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Except when silhouetted against the sun during a solar eclipse as we were fortunate to witness on March 20th, we never normally perceive the new moon until it draws far enough away from the sun for us to see the first glimpse of its illuminated surface. (And when we do spot it, by which time it's typically a couple of evenings old, it should never be seen through glass, and we have to turn over any coins in our pocket to avoid bad luck.)

On Sunday evening, April 19th, having noticed in my Dairy Diary that the moon had been new the day before, I took a chance an hour or so after sunset to swivel my telescope back and forth along the western horizon on the off-chance of spotting this brand-new moon. I actually found Mars just setting but nothing else except that fine curving fragment of a thin and distant vapour trail I'd passed a couple of times in my sweeps. Certainly nothing could be seen with the naked eye, so I was on the point of giving up when – of course! That "vapour trail". It was indeed the moon! The thinnest imaginable curved wire of pale cheesy yellow against the deeper yellow of the sky, reversing slowly down obliquely into the spiky skyline of the Cockercombe firs and spruces. And looking enormous. An astonishing sight. I'm sure I've never before seen quite such a young and ultra-thin new moon. The next evening it was clear to the naked eye but still extremely thin – amazing to think I'd seen it fully 24 hours earlier.

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Around that time I'd heard the distinctive and plaintive song of a mistle thrush coming from one of the oak trees in the field adjoining my garden. It seemed likely that it would move on, but last week my neighbour Roger said he'd seen a pair of these birds – bigger than the song thrush and more boldly marked on its front – on successive days, looking as though they were indeed nesting nearby. Then came the bad news. Roger witnessed a lethal strike by a female sparrowhawk on one of the pair. The remaining bird is still around, and as I write it's sitting atop our electricity pole, looking a bit lost. The sexes are alike so there's no knowing whether this survivor is the male or the female. The fact that it's not singing may mean the latter, though it could be the male, which is the songster, who just doesn't feel like singing. If it **is** the female, I wonder if she's got eggs, and if so whether she could raise a brood single-handed. I've been e-mailing my birdy contacts and one thing I've learned is that mistle thrushes can breed very early. Fingers crossed that's what's happened here.



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Dear old Goods Lane. After all its upheavals from falling trees, resurfacing and the slumping of its banks during last year's floods, it has truly turned up trumps this year with a spectacular display of woodland and hedgerow flowers and grasses, humming with bumblebees and at the moment being patrolled regularly by this year's crop of orange-tip butterflies. Our colony of early purple orchids has burgeoned, too. There are no less than 14 flowering spikes this year, with two new rosettes making 16 plants in all (for years there were just two or three). I've mentioned before that some plants have worked their way downslope right to the edge of the tarmac and may warrant finding a safer home in due course. Not much traffic uses the lane and, not wishing to tempt Providence, we are spared the wide slurry tankers which affect most of the other road verges in our area. Yes, thinning is in progress in the adjoining woods and has brought a regular movement down the lane of heavy tractor-hauled loads of extracted timber, but although the bank has been affected at one awkward point of exit, the verges as a whole are all intact, thanks to the cautious negotiation of the steep grade at less than walking pace. All credit to drivers Ian and Rob!