

TWO HUNDRED MOONS OF AN IDEA

A Short Story
by
Norman King Lloyd

(Word Count: 3,969)

'*Immensikof ducks!*' The little boy shouted to the onlookers in the park.

'Little lad, big word,' I laughed.

'No!' interrupted the mother of the boy. 'Stefan is not wrong!'

The bent over old man grabbed my sleeve. 'Ducks big as the tastiest Christmas bird.'

The mother smiled and said in her strange accent: 'Perhaps, everyone exaggerate...'

Then we saw them returning. They were awesome. They were deep purple with crimson collars. They were certainly not like any bird that I had ever seen and they were certainly not ducks.

The little boy was quite put out: '*Mamica*, I not to eat turkey this Christmas!'

The creatures flew very ponderously as if their wings could not support their weight and settled along the top of the Palace roof.

'It's a harbinger,' the old man said in awed tones.

People got their cameras out. Whistles were blown. Screams from the Palace Gardens. The mother took my arm and motioned that we move a little away from the crowd. We found ourselves under a tree that was already loosing its leaves. 'My son, he dreams always of monsters and gargoyles so now the wish come true.'

I was dizzy with desire. Her accent was somewhere in the Balkans. Pinned to her long, cream winter coat was a beautiful, red rose buttonhole. The scent of the rose was overpowering. Suddenly, she raised her leg, pushing her knee into my calf. This was not done with any subtlety but her expression held a look of detachment; a sort of washed out, disdain. I told her that the birds were now too heavy to fly.

She gave me a long look. 'Listen, I want to go indoors. Those things scare me silly.' I found it hard to believe that she was scared silly of anything and answered: 'My hotel's just across the road... I'm sure your boy would like some tea and cakes.'

'Stefan!' she called out. 'This gentleman promises us nice English cakes!'

That was as far as she got. One of the birds that had toppled off the roof was slowly lumbering towards us, wings and legs all askew. She ran towards her son and stopped. The boy was only a few yards from the ponderous bird.

'Stefan! Just walk towards me, but *slowly*.'

But the boy stood rooted to the spot. The bird waddled like a drunk; its neck extending forwards and backwards like a snake. A strange squeaking sound came from its beak.

Then it began to rot away. Not a pretty sight. I took out my camera and focused on the other birds on the palace roof.

Suddenly Stefan was tugging at my trouser leg and the old man whispered: 'Look, Mister, that bird's near gone to slime.'

I lifted the boy up for a better view of the remaining birds settled on the roof. 'Is it the big shining light that makes them go to die?'

We made our way to my hotel. The concierge looked surprised when I came in with my guests. An older woman was shouting out to hold the lift. 'I've just come from the park!' she screamed as if we were deaf. 'Terrible sights, people fainting all over the place.' Then she started to laugh, digging me in the ribs. 'You are a naughty man letting it get so out of hand.'

The mother asked the lady not to upset the boy as he had a vivid imagination.

'You mean...' the woman began sulkily, 'you don't know what's going on?'

I hustled them out of the lift, glaring at the woman. Walking down the long corridor,