

## Real Moon

Moon was scared. Moon was a bit scared. Since Vicky had left. She'd had a text from her boyfriend. She had left to meet him. When she was leaving, she had asked Moon if it would be all right to be alone for a little while. Moon had said no. She hadn't wanted to be alone. It was her house. But she hadn't wanted to be alone. It had been all right when Vicky was with her. It had been all right when her mum and dad had been with her. She hadn't wanted to be alone in her house.

When she said no, Vicky had frowned. Moon hadn't liked the two wrinkles between her eyebrows. They made her face ugly. They made her voice unhappy. She didn't like unhappy people. Her mum and dad were happy every time they were with her. Vicky was usually happy with her. All her friends were happy with her. Sebastian, the cat next door, was happy with her. Telly, the dog from the other next door, was happy with her.

Vicky hadn't been happy when Moon had said no.

So she said, 'Yes.' Then Vicky had gone, saying, 'I'll be back in a few minutes.'

Moon knew 'a few minutes' was a short time. It was shorter than an hour. It was shorter than half an hour. But being alone for a few minutes was a long, long time.

The round clock on the wall was cutting the air by ticking. Slowly. Very slowly. Tick, tick, tick, tick, tick. Very slowly.

How long was a few minutes?

She still didn't want to be alone.

But she was alone now.

The owl on the gable of the house across the street was the same as the one yesterday. The dead tree without branches standing next to the house was the same as the one two days ago.

The butterfly-shaped stain on the wall in the living room she was in wasn't different from the one an hour ago. The small penguin figurine on the bookshelf wasn't different from the one two hours ago.

But she was alone with the owl and the dead tree and the stain and the penguin. That was the difference. Vicky was with her an hour ago. Vicky was with her five minutes ago. Her mum and dad were with her three hours ago.

The colouring book she was doing with Vicky was dull now. It was only putting different colours in different sections. That was all. Not interesting. Besides, she was too clumsy to make the colours stay within the lines. What she had done was all messy. Why should she keep making a mess? She closed the book with a loud sound that echoed round the ceiling.

She switched the TV on. A woman with big breasts was saying with a fake smile, 'So you can clean your room easily.' She changed the channel. A man with dark glasses was chasing a man without dark glasses. She changed. A man and a woman were kissing. She changed. A woman with pink hair was shouting into a microphone. She changed. A woman with very short hair was saying something on a podium. She changed. She changed. She changed. Then she switched it off.

The butterfly on the wall changed its shape into a caterpillar. Was it getting younger? No. The wall was changing. It had wrinkles all over now. Was the wall getting older? No. It was breaking. The vertical wrinkles waved from left to right. They waved back from right to left. They were like the waves of people in a big football stadium. Maybe a football game would start soon.

Moon watched them waving with her mouth open. She didn't know the wall in the living room could be so interesting. She had thought it would stay still forever and ever. Now it was moving with the sound of waves. Was the room going to be a beach? It would be nice to splash some salty water around her. She waited, sitting on the sofa. Her hands were tightly clasped on her knees. Vicky would be surprised when she came back. Her mum and dad might be happy to see the interesting wall when they got here. Her bored and scared feeling had become a warm anticipation.

Then all the wrinkles got together in the centre. The big TV in front of them shivered and clattered. As if it wanted to wee-wee. She chuckled. It would be fun to see the TV wet the TV stand. Her mum and dad would say to it, 'Bad TV!' She giggled with her hand covering her mouth. Her classmate, Lera, always covered her mouth when she laughed. Moon thought it was cute. She was being Lera now.

The wrinkled wall was quiet for a second or two. Moon watched. Her hands were now back onto her knees. Her short finger nails were digging into her jeans. Her shoulders were hunched. Her head was leaning forwards. As if a chick wanted to be fed.

The entire wall shuddered and erupted into white powder. The wall wasn't white when it was staying still and boring. It was light green. Now the powdered wall was white. Snow white. It was snow. Whirling around her on the sofa. It was snowing in the living room. It was summer and warm. And it was snowing in the room. And it wasn't cold. And it was silent. No sounds from outside were heard in the room. As if the snowflakes had swallowed all the sounds.

The snowflakes perched on her head, on her shoulders, on her arms, on her thighs. They weren't cold. They were a little bit cooler than the air. Like chilled fruit from the fridge.

Moon extended her tongue. The white cool flakes came down. It was sweet. Like lemon slices that had been kept in sugar for a while. Her mum liked to eat some when it was hot outside. She tipped her head backwards to face the ceiling and open her mouth wider. More lemon flakes entered into her mouth. It was yummy. Her mum would be delighted to have lots of them.

Moon looked at her body on the sofa. It was white. She could see a little bit of the blue of her jeans under the white. The sofa was white with a little bit of dark red underneath. The carpet was white with a little bit of ivory colour. But they were very similar. She had to look hard to see the ivory carpet under the white lemons. She saw a mirror hung on the opposite wall. She was there watching herself. Her eyebrows were white. Like she was her granny. Her hair was white. Like her granny. Did she have wrinkles? Like her granny? Like the wall? No. She couldn't see any wrinkles. She was still a girl. She patted her head. Her dark hair appeared. A dog barked outside. She rubbed her eyebrows. Her dark eyebrows returned. A car tooted its horn somewhere. She was still Moon. All the sounds were back.

Then, the big TV screen exploded. With a bell-ringing sound. The bits and pieces of the screen glass came together in mid-air. It became something translucent and long. Like a big worm without a colour, without legs. She could see things through it, although they were all distorted and smaller. It slithered in the air in front of her eyes. Was it dancing for her? Did it want to talk to her? She waited.

If Vicky came back now, she would scream. She didn't like worms, any worms, even little cute caterpillars.

The long big worm in the air touched her left cheek. It was cold. It tapped her right cheek. It was cold. She shrieked. It was fun. She jumped. It was fun. She tried to grab it. It ducked from her hands. It was fun. She stood up. It floated above her head. She faced it and opened her mouth wide, wider, wider, and wider. Her now huge mouth, bigger than the big TV, bigger than the kitchen table, gobbled the cold worm. Or the worm dove into her big mouth. She wasn't sure which and didn't care. The worm was now in her tummy, which was gigantic for a moment as it had the worm and then shrank back to its normal size. The worm was now tiny in her middle, crawling around inside. She had a friend in her. She would be with her friend forever and ever. Not like her other friends, this worm wouldn't be called back to their home for dinner or homework.

She patted her new friend through her body. It patted back from inside at the same moment. They did a high five. She smiled with her now-ordinary-size mouth.

If Vicky came back now, she wouldn't scream. She wouldn't be able to see her new worm friend.

Moon plopped down on the sofa. Her friend moved from right to left. She followed it with her finger. She moved her finger from left to right. Her friend followed it. It was fun.

Humming, playing with her friend, she looked up at the ceiling. Down came lightning. A finger of lightning. A long forefinger of lightning. It was a bit bony. With big joints. The nail was well-trimmed. No colour, like the ones of Vicky and her mum.

It touched her tummy. Her friend inside jumped up to it. Now the big finger and her new friend were talking through her tummy. What were they talking about? She couldn't tell exactly. But from their tone it must be something happy. So she was happy as well. The big finger trembled from the tip to the base. As if a wave rushed upwards. When the last ripple reached the very top, the whole hand lifted off. With her new friend that was in her tummy. So she was up in the air. She was floating in the air. Under her, the sofa looked up r. Under her, the carpet smiled. Under her, the colouring book admired her. Under her, the coffee table tipped its imaginary hat to her.

She shrieked with joy. She was in the air. Like a bird. Like a bat. Like a bee. Like a fly. Like a mosquito. Her new friend in her tummy jumped up and down with rapture.

All three of them were in the air together.

Then the big finger turned once, twice, three times. Gaining speed. Faster and faster. Whee, whee, whee. Round and round. The stain on the wall came and went. Came and went. Came and went. Faster and faster. The stain that had just gone joined the stain that has just come. A circle of stain around the room Around her. Around her and her two new friends. Round and round. Whee, whee, whee.

'You all right, Moon?' Vicky came into the room.

Moon dropped to the floor. Alone.

The lightning finger was gone. The worm in her tummy was gone. The TV was intact. No snowflakes.

She cried.

'Oh, sorry. I should've come back early, but . . . You must've been scared. I'm so sorry. Vicky hugged her tight. Moon cried.

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