

Lunatic

Easter is a Holy Day filled with meaning for Christians all over the world. When I was a young man it always signified pretty girls on warm luscious days that set my heart racing. Our Catholic school granted us a few days off during the week following Easter and the kids in my 8th grade class planned get-togethers and even a class picnic if the weather was nice. I hoped Immy would be there.

Spring weather allowed the young women to shed their heavy coats and knit scarves. Kicking off their snow boots they dressed lightly, enjoying the wind in their hair and the sun on as much skin as they were allowed to show in 1957. Sometime during 8th grade I noticed young women wore less clothing if given an excuse. That was fine with me.

That was the year I became anxious over Easter's exact date. The difference between it falling in the middle of March versus early April was dramatic in upstate New York. March could mean a couple of feet of snow on the ground. But if we were lucky, Easter in April might bring spring-like temperatures. The grass would turn green as warm breezes ruffled the skirts of pretty girls walking along the streets. In such weather our class picnic would end in a touch football game ... with the girls ... after the nuns left. That set my heart racing, too.

I'd had my eye on Mary Immaculata McGrew since the Christmas dance. I would step out the door on a clear and crisp winter evening and gaze up at the moon, imagining a bright faced Mary Immaculata smiling down on me. I struck up a conversation with the real girl one snowy January afternoon at the bus stop.

"Do you play football, Miss," I said to her.

"You don't have to call me 'Miss,' Dave.

We've been in the same school since the fourth grade."

"Yes, M'am."

"Call me Immy," she said. "Everyone does."

"Yes, M'am."

"And no, I don't play football. I couldn't carry the ball and my dolls at the same time."

"The coach wouldn't like that, Miss."

Immy looked skyward and then walked away. Which was too bad, because I was about to ask her if she knew Easter's date. How we got on the subject of dolls I don't know.

Of course I could have looked up the date in an almanac, but an adolescent boy will take any ordinary chore and turn it into a great quest. Although I wouldn't have guessed it, opportunities for such adventures were fast disappearing as adulthood loomed on the horizon with its boring cargo of more sensible alternatives.

Sensibility was not a shining hallmark of my teenage years. Half of my life took place in the real the world and the other half in my pituitary gland as it pumped out confused hormones that argued with each other like a pack of fighting wolves rolling around in the snow. Everything was charged with symbol and drama. Some days I was the successful character in a poorly written melodrama. On other days I'd get up in the morning feeling like a doomed prisoner, my stomach churning at the prospect of my demise, fearing my execution that morning in front of a firing squad. Or was it just a squad of questions aimed at me on the Geometry test at ten a.m.? Reality was a scarce commodity. A molehill might appear as a mountain and a mountain might not even be noticed. A mind trying to find its way from boyhood to manhood seldom follows a logical route.

My brain's cortex was ill prepared to understand how the path of the moon around the earth and the sun could produce a floating holiday on a calendar where everything else was fixed solid by the sun.

I suppose it's entirely possible I tried to understand the moon's motions as a substitute for my deeper need of figuring out women. No mere boy could fathom the feminine and so the problem assumed the guise of explaining the universe, maybe an easier task. But a telltale sign of a deeper meaning became obvious: the way I saw the moon as a round orb representing a female face or whatever, dancing around the earth to a 28 day cycle.

In each Thought Experiment I tried to envision the moon's travel, but Easter continued to hop

around the calendar and tease me. The moon's capricious female nature refused to fall in line and take a permanent slot on the more regimented and masculine Gregorian calendar. Even the formula for Easter's date made no sense to me: "The First Sunday after the Paschal Full Moon following the March equinox." What the heck was a Paschal Full Moon?

Of course, I didn't give the path of the moon anywhere near the amount of thought I managed to spend on various aspects of young women. A huge number of Thought Experiments did not lessen my interest in them. I certainly sensed the tension they caused in my young life. But here's something I may not have realized at the time: the mutual frisson needed for both of us to shine.

As we got closer to Easter, Immy approached me to ask a couple of dumb questions ... whether I liked a new song on the radio or if I'd seen a particular television show.

"I don't watch television," I lied, "because at night I communicate with beings on another planet."

"Are they relatives or just friends?" she said.

"They have much more fun up there. They go fishing rather than sit in school all day."

"That's terrible," she said. "They'll never amount to anything in life."

"I don't know why I'm having this conversation with you," I said. "A woman wouldn't understand."

"Oh, I understand perfectly."

"If you understood *perfectly*," I said, "you would agree with me!"

"That's ridiculous."

"You women think you can dance around and have holidays on any old date," I said. "You may have captured Easter but you're not getting Christmas. It will always be on December 25th. Forever!"

For some reason, she stopped talking to me again.

In February the school held a Talent Show and Immy performed a solo ballet on the stage. It surprised me to see her name on the printed program as I sat in a front row seat where I'd come to heckle a friend when his turn came to play the guitar. Immy came out from behind the curtain red faced with stage fright. Her first movements appeared stiff and arthritic. But soon she was lost in the movements of her body. So was I.

I can still see Immy in my mind's eye. Her limbs and torso were boyish compared to what

they would grow into, but her movements were that of a graceful woman. My God, I thought, she is a beautiful liquid. I wanted to stand up and hold her before she flowed away.

Later that night I dreamed of the moon and Immy, both somehow joined together as a mythic fairy in the forest, peeking around the earth as if it were a giant tree, teasing the sun to shine forth with his strength to illuminate her more brilliantly. To be her best, she needed his attention, his strong light. To fulfill his purpose, he needed to light her up.

Immy occupied almost all of my thoughts after that night. Most of the time I avoided her, although I didn't know why. I may have been stuck on the problem of why I wanted her to notice me while at the same time wished she would leave me alone.

I finally made up my mind to speak to her. Spring had arrived and it was just before Easter of 1957, which turned out splendidly, occurring on April 21, 1957. I walked up as she waited for the bus after school. I had thought about this for days and planned to say something witty, like, "I saw you on the stage. You danced like it left town without you."

A warm breeze fluffed her hair as she sat on the bench reading. She looked up when I walked over and stood before her. There was so much in her eyes. I couldn't calculate all of it as my thoughts raced around in my addled brain. I thought of the fairy peeking around the tree at the sun. Saying nothing, I simply smiled down at her. She smiled back, bringing a broad grin across my face. I sat down next to her on the bench and kept quiet, what I do best but not often. I did nothing but grin like an idiot. Her bus came before mine, and as she stood to board it, she said in a soft voice I would always remember. "Be nice to me." It was the same voice and the same look in her eyes she would give me ten years later on the morning we were married.

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Murrells Inlet, South Carolina

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