

LEVELED Book • S

The Moon Bowl



Written by Algernon Tassin
Illustrated by Maria Voris

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Once Upon a Time, or The Problem

Once upon a time, all the rivers in the world ran into deep holes in the ground. There were no ponds or lakes where people could save their drinking water. The rivers became full only when a woman tipped over an enormous bowl of water on the moon and poured rain down to the Earth.





But she didn't always tip the bowl in a **timely** fashion. In fact, sometimes the bowl would tip just slightly, not far enough to spill any water out. It was deeply frustrating to all the people on Earth who watched the bowl, waiting for rain.

"Isn't that just like a woman, to change her mind for no reason! She tips it one way, and then tips it right back," they said. The people mistakenly thought that women were silly and couldn't make decisions. One year, it had been months since the moon bowl had tipped. The rivers were so **skimpy** you could see the stones at the bottom. Everyone was worried because wash day was coming. "Silly woman! Can't she make up her mind?" the people grumbled.

The Hero

Of course, the tale of the moon bowl is a fairy tale, so there must be a hero and a princess. The hero was a **humble** woodchopper named Tom. The princess was named Charlotte, and she was, of course, incredibly beautiful. One day, the beautiful princess spied Tom the woodchopper chopping wood, and she instantly fell in love with him. Tom glimpsed Charlotte through the trees and fell in love with her as well. So the princess skipped off to tell her father, the king.





"Father, I have seen the man I want to marry. His axe flies like the wind itself, and the motion of his body is like a river."

"A river, hmm?" said the king, and he began to think. Of course this is a fairy tale, so the king had to think of some task for Tom to perform before he could marry Charlotte. "I've got a task for this Tom to complete before he can marry you. He must go to that silly woman on the moon. He must make her tip the moon bowl over so we might have some rain."

The Task

Tom was brought to the castle and told of his task. He kissed Princess Charlotte goodbye and set out to make the woman on the moon tip her bowl over. After three days of walking, Tom realized that he didn't know how to get to the moon. He was hot and tired. He thought it might be nice to feel the breeze on the back of his neck. So he took out his axe and started chopping.

"Wouldn't it be nice," he thought, "to feel the wind on the back of my neck with my eyes closed?" And so Tom closed his eyes. And what do you know, on the third chop that Tom chopped with his eyes closed, whiz-bang, he flew straight to the moon.





Tom opened his eyes. There in front of him was an old man stooping over the ground. He carried a long glass stick, and he was using the stick to draw in the dust. The man was nothing but **rickety** old bones that rattled when he coughed. And he coughed all the time, for he stirred up plenty of dust as he drew.

"Sir, what are you drawing?" Tom asked politely.



The rickety man peered sideways. "A diagram! I am drawing a diagram of how to line up the stars. Look at them all out there in the sky, here and there and splashed about, twinkling and winking. I'm trying to find a way to organize them. See, I'm going to trim their corners nice and square and line them up, biggest on top, next biggest, and so on, etcetera."

"But sir, how will you reach the stars to move them around?" asked Tom, very politely.

Just then the old man had a great coughing fit. Tom was quite sure his bones would crumble and join the clouds of dust that swirled all about them.

"Why," coughed the old man, "I'll get to that when I get to it. First things first."

"Well, if you don't mind me asking, what good would organizing the stars do?" asked Tom, ever so politely.

"Fool! Simpleton!" cried the rickety man. "Can't you see that this is important work? I'm dealing with the stars, boy, and the stars are very important. Yes, very important! My work is much too important for me to waste time answering your foolish questions."



"Well, I'll be moving along then," Tom said, "if only you could tell me where the moon bowl is. I need to speak with the woman who tips it."

"The woman who tips the moon bowl?" said the rickety man. And then he began a great coughing fit that seemed to last a full half-hour. This was very clever of the old man, because he was trying to buy time to think. "What a silly chore it is to tip over the moon bowl," he finally choked. "Thank goodness I have much more important work to do. Turn around, lad, and I'll hop on your back and show you where she is supposed to be."



The Hero's Unbelievably Clever Solution

Tom turned and crouched down, and the old man hopped on his back, piggyback style. With a wave of the old man's glass stick, they instantly arrived underneath the most enormous bowl Tom had ever seen. It towered over them, silver and smooth and **gleaming** softly. Clearly it was full of water, for shining drops trickled down its sides.



"It tips from up top, on the rim," croaked the rickety old man.

"How can I get up there?" asked Tom.

"Easy enough," said the old man. And with another wave of the glass stick, Tom and the old man were **perched** on the rim of the bowl. It was as though they stood on the edge of an enormous round lake.

"How could anyone tip over such a large, heavy bowl?" asked Tom.

"Simple, boy. Why, I barely need to brush it with the end of my stick, and over it goes." And so the old man did. He reached out his glass stick and tipped the moon bowl slowly, slowly over.





The water ran out, singing over the silver sides of the bowl like a million glasses tinkling at once. Tom thought of the purring rivers and trickling raindrops falling down on Earth, and of how happy all the people must be to have rain.

“Excuse me, sir, but I wonder how you know so much about tipping the bowl when it isn’t your job,” Tom said, ever so politely.



“What? Huff!” cried the old man. And he began coughing again, so much that Tom himself shook on the edge of the bowl. “What a stupid job, tipping over the moon bowl. Why, an infant could tip this thing over! I’m much too important to do anything as simple as this. Much too important! The stars, my boy—my brilliant mind was destined to work with the stars. Ridiculous moon bowl.”

“It is your job to tip the moon bowl, isn’t it, sir?” asked Tom, taking extra care to be especially polite.

“Balderdash! I was cut out for much greater things than **minding** the moon bowl. Why I . . . I . . . oh, rubbish. Yes, I’m the one who’s supposed to tip the moon bowl,” the old man grumbled. “All that bowl ever does is keep me from my real work. It’s important work, you know, lining up the stars. Much more important than that silly moon bowl.”

“But sir, if you don’t mind me asking, why would you tip it partway and then put it back? It makes the people on Earth quite angry.”





The rickety man **stammered** and choked and **jostled**. “I don’t have time, you great oaf! I must get back to my work!” he cried. And he shouted so violently that Tom lost his balance (you do remember that he was riding piggyback, don’t you?). The rickety man fell right into the moon bowl while Tom fell outside to the ground. Tom heard the scratching sound of the old man scrambling up the inside of the bowl. Soon he saw the old man’s long nose peering over the edge.

"My stick!" he cried. "How will I draw my diagrams without my stick? And how will I get down? Toss it up to me, boy."

Tom looked around him, and sure enough, the glass stick had fallen near his feet.

Tom laughed. "Well, now that you're inside the bowl, I suppose you'll do your job," he said. "If you don't tip the bowl when it's full, the water will come up to your nose. I'm sorry, sir, but I have to be leaving now." And Tom tipped his cap ever so politely, waved the glass stick, and in an instant was back at the king's palace.



Happily Ever After, or The End

"Did it happen to rain here?" asked Tom.

"Rain!" cried the king. "Why, it rained more than I can ever remember it raining. The fields are full of grain and the rivers are full of sweet drinking water. Plus I'll be able to get my washing done. Good show, Tom!"

"And I must inform you," continued Tom, "that the woman on the moon is really a man. And he changes his mind not because he's silly, but because he thinks he's much more important than the moon bowl."





Just then, the princess came in and saw Tom, and she flew into his arms. They were married that day, and you can probably guess how they lived after that.

As for the old man in the moon bowl, he doesn't dare jump out, because he's nothing but bones. Sometimes he gets so angry that he lets the water get almost up to his nose before leaning over and letting the rain out. But thank goodness he's leaving the stars alone. I think they look quite nice just the way they are, don't you?

Glossary

balderdash (<i>n.</i>)	nonsense (p. 17)
gleaming (<i>adj.</i>)	shining softly (p. 13)
humble (<i>adj.</i>)	modest; a common person, not royalty (p. 6)
jostled (<i>v.</i>)	knocked around; bumped (p. 18)
minding (<i>v.</i>)	watching; taking care of (p. 17)
perched (<i>v.</i>)	sitting or standing in a high, unstable spot (p. 14)
rickety (<i>adj.</i>)	weak and shaky; likely to fall over (p. 9)
simpleton (<i>n.</i>)	a stupid person (p. 11)
skimpy (<i>adj.</i>)	small; thin; very little (p. 5)
stammered (<i>v.</i>)	stuttered (p. 18)
timely (<i>adj.</i>)	in time; when it is needed (p. 5)

This story was originally published in 1921 in the book
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