

## **Moonlight holder**

There are advantages to working nights, maybe not if you are a family man or watch a lot of television, but for people like Terry and I, who live on our own, and largely make our own entertainment, there are advantages.

We share a small terrace house, split into two flats. I am upstairs and he's downstairs in the so-called garden flat. That means he has the advantage of a yard out the back with high walls all round it, and about three feet of trodden dirt between his front window and the pavement.

Terry was already there when I had moved in, actually he suggested it. It stemmed from a chance encounter at a party. We found ourselves mutual wallflowers, I because I had only recently arrived in the neighbourhood and knew no-one; he from working nights and having a restricted social life. Terry also suggested the job at the rectifier factory, sharing a night shift with him. I think partly he fancied having someone over him who also worked nights.

Also it soon became clear that although we were not loners, neither were we party animals, but individualists who treasured our personal time. We worked in the same place and lived in the same house, but we were not bosom buddies, living in each other's pockets. I spent most of my indoor leisure time writing and Terry got on with whatever it was he did downstairs, we got plenty of association at work.

It was a simple job, steel plates coated with selenium were turned into rectifiers by passing an electric current through them. Loading them into the cabinets where that happened and unloading them had to be done at set times, which meant there had to be a night shift.

If we did do things together the motivation was usually utility rather than company. We would shop together and occasionally I would accompany him on his foraging expeditions to help recover larger items. He would go round all the local waste sites and behind billboards looking for “quality toot” as he called it. He used this to build strange contraptions with which he claimed to measure things like “moonshadow intensity”.

Like I said, on the whole we lived separate lives.

Even at work we would usually be opposite ends of the room working and during breaks I would read. If it was a moonlight night Terry would go out in the yard and do what he called “moonbathing”, like sun bathing but in moonlight, to bask in the moonlight, he had a fold up lounge and a pair of khaki shorts that he kept in his locker. He was an immense man, with a great russet blonde mane of hair and his entire body was covered in hair, well, I suppose we all are, but his was visible. He didn’t seem to feel the cold either, it was as though that fur kept him warm at night.

Other times he would bring a pair of binoculars in with him, mount them on a tripod, then place it so he could sit on his lounge in its chair position. There he would spend hours studying the Moon’s surface through them. He let me have a look a few times, he had the binoculars perfectly positioned, and it was spectacular on a full moon, but it was too static to hold my attention, still each to his own.

One afternoon we had been to the supermarket and, after dividing up our groceries, he suggested coffee and I had my first visit to his flat. He left me in the living room while he went to make the coffee. Now, I’m a writer in my spare time, so naturally I gravitated pretty quickly toward the book case, at first it seemed a pretty eclectic mix,

a book of tide tables, collected werewolf stories, a photo book of the Apollo moon shots, a lunar atlas.

Wait a moment.

I scanned on down two or three more shelves, everything was moon related in some way, from a short story by H.G. Wells to a nineteenth century thesis on lunacy. That was about when Terry came back in the room.

“You’re kind of keen on things to do with the moon” I said, and looked round, the theme extended to the rest of the room. The picture over the mantle was that one taken from the moon of the earth rising, the ornament on the table was one of those clockwork things that demonstrates the movement of the planets, except this one was only the sun earth and moon and the navy blue curtains were decorated with silver-white moons.

“I expect you think I am a weirdo” he replied.

“Don’t worry” I said and told him about my writing. Only that morning someone had posted a message on my website calling me just that, “weirdo”. One thing led to another and soon he was telling me about his theories, they were based on the idea that the moon affected life on earth through moonlight as well as gravitational pull, he got out books and showed me lots of evidence that the moon affected terrestrial life, though I failed to see the reason for thinking it was the light that was responsible.

We talked every so often after that but he was really only interested in one subject. Then one day, more out of politeness than interest I think, he asked about my writing. I remembered a little bit of nonsense, which illustrated a technique for generating interesting

phrases. I had put it on the writers forum I visit and I soon had the computer fired up to show him.

Paper boy scout  
Paper boy soldier  
Paper tiger rider  
Paper moonlight holder

Paper back up  
Paper back down  
Paper down town  
Paper mill run round

He read it through and looked at the comment someone had added underneath,

“What the heck is a moonlight holder?”

“I’ve never heard of one, but it’s quite an idea” he said.

I tried to explain the process I had gone through to arrive at the phrase.

“I realised there are an awful lot of words associated with paper and after listing them I looked for words that associated with them, so paper-boy, boy-scout. In the last line I have taken it one step further, so, paper-moon, moon-light, light-holder”.

I was beginning to get into my flow when I realised he wasn’t really with me any longer. I abandoned

Sea-snail-pace,  
sea-legs-eleven,  
mid-ocean-wave,  
mid-riff-playing

I found out long ago, there is a difference between those interested in how you write and those interested in what you write, and I wasn’t

actually sure he fitted either category, like I say, I think he was only being polite. So I changed the subject and soon after that he made his excuses and went back downstairs.

Over the next couple of weeks I saw even less than normal of him outside work, other than a “toot seeking” expedition, though I heard him working downstairs every morning when we came back. Then one afternoon he came knocking at my door, which was strange, it was a Sunday, we were not due into work, the shops would be shut, and he had never come looking for me without a prior arrangement before.

He was very excited and asked me to come down and see what he had been building. His front room was filled with a large, three dimensional, silver crescent attached to a similarly silvered discus and in the back room was a strangely cogged base.

“It comes apart to get it through the doorway” he said “But the pieces are quite heavy because of the lining, could I have a hand getting it out in the yard? It’s an ideal night tonight, the moon is full and it rises early so we should get almost maximum moonlight”

Whilst he was talking he had been undoing the clips that joined the structure and I saw that although the outside was covered in aluminium foil the inner lining was covered with the little rectifier plates I knew so well from work. He must have misinterpreted my look because he quickly explained that these were the duds that failed to rectify a current. I knew it had to be true, all the others would be accounted, not that I really cared, I felt no great loyalty to our employer, I just thought Terry had finally flipped.

“What is it?” I asked, he looked at me astonished,

“A moonlight holder of course, I am going to collect for the first half of the night w. Then I shall release it and give myself a really concentrated dose for the second half of the night, see if it has the sort of effect I think it will.”

What could I say? I helped him carry the pieces outside and he showed me the “retaining lens” in the discus the curved mirror of the crescent reflected into and explained the significance of the selenium plates.

“Coated with the metal of Selene, goddess of the moon” and of the aluminium foil outer covering

“Its name means ‘that lights up’.”

We erected the parts on the base and he explained that he would have to hand crank it at a given rate to keep the moon in the correct alignment as it passed over and how he would release the light slowly during the latter part of the night to reinforce the natural moonlight.

It was good our little yard had high walls and no-one was going to witness this lunacy, they call me a weirdo because I write stories. I couldn't get back to my stories and computer quickly enough.

The forum was a great escape, I was getting involved with a lady who only wrote poetry, she had been through a period of using alliteration and simple rhythms, had moved on to a series of conflict poems that were far more interesting and made much better use of her undoubted talents. Now she was starting to tackle the basic issues of her personal identity. It made a pleasant change from the fantasy werewolf stories teenagers kept submitting.

I was thinking that it couldn't be long before she moved into other forms, such as the short story, when the dogs started. I might not have noticed in the old days, but Terry had pointed something out to me, dogs howl at the moon, but they only howl at some moons and then only at certain times during the moon's transit. He collected data about things that happened during moonlight hours and was always looking for correlations. Even then I might not have noticed, except that there was a particularly close and loud dog that I had not heard before, it might almost have been with Terry in the yard.

After a bit the howling stopped and there was a fair bit of crashing and banging. I assumed it was Terry trying to get his machine to let out the light he had gathered, as it stopped when the moon set. I don't know what he did after that, but I didn't hear the back door until dawn.

That night when I knocked for him to go to work he looked rough and had one of his fingers bandaged, he muttered something about losing a nail and trouble opening the door. I gathered his equipment had not worked too well. Delicacy stopped me enquiring further but he must have had a nasty accident, there were five huge scratches down the wall when I looked out of the widow next morning, and the moonlight holder was all bashed up , a wreck in one corner as though something heavy had stood on it trying to get over the wall.

Anyway, it seems to have cured him of his lunacy, says he now realises the power in moonlight is negative and goes to lengths to avoid it, only going out on dark nights. Even in daylight he doesn't like going out if the moon is in the sky, he turns up his collar and wears his big, black fedora hat. His new obsession on those dark nights is starlight, he says it is sunlight purified by the millions of miles it travels through space.

I didn't hear that dog howling close by again either, it must have belonged to an overnight visitor.