

Twin Moons

by Ajay Nair

Stroman first saw the moons when he took Lisa's blouse off. He did not call them moons when he first saw them; they were merely identical crescent-shaped crimson discolorations at the tops of each of her breasts. He was distracted by their dark lustre — enough to stop wanting to furnish her body with respectful kisses like he intended to - and called Lisa's attention to them. She stood up from the bed, turned to the oblong, full-length mirror by its side and in the half light of the fading summer day peered at these new scars.

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It all began with love as these things usually do. Puppy love, perhaps, but embellished with a carnal flavour. These polarities are not irreconcilable as anyone who has fallen in love at the age of twenty or under will tell you. Stroman was healthy, handsome and wholly gullible. Lisa was pretty, voluptuous and entirely lustful. Apart from a minor digression from convention — Lisa was an inch taller than Stroman — theirs was a match fused with abundant reserves of natural potential. They kissed on their second date, went further and farther on the fifth. When opportunity presented them with an empty bedroom to host their seventh date in, they grabbed it with fumbling hands, wobbly knees and plenty of heavy breathing.

'Bite me, bite me please.' It was the 'please' at the end of the importuning whisper that surprised Stroman. The bed was soft, the lights were turned out, the clothes had been discarded and all that was moving in the room was the trembling wisp of Stroman and Lisa's physical love. Stroman looked at Lisa, delighted at the discovery of this pleasant kink, his desire augmented. With exaggerated tenderness and an unexpected facility for symmetry he bit twice into the fruity flesh of her skin, a few inches below her shapely collar bone.

And now those bites had developed into incipient twin moons.

'They will go away, won't they?' Lisa asked with the disbelieving faith of a religious rationalist.

'Of course, my dear. They are only love bites.'

Over the next few days, the only-love-bites waxed. Though their progress was slower than the parent moon that hung in the sultry night sky, they were nevertheless filling out. Stroman panicked first. At this rate, he calculated that in three days, the moons would be visible every time Lisa stepped out. His anxiety seeped into Lisa and she took to wearing blouses that had necks circling her neck even as the sun fried the city as if wreaking some ancient vengeance.

They decided to consult a doctor. In order to preserve the secret of their coupling from family and acquaintances, they ventured to the eastern edge of the city where no one knew them. They found a clinic hidden deep in a dead-ending by-lane and waited for the doctor to call them. With them waited an ageing man with a chicken tied by its leg to his right hand with a piece of fluorescent pink string. The chicken seemed peaceful in its upside down state, its eye contemplating the hand-locked, nervous couple calmly.

The doctor called the chicken man first. Lisa and Stroman could detect whispery rumblings from within the doctor's chamber, which had been cordoned off from the waiting area with a thin wooden partition. Then the door opened and the chicken walked out with an imperious gait, clucked loudly when it reached the door and exited. The man followed shortly after, his string now tied around his wrist and his face morose, his eyes teary.

Stroman followed Lisa in to the doctor's chamber, only to find there were two of them. One of them wore a white coat, had a

stethoscope coiled around his neck, had a weather-beaten face and long, grey hair speckled with some sort of glitter. He was reclining in a spacious arm-chair. The other was sitting on a table in the middle of the room, his legs folded underneath him, his right hand idly fondling a skull painted half-green-half-red. He had a wicked look on his face, his toes curling into the soles of his bare feet.

'And what brings you here?' asked the man on the table, his beard twitching mischievously. Stroman hesitated, Lisa didn't. She explained the condition with remarkable candour. As she narrated the incident leading up to the inflicting of the hickeys, the doctor in the arm chair stood up, stretched and motioned for Lisa to follow him to the small bed that stood by one wall of the room. He asked her to lie down, pulled a grimy curtain to partially obscure the view from the rest of the room and asked Lisa to show him the marks. When he'd seen them to his satisfaction, he strolled back to his chair.

The man on the table, who had closed his eyes during the examination, piped up and said, 'We need to run some tests, get some blood work done. Come back to us in a week for the results.' He skipped off the table, grabbed a new needle from a rack, and quickly drew blood from Lisa's arm. They charged the couple seventy five units of the local currency and bid them good-bye. As they left the clinic, they could hear the echo of the chicken's clucking behind them.

In the next few days, the moons swelled to near fullness and began to ache. They turned darker and were hot to touch. Lisa sensed their paralyzing presence every waking moment. She felt heavy and edgy, with no energy to walk, much less to canoodle with an increasingly despondent Stroman. She grew heavy-lidded and her thighs grew thicker, restricting her movements. It was as if the moons were exerting pressure on her body, causing tides in her bloodstream that weakened her. The malcontent spread to her love

for Stroman who was now officially blamed by her for her misfortune, though both knew that technically, she was the root cause.

The night before they were to return to the doctors, Lisa started bleeding through the moons, which were now full and flushed with a poisonous dampness. They burst forth, thin rivulets of blood streaming through them, soiling her clothes, her bed-sheets. She writhed around in silent agony, till she could bear it no more and passed out. When she woke up the next morning, the moons were gone, the blood had dried and her skin was restored to its previous earthy sheen.

They had decided to meet at the doctor's clinic and Stroman was there as soon as dawn had broken. The clinic was already open and when he entered the waiting room, he found the chicken man again, but this time instead of the chicken, two large, brown eggs were tied to the end of the pink string. When he saw Stroman, he waved him through to the doctors' cabin with a smile. Stroman didn't have the patience to wait for Lisa to arrive.

The two of them were hunched over the table, nodding at a piece of paper, which was held in place by what looked like a jar of blood. They looked up as Stroman walked in, and he noticed that they had identical pairs of eyes, dark blue flecked with an impossible shade of grey.

'Sit down, son', they said in perfect unison. Stroman obeyed. 'Congratulations. You are about to become the father of twin daughters.' Stroman passed out and as he fell to the floor, he saw that the doctors were holding hands under the table.

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Lisa and Stroman never saw each other again. Neither of them wondered why the other didn't try to contact them; instead, they

were glad they did not have to go through any troublesome partings. It was cleaner this way. Lisa didn't give birth to any child — no twins, not even a solitary baby. Not for the rest of her life.

