

# THE LIGHT OF A HARVEST MOON

A bright harvest moon continued to play peek-a-boo behind dark, sullen clouds. Nowadays, the precious light provided by our lunar neighbor has lost some of its significance. Oh, we still comment on it when we see a particularly bright one, but today's massive tractors and combines with intense headlights extend the day for most farmers. There are a few old-timers around Cedar Crossing with small farms who swear its reflected light is more revealing. Perhaps that is scientifically impossible, but it could be a more revealing light of the veteran farmers themselves.

Amos Franklin sided with the group of harvest moon proponents. I had been meaning to visit him for a while, but I thought a harvest moon visit would be extra special.

The long, winding dirt path to his farmhouse was well lit – yes, by the light of a harvest moon. As I rounded bend number five, a pair of cottontail bunnies scurried across the path in front of me. With the house in sight, I saw Amos sitting in a rocking chair on his front porch. We exchanged greetings, and he handed me two bushel baskets.

“I thought you might like to experience some harvesting tonight, Pastor,” said Amos.

“What did you have in mind?” I asked.

“Picking apples,” answered Amos. “It’s not often that I get some free labor.”

“Well, I guess it’s good that I wore my harvesting shoes.”

“This first tree is a Golden Delicious. You ever picked apples, Pastor?”

“It’s been a while. I don’t recall any courses in the seminary on picking apples, but I think I remember the fundamentals.”

We picked for about fifteen minutes when our harvest light disappeared behind the clouds. The rest gave Amos a chance to talk (rarely do the old-timers talk while they work).

“You know, Pastor, the apple has gotten a bad rap.”

“What do you mean, Amos?”

“Every painting that I’ve ever seen with Adam and Eve has the apple as the fruit of temptation.”

“Now that’s a good point, Amos. Most Biblical scholars do not think that it was, given the climate of the area that the Garden of Eden was thought to be. A lot think it was more likely something like the pomegranate.”

Our discussion ended quickly as the moon reappeared in full light. Another thirty minutes of picking and we got another rest period.

“Ever heard of the creature of Dalton Valley, Pastor?” asked Amos.

“No, I don’t think so. I’d probably not forget something like that.”

“You know where Dalton Valley is?”

“Yes, it’s ten miles or so west of here, isn’t it, Amos?”

“About. Now, mind you, I don’t buy everything about the story, but there is some strange evidence that points to something out there.”

“Well, some stories do gain a certain amount of embellishment over time. Are you talking about evidence that points to a creature existing today?”

“Possibly.”

“Like what?”

“Let me go back to when I first heard the story. My daddy told me about it, and his daddy told him about it. It started back on old Dewey Hudson’s place with a harvest moon just like this. My granddaddy farmed next door to Dewey and was the first in my family to witness something. Granddaddy heard Dewey hollering from his orchard next to their fence line. Dewey was back a dozen trees in and staring at one tree. All the trees in his orchard were full of leaves and apples, but that one tree. All its leaves and fruit were gone – completely disappeared. The branches cast an eerie, barren shadow under the moonlight. They saw giant footprints around the base of the tree, so they ran back together (neither one interested in staying out there alone) to get some paper and pen. Just as they got back to the tree, the clouds on both sides of the moon opened up and released a torrent of rain. Naturally, the footprints were washed away and, unfortunately, neither of them remembered enough fine detail to recreate an accurate picture. Of course, the local weekly newspaper ran a front-page story on it. It became a big deal because there weren’t that many newsworthy front-page stories at the time in the small farm

town. After a while, Dewey and granddaddy started to become the butt of jokes. Apparently, they never talked about it again. Dewey cut down the apple tree even though it was putting out fresh spring growth. As far as I know, there were no other incidents. The Cedar Crossing Gazette ran one of those ‘100 years ago’ columns about it, but I’ve not seen anything else.”

“What made you think about it tonight, Amos?”

“I don’t know. Just one of those eerie feelings, I guess. You see those two cloud banks on either side of the moon that seem to be acting as a frame for our light?”

“Yeah.”

With the moonlight now reappearing, we went back to picking. As I grabbed apples, I started to wonder about the alleged creature. The valleys around here have produced fossils of dinosaurs before. God’s Creation, including the dinosaurs, is such a wonder. Could the creature really have been a dinosaur that survived and lived for all that time? It hardly seems likely. It would have been a scientific impossibility. I looked up at the moon and noticed the cloud banks had moved on,

leaving a clear path for the light of the harvest moon onto our apple trees.

After about an hour more of apple picking, Amos said, “Time to head for the barn, Pastor. Those clouds are coming back, and we still have enough light to see the path.”

Of course, the way my fingers felt, I could have quit a half hour sooner. By that time the orange globe sat lower in the sky. Just as we turned to go back, it got completely dark. If I hadn’t been a skeptic, my eyes would have thought they saw something big – big enough to block out the moon – move across the horizon in front of the moon. It only lasted about thirty seconds. Then we felt the ground rumble rhythmically for about a minute. At the far end of the orchard, we could vaguely see leaves and fruit being thrown up into the air. Then everything became quiet. Amos and I looked at each other with silence.

Finally, Amos said, “I’m going to check it out. Are you coming?”

Oh, that temptress ‘fear’. Forced to confront her, I managed, “Well. Amos, I can’t let you go out there alone.”

We easily found the only barren tree in the orchard. Large pad and claw prints surrounded the base of the tree.

“We need to go back to the barn, Pastor.”

“Okay, Amos,”

When we got back to the barn Amos started up his tractor and then hooked up a utility trailer behind it. He grabbed a chainsaw, and I grabbed shovels and rakes.

When Amos went to put his rifle in the trailer, I said, “Amos, if that creature was big enough to blot out the moon, then a shot from that rifle would only seem like a pin prick. Besides, it might make him mad.”

Amos stood there for a few seconds thinking about what I had said. Then he put the rifle back in the cabinet.

We spent two hours cutting down that apple tree and raking out all the footprints. When we got back to the barn, my back hurt, my hands had blisters, my arms hurt – even my brain hurt. Amos and I made a pact to never talk about that night again.

Amos passed away four months ago without breaking our pact. I also remain true to the agreement. After all, no human sustained injury. The only victim was the apple tree and that actually came at the hand of man and the chainsaw. If God wanted to keep a dinosaur alive for all those years, then He could certainly do it.

I have not picked apples in the light of a harvest moon since then.

And I NEVER WILL.