

Before This Moon

By Charlotte Chadwick

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The night the moon wobbled down to earth, nobody really knew what to do so we all wandered out onto the street to look at it. It was perfectly smooth, which was unexpected. It was huge, but not really as big as you'd think. It fit quite well into the construction site, where it sat, and glowed. We wouldn't have known it was the moon, except that we had all heard that high-pitched sound; and looking outside, we had all seen the moon fall in a slow but incontrovertible path from its usual place in the sky.

A guy in cycling gear tried to take photos on his phone, but the flash bounced back into the lens, and he only captured a soft gray light that didn't seem to leave the screen. He frowned at his phone and shook it.

Fuck, he said.

Language, said Mrs Abebe. She was Christian. We all knew that but she had brought her Bible to the scene, which clarified her take on the situation, should any passersby be in doubt, and which would also stand her in good stead if this turned out to be the apocalypse.

Not that there were any passersby at this hour, only the bicycle man, who had been a bit drunk from the pub but still remembered all his safety lights. The lights seemed to be getting less and less effective so he wheeled to a stop at the beginning of our street to check the batteries, when he looked up, and suddenly saw the moon sitting on the pavement. He walked the rest of the way.

One of the twins from the estate looked over at bicycle man who had now retreated to a seated position in front of the closed shop front of the off-license. He was stroking his phone and making little whimpering noises.

The twin (you never knew which was which) held her phone up, pointedly turning the flash off and standing well back. We all crowded around her screen but could only see a photo of darkness. That is very poor image quality said Mrs Abebe. The twin was pressing buttons faster and faster. Apparently, her phone had frozen too.

No one tried to take photos after that. We all just looked at the moon for a while. It was quite beautiful. People went away and came back. Other sleepy family members and flatmates joined us, and they looked at the moon, too. It's beautiful, we all said.

After a while, we felt like we should do something else to the moon. Sing to it? Cover it up? Mr Popescu finally said we should inform NASA or the British Museum, and it was so obvious that everyone heartily agreed, wishing they'd been the ones to say it, looking for a reason they had not. The moon, of course.

It's quite transfixing, isn't it?

This may sounds strange, but I feel like it affects your thinking...somehow..

Oh yes, I agree! I've been noticing...something...too...

The voices tailed off.

Then there was only silence and the moon; round and white, turning the whole street surrounding it to bluish grey.

A sudden intake of breath, "Tamsin!"

Tamsin Ward was running towards the moon. No one had ever seen her run before. Tamsin's mother was running after her, followed by other people who'd broken out of the reverie and were

torn between wanting to stop Tamsin and not wanting to get any closer to the moon.

Typical. Tamsin was the kind of kid who broke, or crushed, or stepped on, anything in her path.

What more fitting tribute to ten years of clumsiness than managing to somehow screw up the sole celestial encounter the neighbourhood had ever experienced.

Tamsin was brandishing an umbrella, and as she reached the moon she jabbed the umbrella in. It slid into the pale orb as easily as a chopstick going into jelly, leaving only the handle visible.

Tamsin looked around quickly, before withdrawing the umbrella amidst a shower of white jelly and a chorus of whispered 'oh my god's, gasping, and swearing -- not just from bicycle man.

Mrs Abebe threw her bible towards Tamsin in what most of us generously chose to interpret as an attempt to protect the girl.

Before the bible made contact, and before the first chorus was even finished, it was repeated much louder, with shrieks this time: Tamsin was licking the jelly off herself.

Apparently it was delicious, because next thing, Tamsin was scooping it up with both hands and cramming it into her mouth.

No one moved. Tamsin's mother had paused mid-run and was just frozen, watching the fast-moving figure of her daughter working her way across the surface of the moon, handful by handful.

Will she die? asked a child. The child was swiftly hushed, but we were all thinking the same thing.

Tamsin continued to eat, making little squeaking sounds of pleasure and even closing her eyes.

The child said, 'looks yummy, I want some'.

Suddenly all the kids were there - how had they all managed to loosen their parent's grip on their

hands and run that fast? Some of them even wielded utensils; Mrs Abebe's son Jeremy had somehow procured an enormous soup spoon and climbed to near the top of the moon. He was nested in a hollow he'd ladled out for himself, doling out gelatinous white chunks to the mass of clutching child-hands below.

It didn't take that long for the parents to join in.

By the time the first helicopter appeared, there was nothing left to eat, and well, there was nothing actually happening. There was just a crowd of contented looking people standing around on the ground and a sky buzzing with helicopters and also bearing a distinct lack of moon. The police, media, and government circled around and through us, puzzling. Something was clearly odd, but no one was willing to talk about it. Journalists couldn't get a single quote. Not a single arrest was made. The media was watching the government agents and our phones were working again, so we recorded their inquiries and they left us alone. We all went back inside.

It was okay.

At first there were a bunch of op eds speculating about what had happened to the moon, and saying we 'the silents' certainly had something to do with it, and we should be punished. Very quickly, more pieces appeared defending us, saying innocent until proven guilty and as the moon's suspicious disappearance was completely unprecedented, there was no previous course of action which applied. Some members of our street emailed the articles to each other at first, then we all stopped reading them. The media would regularly call us with outrageous offers of money. We endured many visits from poorly disguised undercover government agents. Still no one said anything about what had happened, not even to each other, not even the children.

Especially not the children. Individually, our memories grew hazy and we became doubtful.

Perhaps it had not happened like that. Perhaps it had never really happened.

After a while, with a lot of ceremony, a telecommunications company sponsored a big shiny sky disc that looked very similar to the original moon, due to having all the same shadows fall on it. It was supposed to be for navigational as well as decorative purposes. To light up our shared history or something - I can't recall the first logo. Some people said it was recording us or beaming stuff into our heads, but it looked okay. We got used to it and, after a while, almost forgot there had ever been another moon there.