't quit being Alfred Jongler. Sometimes I wish I could. Sometimes I wish I had never inherited this unusual instrument and the burden that comes with it. Sometimes I wish Iris Jongler-Jinks had never played this thing and sent you here. But here you are, forcing me to be who I am."

Alfred's quiet confession released a tremor in Matt, awakening his own doubts. "I get what you're saying. But what if football isn't part of who *I* am?"

"Maybe it isn't. Maybe that's what you're here to find out."

Matt's face, a knit of distress and confusion, prompted Alfred to cut to the chase. "I talked with Major Mercer and Pop Warner. Pop said you have two things no coach can give a player: size and moxie. They're giving you a second chance to attend Carlisle and play football." Alfred lifted a foot and shoved the music case back to Matt. "It's your call, Matthew. Take it, and find another Jongler. Or stay, and see which way the ball bounces."