

## Looking for the Moon

By Jennifer Lawler

“Moon, Mama,” Jessica says, grabbing my arm and pointing at the window. The moon obsesses her. But until she was five years old, she didn’t even know it existed. Before then, it was just bright lights and hospital beds and a long and gradual awakening to awareness.



Jennifer Lawler raises her daughter Jessica in Lawrence, Kan.

Once she discovered the moon, she fixated on it. She memorized the words “crescent” and “half,” “gibbous” and “full.” On her seventh birthday last July, the new moon had not yet risen. After she scanned the sky unsuccessfully, she asked with a sigh if I thought the dogs had eaten it.

I practice patience with her obsessions: rock collecting, the three songs we must sing in a certain order before bed, and her shrill rejection of the word “little.” I needed patience when she was a newborn and nobody could explain why she was having seizures; patience when

she was seven months old and the neurologist finally gave a name to the problem — tuberous sclerosis, a rare disease that causes tumors and seizures, along with other problems, like Jessica’s obsessive behavior. I know a lot about patience, more than I would like to know.

Sometimes my patience runs out, like right now, as I try to fix dinner while she demands that I look at the moon. She always stands precisely where I need to be next. It’s little-kid radar: how to best position herself where she cannot be ignored. In that regard, she is like every other child I have known.

I’ve got a heavy pan in one hand and a colander in the other, and I’m keeping an eye on the stove because the burner is still lit and it would be just like Jessica to stick her hand on it. It doesn’t matter how many times I tell her to not to touch the stove, she doesn’t remember. How many times have I told her? 10,000 times. Her mind is like this colander here in my hand.

“Moon, Mama!” Jessica says more urgently as I uncap the olive oil.

“Yes, the moon,” I say absently. I toss the drained noodles back in the pan, add a slosh of olive oil, and wipe my hands on my jeans. The phone rings and I dart into the other room to grab it. I tell the caller I don’t have time to talk, and then I hear the sizzle of oil on the stove. Back in the kitchen, I catch the pan up, narrowly avoiding a collision with Jessica.

“What kind of moon, Mama?” Jessica persists.

“I don’t know, I can’t see the moon,” I say, tossing the noodles into a bowl. What did Jessica do with the Parmesan cheese? She was probably trying to be helpful, and took it out of the refrigerator while I was on the phone, which would mean it’s . . . where?

“What kind of moon, Mama?” Jessica raises her voice and plants herself in my path, thrusting her face towards mine.

“I don’t know!” I say. “Where’s the cheese? Where’d you put the damn cheese?”

Her eyes fill with tears. Great. How hard can it be to make spaghetti without causing your kid to cry? How hard can that be? I am sure other mothers accomplish it all the time.

I kneel down and take Jessica’s face in my hands. “I’m sorry,” I say. “I had a tough day today. I’m tired and I yelled when I shouldn’t have. Can Mama have a big hug?” I ask, giving her a big hug.

She looks up at me and says very seriously, “Moon is full.”

Yes, indeed. Well, that’s the main thing, I guess.

“The moon is full,” I say, ruffling my fingers lovingly through her short brown hair, and smiling, as I discover the Parmesan cheese in the microwave, just where you’d expect it to be. NN

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