

Stopping The Rain

To whom it may concern;

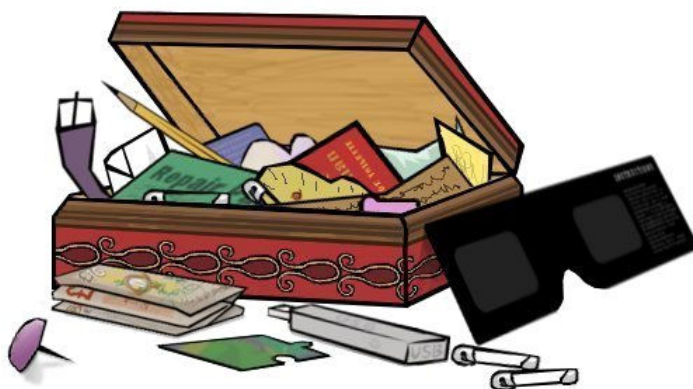
I have a story that may interest you; something that happened to me over ten years ago, when I was much younger. I hope it serves as a warning, perhaps as an indication of what is to come, or just as interesting information.

I can guarantee that every word of my story is true.

Saturday, 17th October, 2009 -

I had a headache and my sister was bored. Our mother had told us to clean up, but instead we began our procrastination routine. On top of the DVD cabinet, there sat a pretty red box. My sister and I were going through it, hoping to find something interesting, as we often do.

We found a £10 note left over from our life in England, the delicate ink damaged by water. We found a snake-like glasses chain, severely outdated but utterly beautiful. A piece of jigsaw, plastic badges, a USB stick. "And a little thingy with stardust in it," my sister comments, her voice evidently captivated by the information written on the packet. Apparently the contents are from an *actual Falling Star*™!



And we also found something that I personally found much more interesting than the rest, something that, for me, brings back some startling memories - a pair of cardboard glasses, similar to those cheap ones they give you to see 3D films in the cinema. Looking through them, I could see nothing, the glasses being utterly opaque. They were covered with instructions in minute white letters, with various headings here and there. One in particular stood out; "The Solar Eclipse Viewer".

These glasses were from 1999, when there was a total eclipse of the sun. A small diagram was provided, just to explain. On the reverse, in lettering so small I almost needed a magnifying glass to read them - Instructions For Use. Most of it registered to me as "blah, blah, blah", but some of it was interesting - i.e., "DO NOT use after Aug. 12 1999".

I take it this was the day of the eclipse. I must have been six years old, short for my age, extremely skinny, notoriously shy. Lank brown hair framed my face, and I probably looked ill. I know from old school photos that I've always looked ill.

Being a person with a memory like a goldfish-cum-sieve, I find myself surprised that I remember this day, but I suppose what happened was enough cause for me to fail to forget. I was terrified. Positively petrified, I was. I didn't know what actually was going on, something to do with the sky. The sky was going to do something... a clever trick, perhaps? But I understood one thing; people wanted to look at the sun.

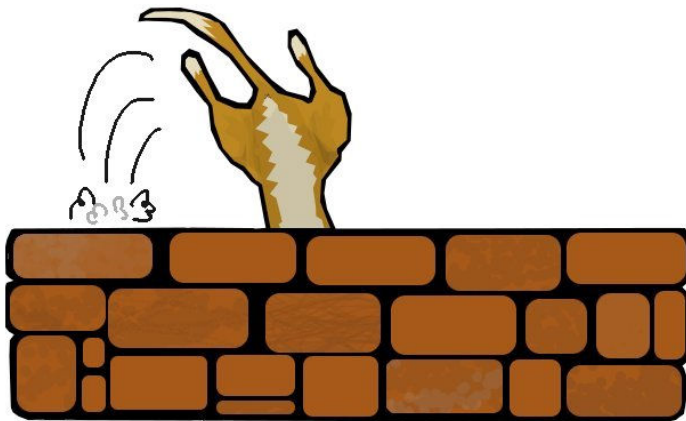
Being the safety-conscious child I always was (and still am), I refused to believe my dad when he said it was safe. Mind you, since then, I have learnt that what dad

says is 'safe', probably isn't. Maybe my younger self was more intelligent than I thought.

I stayed in my bedroom. I had a window overlooking the garden, and I could see my family bustling about on the lawn, waving the glasses around. A stuffy British summer hung overhead, not quite sunny, not yet raining. Clouds that I couldn't see clearly were rolling in from one side, all dark and shady. I could smell the rain already, even through the closed window.

My mother kept calling up to me, begging me to come down. I was missing all the fun; how was I to *remember* anything if I never *experienced* anything? I guess I proved them wrong, writing this.

A stiff warm breeze blustered the garden about, the branches on the tree next



door swaying side to side, leaves trembling, as leaves often do. An orange cat named Jaffa, who had been sitting on a dividing wall, scooted. He ran back inside his house, cat flap smacking itself behind him.

That wasn't good. I'd always recognised how the animals around me behaved; if the cat was scared, then something significant was afoot. Maybe something in those clouds - they were closer now, darker, and heavier.

Quiet thunder grated against the sky, rumbling below the ground. My parents laughed to themselves, their voices sounding distant, carrying badly in the thick air. My sister said something, concern in her voice. She wanted to go in. Well, of course she did. She wasn't afraid of thunder, but she, along with the cat, knew something was wrong.

I could feel static charging the air, the whole area gradually turning a fuzzy grey colour. How long until this was over? Had it even *started*? Nobody was looking at the sky just yet...

The clouds were still coming, gaining mass as they approached. I could see a shadow eating the neighbours' fences down the road, followed by barely-visible rain. It would take a good few minutes before it reached us, and maybe my family would be inside by then. Somehow I felt there was more consequence to this shower than just getting wet.

I could hear the patter of the rain by now, falling over nearby gardens, shimmers of light catching in the raindrops. The shadow of the cloud was gliding towards us, five walls away now - four and a half... three. I didn't know what it would do when it got here, but it would not be good. This was not normal rain. I *liked* normal rain. I could hear it, I could smell it, but it felt... out of place.

I cried. There was something very wrong.

But it was too late now, the shadow slipped over our fence and engulfed one flowerbed. Nobody had even noticed it until just then, the blind old sods.

The darkness fell over my family, huddled together in a group. But wait... They *still* weren't scared, they were *still* looking at the sky above the house. There wasn't the slightest flicker of concern on their faces!

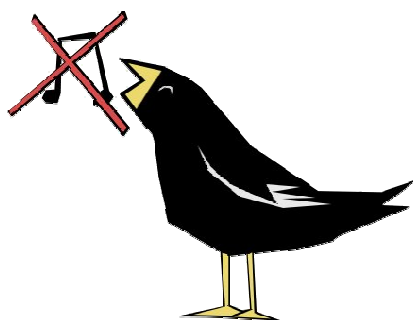
Apparently the darkness was what they were waiting for, because then, all of a

sudden, there came the clichéd “ooh”s and “ahh”s, and an excited “look!”. Then came the swapping of glasses, the picking up of my sister so she could see.

But the rain hadn't fallen on us yet, this was just the shadow of the cloud. A spark of forked lightning split the sky about a mile away, followed by a rumble, louder than last time. My parents were still intent on observing the darkened sky; it was obviously very interesting. But here was the rain, just at the fence. The clouds hovered above it, dropping their heavy load onto the ground.

Didn't my parents care? The cloud had already blown across the sun - they shouldn't be able to see the sky any more, and that was defeating the point of this whole 'eclipse' thing! It was *right there*, directly above them! It was like it was invisible to them!

I shivered, toes curling into the carpet, hugging myself. I was probably chewing my nails, just out of nerves, sniffing away my tears. I couldn't hear the rain any more, now I thought about it, that background hiss had gone. The thunder had gone too, along with the daylight. The birds... the birds had stopped singing. There was no panicked chatter of a blackbird, no sudden flutter of a sparrow. The tree had stopped swaying.



It was dead silent.

The rain paused in mid-air, like someone had put it into slow motion, forcing it slower and slower, and then stopping it completely. Well, I thought, scared stiff, that didn't happen often. It was like it had frozen - except it hadn't turned into snow... plus, it was the

middle of August. I mean, it once snowed in July, but *this wasn't snow*. What was going on?

Dad was pointing at something; Mum followed his finger with her eyes. They held their pose, gazing intently at something in the cloud through the glasses. My sister was tense in Mum's arms, looking back over her shoulder rather than at the sky.

I heard myself breathing, trying not to hyperventilate. My heart was thudding so hard I could feel it in my neck. My room was dark, like it was at night-time. Dad was still pointing. Mum was still looking. They weren't moving.

Was I still moving? I could still feel my heart, I could still think, but could I move? I waved my hands around at my side. Yes, I could. Phew.

But what of my family? They were... stuck. Frozen. How long did this 'eclipse' thing last? Would it be like this forever? I didn't want to live by myself! Who would cook dinner; who would play with me?!

On that thought, what was the time? I turned to look at the colourful clock on the wall, which I had not yet learned to read. With great regret, I realised I had no idea what the time was. The clock was broken anyway, it wasn't ticking and the little hands weren't moving. Funny, I could have sworn they were moving earlier. Dad had pointed at them and said something about when the eclipse was meant to get here. Not that I'd understood.

I went back to the window and looked over the garden again. Everybody was still there, nothing had moved. I slid the window open, warm air swirling inside slowly. It was as if the air didn't want to move, like it needed encour-



agement to do what it ordinarily did.

The whole environment smelt stale, not like rain was meant to. The good smells were gone, and the world was enclosed in a kind of dark bubble now. There was no daylight left; it was just leftover light from other places, bouncing off the shadowed sky. The clouds weren't even doing their normal swooshing thing; they were just hanging there, low in the sky, a bird breaking out one side, stopped with its wings outstretched.

How long would this last? I wanted it to be *over* already - the initial panic was gone, but I was still scared, shivering slightly with panic. This wasn't meant to happen. I guessed that... well, I just had to wait, now.

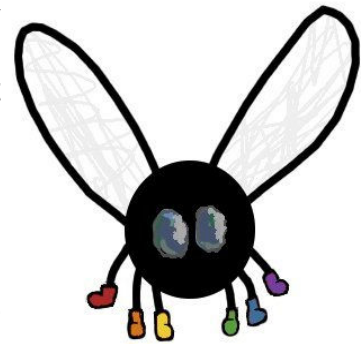
There was nothing I could do; I was a *child*, I was helpless. Nobody expects a child to be able to do anything of great significance. I couldn't restart time.

I sat for what was probably three hours. The rain never fell, the bird stayed in the sky, still flying. The wind never rattled my window, the tree never rustled its leaves. I never went outside, for fear of joining the silent world.

I thought of helping myself to a biscuit or two, but I couldn't reach the cupboard. Playing with toys was no fun either, especially when you were used to having a sibling to play with you.

I sat at my window for great lengths of time, actually quite enjoying being able to see the world in such detail, without the distraction of movement. I would never admit my feelings at the time, mainly for fear that if I became too comfortable with it, it would never go back to how it was meant to be.

It was a while before I came to notice the black blur on my visibility scope, and it got to the point at which I was becoming irritated with the odd little blind spot, before I realised it was a bluebottle fly, paused in his journey on the way to smash into the window. From where I sat, I could study his every feature, his wings spread aside his body in a manner more graceful than I would have expected from such a pest.



I thought to myself, that if this were ever over, I could never look at some things in the same way again. The fly, for example. What was left of the daylight caught on his green armour, and he was so *shiny*, beautiful. The rain, it was stunning to see from just one moment in time, every drop perfectly formed in the air, particles clinging to each other in a tiny, damp hug.

It was almost lunchtime before anything happened - I knew this because I was hungry by that point. I was still in my room, sitting on the edge of my bed, staring at my wallpaper, watching Tigger and Piglet talking uncommunicatively to Rabbit and Owl. And then I heard something hit my window.

I jumped up straight away, desperate to see the world return to its previous state. Frantically looking around, I saw my fly crash back to the window, too dim to realise he was meant to turn around. I was filled with optimism all of a sudden - the world was coming back to life!

Sun was breaking through the blackened veil; the darkness was fading from the sky in the middle-distance. A bird chirped in an unidentified hedgerow, followed by the long-awaited squawking of a startled blackbird.

Dad chuckled. Mum said something in an irritable tone, my sister whined. Yes!

They were back in action!

Mum huffed and handed my dad her pair of glasses, hitching my sister higher on her hip, and trailed the family back inside the house. Dad kicked around for a bit outside, screwing the hose tap up a little tighter, just in case. Such normal things; they obviously hadn't noticed the lapse.

What had happened? What was going on!? I was clueless, I would probably never know. Nobody was harmed, it seemed - even I was no worse off from the experience, I was actually a little happier for it. I had a new take on life - and really, for a six-year-old, that's pretty impressive.

Mum called up the stairs, something about lunch. Oh good, *lunch!* I took one last fleeting look outside, at the trees whispering in the breeze, the near-clear sky, the sunshine and the rolling clouds. The world was normal again. Well... whatever a six-year-old classifies as normal.

Looking back, I now know why I never just warned them; they would never have listened. I mean, if I was all grown up, why would I listen to a paranoid six-year-old who was saying the sky was going to eat them?

I put the cardboard glasses down, back in the box. Well, that was 1999. The sun, moon and Earth lined up, and that was pretty cool. I don't remember there being any conspiracy theories about that day; and the millennium bug never hurt anyone, I thought.

Then there's 2012... There might be something in that, with *all* the planets aligning... perhaps something weirder than last time might happen. I guess you never know.

I just hope, if what happened in 1999 happened again, it's not me who has to witness it - and whoever does... well, I wish you luck, child. And I suggest that one day you write about that fateful day, lest you ever forget.

Yours sincerely,

x

