

Witness

By Sydney Dockery

One could try and point to who noticed first. NASA would be a good first guess, with their high-powered telescopes, cameras, and radars that can scan and take photos light years away could easily have known before everyone else. It could be them, or perhaps the CIA, the FBI, the Illuminati, or any of the powerful and resourceful organizations that exist across the globe. Personally, I think the birds saw it before anyone else did.

At first it was subtle. Mourning doves, active throughout the summer months, usually perform their mating calls early in the morning or in the late evening. Some of my fondest memories were hearing their melancholy cries in the cool dawn air as I prepared for school. I began keeping a tally in my bird book of how many of their calls I started hearing in the afternoon, when the sun was high and scorching, far from the cool dry environment they prefer. At first, I thought it was just one that didn't get the memo. Some birds, and even other animals, can stray from the expected norm from time to time, but when all the birds on my street stopped flying altogether, I couldn't really think of a good reason for that. It was odd to see them all in the neighborhood hopping around, skipping away with worms or bugs in their beaks trying desperately to find shelter. Even when hit by cars or cornered by the feral cats, none of them took flight.

That wasn't all. I was humming to myself while laying on my bed and writing an account of witnessing a small blue jay appearing to bury itself in my neighbor's backyard that afternoon when my sister walked in, our dog trailing after her.

"You notice anything weird?" was all she said. I didn't know how to respond at first, since all my attention was focused on my birds. I mean, sure it was odd to me, but would *she* get that?

“What kind of weird?”

My sister was a bit strange herself, her being into witchcraft and magic. We never connected much in terms of shared interests, so I didn't know if her weird and my weird were compatible. In response to my question, she just stood there with a very distant look on her face. She then lifted a finger and pointed towards my window. It was late evening with the sun already tucked away, but its leftover light still lingered, giving the horizon a mute pink hue. You could make out the faint claw shape of the moon stamped against the sky's faint but increasingly darkening blue, floating above the thick outline of roofs and trees.

“It's been a waning crescent for two weeks now. I keep checking every night, and it hasn't changed.” She hesitated for a moment and lowered her finger. “It supposed to be a full moon tonight.”

After she spoke the room was quiet. As I closed my book, a humming broke the silence. With a pause, I looked over and saw the dog, sitting and looking right at me, bobbing his muzzle slightly to imaginary music as he hummed the same tune I had had stuck in my head just moments earlier.

Our parents shoved us in the car a few days later and we have been driving ever since. We left the dog behind. I wish I could say we tried to take him with us, but we didn't. I don't think he minded too much, either. I was only able to grab my bird book in the hurry to the car, but I have long since ceased writing about birds. In the blank pages in the back, I had begun keeping track of everything I have seen since we entered the car.

Strollers left at public parks, front doors of houses hanging open, countless emergency vehicles racing past us as we drove. At first, they all had their lights on, wailing and screeching, but they very quickly stopped after a while. Soon, every car we saw had their lights off, even at night. When mom and dad grew too exhausted to keep driving, we would pull over and try our best to get comfortable in what little leaning room the car seats would provide. And it was on these nights, looking up in the ink black sky through the car window as we parked in random lots and ditches to sleep, I saw what my sister had meant earlier. Every night, that same pale scythe of a moon would shine without fail, its blade never dulling.

My parents hadn't said anything. The last time me or my sister recall hearing them was when they told us to pack our things immediately, and even when we got our bags together as fast as we could, we still left them by the front door when we practically ran out of the house. It had been a week, and I was still wearing the same clothes I left in. All of us were. My sister did manage to grab her phone before leaving, so to pass the time we would watch movies and videos in the back seat, an ear bud for each of us. Our mom drove and dad just sat in the front seat staring out of the window. A few times his hand reached back and squeezed my knee, as though he were checking I was still there, and yet he never turned around to actually look.

One day we were driving in the far-out country surrounded by large fields that turned into corn and then wheat and then nothing at all until it went back to corn, when my sister pulled up the news broadcast. According to the anchor, everything was fine. With the moon on my mind, I briefly wondered about the weather. I glanced out the window and only saw clear skies. I tried to recall the last time it rained, and I couldn't. I then tried to recall the last time I saw a cloud and couldn't. At this mild revelation, it then didn't surprise me when the news broadcaster never cut to the weather man; didn't mention upcoming storms or ice or heat or anything. It never even mentioned the temperature. My sister kept watching, not realizing at all what was racing through my mind, not

seeing what I was seeing. Or what I wasn't seeing, in this case. I turned away and stared out the window. It was noon and the sun was large and angry, beaming into my eyes as I tried to squint through the light and warping heat.

As I tried focusing on the lined edges of the road, shadows began to quickly flicker in front of my eyes. A strobe light effect began as we raced by the largest field of sunflowers I had ever seen. I had never really seen a sunflower in person, but these were enormous. The ones that lined alongside the road towered over the car, resembling a forest rather than a field. As they stretched and leaned, a shiver went down my spine. I didn't know much about flowers or horticulture at all, but my elementary knowledge on sunflowers gave me enough to feel the darkest fear in this moment that I had ever felt in my life. As the sun shined brightly over them, not a single flower looked up at it. Instead, the rotating heads of each sunflower were pointing down to the ground and staring right at me. Each and every one.

An army of blackhole faces and withering petals cloaked in shadows with their hundreds of seeds, which I horrifically started to think of as hundreds of eyes, peering down on the car. As we sped past, I could swear I saw them follow our movement, staring as we approached, and turning to watch as we raced away.

I wanted to cry but I felt like they were waiting for that, waiting for something, just so they could watch. Just so they could witness what happens.