

# WALKING ON AIR

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OPEN BOOK UNBOUND WRITING

It was magic. *Crunchie, so light, you can walk on air.* A woman strolled along the road eating the chocolate bar and as she ate, she moved upwards, her feet no longer touching the ground. Marianne watched the advert, mouth half-open in wonder and called to her mother to come and see.

‘Please, Mummy, can we buy one? Please?’

She already knew the answer. ‘No. They’re bad for your teeth.’

Marianne scowled. She had to try one.

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One day, when her mother picked her up from school, she said they’d walk home instead of taking the bus. Marianne was thrilled. A walk home meant a stop at the corner shop.

Marianne skipped and talked all the way there. About school, about what the teacher said, how she shouted at the whole class and threatened to belt them all because James Murphy was talking when he should have been doing his sums.

‘And did she?’ A little dent appeared between her mother’s eyebrows.

‘No, but she brought it out and thumped it down on the desk like this.’ Marianne mimed a furious teacher sweeping a tawse above her head and down on to an imaginary desk. ‘Her face went all red.’

‘I bet it did.’ Marianne’s mother changed the subject. ‘What times table are you learning, pet?’

‘Three times table. I can say it all.’ And Marianne chanted *three nothings are nothing, three ones are three, three twos are six* until her mother joined in. For a while they tested each other. Three sixes? Three nines? Sometimes Marianne’s mother got one wrong and Marianne laughed until her sides hurt.

They were laughing when they reached the sweet shop. It was called Green’s because an old couple called Green had owned it. They had died a long time ago and a young man called Johnny worked there now, but the name had stuck and he didn’t seem to mind. Marianne stared at her mother.

‘And what’s that look for?’

Marianne said nothing,

The shop was dim and dusty inside. There were shelves filled with glass jars of brightly coloured sweets and on the counter was a set of scales where Johnny would place scooped out piles of sweets and weigh them into paper bags. He was very precise, shoogling the last sweets free to get the exact weight. On one side of the long counter were rows of chocolate bars, covered by glass. Marianne inhaled the dark, fruity smell of chocolate and sneezed.

Johnny was placing jars back on the shelf, high up on a pair of stepladders and hadn’t noticed they were in the shop. He looked down, startled. He smiled, a big wide grin that showed off straight, white teeth.

‘Sorry, I was miles away. What can I get you?’

‘Please Mummy, please can I have a Crunchie?’

‘It’s too near teatime.’

‘I’ll eat it all, I promise. Even the carrots.’ She hated carrots.

Her mother shook her head. ‘They’re bad for your teeth, you know that.’

‘Oh go on,’ said Johnny. ‘Where’s the harm?’ He picked one out from under the glass case and held it up. The golden wrapper brought sunshine into the shadowy room.

Her mother hesitated before saying, ‘Okay then, seeing as you’re such a clever girl and know your three times table.’

Marianne couldn’t breathe. She was going to fly. ‘I’m going to be like the lady on telly and walk on air.’

Johnny smiled at her mother. ‘What it is to be young.’

‘Well you should know. You’re barely out of nappies yourself.’

‘I’m old enough for anything that matters.’

‘Is that right?’ her mother twinkled at him. Her fingers brushed his as she took the chocolate. ‘I’ll have some chocolate too. I need something sweet. What do you recommend?’

‘I’d say you were sweet enough.’

Marianne’s mother glanced at her. ‘Why don’t you wait outside, dear. Here, take this.’ She halved the Crunchie and handed it to Marianne who scowled.

‘You didn’t think I’d let you eat all of this at once, did you? You can have some more tomorrow.’

Marianne wanted to argue but her mother had gone back to chatting to Johnny. She lifted her chin. It would still work. It had to. In the advert, the woman only had one bite before her feet lifted off the ground. It would work.

Outside, she looked for a place where she could try to fly. Across the road was an electricity substation surrounded by a high wall. It was an easy wall to climb, because it was made of stone and some stones jutted out a little, like steps to help you up.

Marianne glanced inside the shop but her mother was busy talking and laughing with Johnny. She’d be so surprised to see Marianne fly.

Marianne looked both ways to check if there was a car coming but the road was clear and she ran across. She clambered on to the top of the wall. Goodness, it was high. She bit into the chocolate. It was delicious, her tongue popped with honeycomb sweetness. Her mother was shouting but Marianne ignored her cries. Triumphant, she stood up on the top and waved to her.

‘Look, Mummy, I can walk on air.’ She stepped off the wall onto nothing, arms outstretched, expecting to fly.

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Marianne woke up in hospital. Both her parents were sitting by her bed. Her mother looked tired and sad.

‘You all right, pet?’

‘My leg hurts.’

‘It’s broken. You broke it when you fell off the wall.’

Marianne nodded. ‘I needed a whole Crunchie to make me fly, I should have known.’ She took her chance. ‘When I go home can I try again?’

‘I don’t think so, pet,’ said her dad. The trips to the sweet shop will have to stop. Isn’t that right, Mum?’

Marianne’s mother nodded, her eyes dull, a tight smile on her red, glossy lips.

THE END

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