



Goose and The Gingerbread Moons

A Cautionary Fairy Tale by Angie Thompson



Once upon a time, there was a small town surrounded by ancient forests and fertile farmlands. At a twice-weekly market, merchants sold goods of all kinds, lining the streets with fine silks, majestic shoes, elegant gloves, intricate baskets, and bejewelled clocks. Farmers and travellers paraded a menagerie of cows, sheep, chickens, peacocks and even dancing bears!

People would come from far and wide to sample the local ales and feast on the most magnificent confectionery laced with exotic spices from far off lands: nutmeg, cinnamon... ginger.

It was a time, dear reader, in this fairy tale land, when children were seen but not heard, and were put to work and forbidden from play.

A time when sugar was more valuable than gold, yet a time when the small town was famous across the kingdom for its mouth-watering gingerbread – a confection forbidden to all children. A time when a child could drink a quart of ale but could not eat even a morsel of gingerbread!

My story concerns Goose, the youngest child of the most revered of all the gingerbread bakers: a widow with 13 children. A fearsome lady who baked the sweetest and spiciest treats from dawn till dusk. Her recipe, a closely-guarded secret, was desired by all.

Whilst the mother baked and sold her moreish produce to Lords and Ladies and Kings and Queens, her children obediently delivered her sweet-smelling parcels, still warm from the oven, to the doorsteps of the town's guildsmen, councillors, clergy and elders.

But, never once did any child taste it...

Late one afternoon, when winters were winters, and the moon was a thin silver crescent in the sky, the baker's children argued about who should deliver a certain package of delicious gingerbread.

'What harm?'

'It's not far...'

'We've all been and returned safely'

And so it was decided that Goose, the youngest of the revered baker's 13 children, should deliver the gingerbread package to the dark house at Mystic Mews.

Before I forget, dear reader, you must be wondering why the boy was called Goose.

I'm sure you'll agree that if choosing twelve fitting names for your children would be hard enough, then to choose a thirteenth would be out of the question. Upon seeing his long neck and skinny pink feet at his birth, he was known affectionately as Goose.

You may be equally curious about the address. Mystic Mews, as its name would suggest, was a place of secrets and shadows. A place that children feared, but dared to go. They said a witch lived there; some called her Jenny Green-Teeth and told how she moved unseen, hither and thither through secret tunnels beneath the town.

Now Goose, being the sort of child that was not altogether concerned with the world, obediently took the gingerbread package to Mystic Mews - its sweet, spicy warmth reminding him of a mother's hug. The sweet spices teased his nostrils as he walked down the alley. As he pushed open the heavy door, forbidden gingery temptation taunted him.

Oh, dear reader, once hidden in the shadows, Goose, intoxicated by the delicious aroma, could resist no more.

In the silence of his secret cave, he undid the wrapping, the paper crackling as it unfolded. There before him were twelve perfectly round coppery coins, their sugar grains and spices glittering in the shadows.

Mesmerised, Goose held up a biscuit gently on his hand as if it were a delicate butterfly. He turned it this way and that. He breathed in the spellbinding scent, then took a small bite...

Crispness exploded and popped between his teeth; hot ginger danced on his tongue. A symphony of spice, caramel and chocolate soothed and warmed his stomach.

A shadow passed over the doorway and Goose shivered. Staring at the parcel on his lap, he saw not twelve perfectly round coppery coins, but twelve neatly-nibbled coppery crescents.

He hastily replaced the wrappings, and placed the package on the doorstep with a scribbled note.

'New Shape! Gingerbread Moons!'

Every day, dear reader, until the moon was full, Goose took the package to the unseen customer in Mystic Mews. Every day, Goose nibbled and sculpted twelve coppery crescent moons.

His mother remarked upon his new 'rosy cheeks' and his 'healthy dimples'.

Every day, dear reader, until the moon was full, the child secretly ate the forbidden gingerbread.

The silver moon, round and perfect in the dark velvet sky, looked down on Mystic Mews as a small boy called Goose secretly nibbled gingerbread moons. Drunk on the forbidden sugar and spice, he didn't notice the shadows creeping and curling and wrapping around him.

'SO!' a voice boomed like thunder, 'You, are the gingerbread mouse?'

Goose froze, eleven neatly-nibbled gingerbread moons in his lap, one more perfect disc of spicy temptation half in his mouth.

'And what might your name be?' the colossal voice inquired politely.

'G...G...G...Goose...' stuttered the small boy, unable to move this way or that.

'Well. GOOSE...' the voice whispered thoughtfully, '...so it shall be, for all eternity...'

This is where my story ends, dear reader. No-one knows what happened to the small boy called Goose, but there is a story I hear-tell of a lady who baked gingerbread biscuits in the town, who had a lot of children and a faithful gander who followed her to work each day.

And to this day, dear reader, as one winter moon yields to the next, great flocks of geese fly over the town. If you look, there is always one who hangs back a little. Could this be the baker's son who ate the forbidden gingerbread?



So it shall be. For all eternity.

