

# A Sea Story

By Don Gibson

It was another balmy day. The clipper *Baltimore Lady* was again becalmed. On deck, a stalwart man of fifty, bearing a worn cap of navy blue as his only identification as captain, restlessly paced. For a moment he stopped, turned his face to the horizon, and revealed a deeply-tanned complexion etched with the marks of fifteen years of close association with the sea. Turning, he impetuously stamped the floorboards and resumed his way towards the bow. From a perilous perch, entwined with a profusion of rigging, a lookout shouted, "Lifeboat off the starboard bow!"

The cry turned all faces toward the distant low-lying boat. The captain rushed across the deck and snatched the spyglass from one of the sailors.

"Where is it?" he shouted to the lookout without moving the glass from his eye.

"Four points off the starboard bow!" the lofty voice returned.

The captain adjusted his instrument to

the new bearing and saw a small, weather-beaten lifeboat drifting aimlessly in the noon heat. He thought he could detect something moving within the frail hull, but the rolling of the clipper made it impossible to confirm. Turning to his first mate, he gave concise orders to lower a boat to investigate. Within moments a boat, manned with several able-bodied sailors, was launched. It seemed like an eternity to the captain and his crew before the two boats met and returned with one in tow.

Within fifty feet of the clipper, a young, blond-haired sailor stood up and, cupping his hands around his mouth, called out, "Call the ship's surgeon. There's a man here close to dyin'!"

The emphasis placed on his last word sent a murmur through the on-looking crew. A few minutes later, the boats came alongside the high hull of the clipper. The blond-haired youth struggled up the rope ladder with an apparently lifeless form over his shoulder.

"He looks hurt bad," he announced to his expectant comrades. "Where's the surgeon?"

"Right here," a weak voice responded. "Let me through." The doctor crouched by the sprawled form and put one ear to the withered form's chest. A dead silence filled the air, broken only by the creaking of the ship's timbers.

"He's alive!" the surgeon uttered in an astounded voice. "Someone help me get him below."

By this time, the captain had arrived on the solemn scene. He quietly ordered four sailors to carry the survivor below to sick bay.

"Back to your stations, everyone," he said, turning to his crew. He took the young, blond sailor by the arm and led him aside and spoke to him in lowered tones.

"Did you find any identification in the boat or among his belongings?" the captain asked.

"No, sir," the seaman answered respectfully. "And as for his belongings, the boat was empty."

"How long would you say that boat has been adrift?" pursued the captain.

"Well, sir, judgin' by the seaweed on the sides, sir, I'd wager that old dory has been out there for a good two weeks."

"Thank you sailor," the captain said.

"Oh, and see to it that that lifeboat is cleaned up — we might be able to salvage her." His eyes moved off toward the horizon under his lowering brow.

"Two weeks," he mused to himself. "Two weeks." A merchant ship had passed them six days before saying they had seen wreckage of the whaler *Penguin* ten days before that. That would place the loss of the *Penguin* at no later than sixteen days ago.

An officer broke his reverie by saying, "Captain, you are wanted below, sir. The surgeon has revived the man we took aboard."

"Very good," the captain mumbled as he hastened off toward the companionway. He lowered himself down the narrow staircase and through the small corridor to a cramped cabin.

The room, dimly lit by a tiny porthole, was filled with a stale odor, mingled with that of the surgeon's sweat. The captain shot a glance toward the prone figure of an old man on an improvised cot. He could not discern the face, as a shadow secluded it from view.

"He can talk now, sir," the surgeon said in a low voice.

The captain nodded to the doctor and turned to the old man. He drew up a stool

and sat beside the cot. His eyes had adjusted to the surrounding gloom and he could now readily see the old man's face. It was once a handsome one, he thought, but now was thinned by old age and recent starvation. Deep ridges were furrowed into his brow, below which two sunken eyes swam in ruddy pools without focusing. His jaw was covered with a rough, grey beard; his head was crowned with white. His frame was broad, but pitifully emaciated. Two wrinkled hands hung motionlessly at the ends of his feeble, thin arms. Within a moment the captain realized that this living spectre had once been a strong seaman, starved for some two odd weeks under a searing sun in the middle of the sea — he hadn't long to live.

As the captain leaned closer to the old man, the two sunken pits suddenly became animated.

"I ain't dead yet!" the old man croaked, sending the captain reeling backwards on his stool. Quickly recovering from the shock, he thought he could detect a faint smile on the old face as he asked, "Who are you? What happened to you?"

"Who am I?" the old man repeated. "Who am I?" a little fainter. It took a short time before his mind cleared. "Ah, yes," he said after a short while, which

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# Way of a Turtle

By Kevin Coogan

I get the distinct feeling every once in awhile, when I stop and look around, that no one else is there. Come to think of it, this is not some strange feeling; it's a true-to-life fact. I am alone. It doesn't bother me though. I guess it should, but it doesn't. Just think of it. In a short 14 years a scrawny goof like me has become completely isolated from the world. It's horrifying, but it's true. I'm ready to face a harsh and bewildering life filled with loneliness and despair. It will make a great novel someday, after I've lived it.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not an orphan or a leper or anything like that. Physically I am surrounded by people, lots of them. In fact there are so many of them, I am suffocating. I should say "we," because the whole world is suffocating in its same dull existence. I live with a group of people, my family, in a purple house surrounded by thousands of white houses. That's why my father painted ours purple — to be different. Really everyone that lives in our house hates purple, but my father says individualism is a beautiful thing no matter what color it happens to be. My mother thinks the whole idea is stupid. "Why be different just to be different?" she says.

He always mumbles back, "Man needs to be an individual."

"Why don't you paint yourself purple then?" she says.

"Maybe I will," he grants. I bet he would too if he had any purple paint left.

When I walk (I walk everywhere), I sometimes think that somebody is playing a joke on mankind. I mean, wouldn't it be funny if someday somebody, I guess it would be God, told us all that we're not really alive, that it's all just an illusion? What would the world do? Probably just roll over and go back to sleep, but I still think it's kind of funny, and I laugh about it whenever I walk. You know, I think I'll become a mailman. A lonely and embittered one. The idea really does appeal to me. I could walk to my heart's content through rain and snow and sleet and hail every day. That really does appeal to me.

I hate the word family. It's such a fake, the whole word. On the outside family means love and togetherness and happiness and the whole joy bit, but it's really not the truth. Family really means boredom and irritation and dislike. That's the way it really is.

The last time my family was all together was when my sister died. No, I guess that's not right because my sister died before the family got together. She was old, I mean about thirty or so, and she had kids and a husband. It was kind of sad. I didn't even know her, but it was still sad. I'm the youngest in this group of people I reside with. It's very irritating to be the youngest. The problem is I'll always be the youngest. When they say, "We'll tell you when you're older," they really mean that they'll never tell me because the thing is I'll never be older. I'll always be the youngest.

When I go to school (I hate that word too) my mind remains blank. It's such a joke that school is a place of learning. That's such a lie. I really haven't learned much of anything. I don't know anybody that has, but then again I don't know anybody very well at school. "It's your own fault," my mother says. "You're like a turtle, never speaking to a soul." I know it's my own fault, but I don't care.

There used to be this kid that constantly bothered me. Everyday he would say "hello" and introduce himself and ask if he could eat with me since he usually saw me at lunch. I mean everyday he did this. Of course I never said anything to him, and he usually would say nothing back, but it really bugged me. I mean who was this kid anyway? I didn't even know him. One day right out of the clear blue sky he said, "You're a fool," and got up and walked away.

But he was wrong. I'm not a fool. I'm a turtle. I like seclusion. I like loneliness. That's me. And if someone comes searching for me, I resent it. Because myself, alone in this world, is a secret.

You know I don't think I'll be a mailman. It seemed kind of stupid anyway.

# SMOKE SIGNAL LITERARY SUPPLEMENT

Mary Ann Jackson, Editor

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## Private William Langdon

By Maureen Clawson

"It is war that wastes a nation's wealth, chokes its industries, kills its flowers, narrows its sympathies, condemns it to be governed by adventurers, and leaves the puny, deformed, and unmanly to breed the next generation." Bill underlined this paragraph with his magic marker and closed his book with a heavy sigh. He was tired. He shut his eyes trying to obliterate the incessant hum of the helicopters, the never-ending snap of an enemy gun, the heat, the flies, the knowledge that in a few moments he must get up, tired as he was, and face the inevitable — death.

That's how he felt about this assignment. Though oddly enough, this was the first time since he came to Vietnam that he wasn't afraid. Bill sat back enjoying a small patch of shade provided by an old lean-to. He had a few minutes before the mission, and he wasn't about to squander them. Funny, he thought, how he took advantage of time back home. Ah, he sighed heavily again — Virginia. That small farm he was raised on never sounded better than at this moment.

Memories flashed through his mind like prices on a stock-market board. Up until a few months ago, his life was the farm, his girl Ginny, sunny days, and happy hours. Then he turned eighteen. Bill laughed quietly to himself. Eighteen! That was supposed to be the magic age where the world would come alive to his presence. Eighteen. The only thing that it got him was a shaved head, a cold, a harsh rifle, and a stack of yellowing letters from home. And, of course, the heat and flies.

Bill wiped his sweating brow with his sleeve and got up. He was still tired. He walked down past the rows of army green until he came to his tent. This was his home now. He went in and looked around, threw his book on the cot and at the same time picked up the M-14. An odd combination, he mused: a book against wars and a gun that causes them. He gently caressed the sleek firearm. Shooting used to give him pleasure. Virginia is a good hunting state, he thought. Lots of deer, rabbits and squirrels. A gun used to give him pleasure. It didn't anymore. "When I get home," Bill thought, "I'll sell those huntin' guns."

He picked up his helmet and ammo belt, remembering when he first arrived for basic training at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. "How naive I was," Bill thought. Fighting for God and country was a tradition in the Langdon family. All of his ancestors had fought in one war or another, and all had been decorated. Everyone expected Bill to go into Vietnam and come out a hero.

Perhaps that was why Bill was so gung-ho about basic, taking delight in the learning of hand-to-hand combat and becoming an excellent marksman. Despite all this training, the first mission in Vietnam was a shock. For nothing can prepare a man to kill.

"Hey, Bill," a tart voice broke through Bill's reminiscing. "Bill?"

"Yeah, Joe, what is it?"

Time to go, buddy. The Old Man's a-callin'."

"Right, Joe. Be with ya."

Bill turned to go, taking a long, hard look at the small area he had called home, not really knowing why

The sun in Vietnam is an intangible enemy, even to those who were born under it. It was especially harsh on the GI's gathered around outside the radio tent waiting for orders. Bill shaded his eyes from the heat and glare and glanced at the country before him. Aside from the occasional spurts of gunfire, the rich, gently sloping hills could easily have been mistaken for American countryside. However, this was all he had time to reflect upon, for this troop was moving out.

They started at a quick pace, walking along well-worn and familiar paths. As the hours passed, the terrain became rugged, almost jungle-like, and walking became difficult. So far they had been lucky, for they had run into only one small Vietcong scouting party, and no American casualties had resulted from their meeting. However, they were going deeper and deeper into V.C. territory, in an area where every step might be their last.

The men were sweating profusely. The heat of the jungle was suffocating, pressing in on them from every side. And a fear which prickled their skins and made their hearts pound madly steadily grew. They stopped for a moment, listening to a dead jungle. Then it happened! A crack from an enemy rifle and one young man lay dead. The soldiers scrambled for shelter, now thankful for the denseness of the area. No sound was to be heard. The men stayed that way for an hour. Just listening and waiting, knowing what was to come, but powerless to prevent it. A shot from behind started a barrage of fire and told the men the terrible truth — they were surrounded! Bill and the men opened up with everything they had. However, it was not enough. The radio man, down. Tom Harkens, dead. One by one the American soldiers were picked off until only three remained. One of them was Bill.

The Vietcong had stopped shooting. Bill relaxed a minute and looked upward trying to see the sun. The foliage of the trees was too thick to see through. But he didn't need to see the sun to tell that it hung low in the sky, for darkness was falling quickly.

We cannot sit and wait for death, Bill thought. We must fight. The two other survivors were to the left of him and back a few yards. Bill's mind was hazy, his thinking unclear. All he could remember was the platoon sergeant back at basic saying "strength in unity safety in numbers!" These words kept echoing in his mind, growing louder and louder "Never give up go down fighting!" Bill tried to calm himself, but the words kept repeating in his brain. I must get back to the other men! I have to! Half crazed, he got up and ran with all the strength left in him, running for Virginia, running for tradition, running for himself; he never made it.

Back at camp a sergeant was gathering together the things of Private William Langdon. It was a name to him, nothing more. He picked up a worn book lying on the cot and placed it on top of the other things left of Bill. It slid down the small bundle and fell to the floor, its pages opening to a small section underlined with a red marker. "It is war that wastes a nation's wealth, chokes its industries, kills its flowers, narrows its sympathies, condemns it to be governed by adventurers, and leaves the puny, deformed, and unmanly to breed the next generation. It is war that kills."



# The Misfit

By David Johnson

Alan was a lonely guy. His favorite pastime was swimming in the pond and catching flies. This is because Alan was a turtle. He wasn't like the other turtles in the pond. He had a bright, orange spot on his back which made him stand out. The other turtles didn't like this, because when the sun hit the spot, it reflected into their eyes and made them sore; therefore, no one wanted to be around Alan. Al was very dismayed at having no friends, and so he decided to consult the wisest person he knew — Fred, the frog. Fred could usually be found sitting on a lily pad at the edge of the pond.

"Fred," Alan said, "what can I do about this spot on my back? I'm tired of catching flies by myself."

"Well, Al, why don't you try dyeing your spot black?" replied Fred, while putting on a pair of sun glasses to eliminate the glare.

"That's a great idea, Fred, but where do I get the dye?"

"Go to the goffleberry plant at the other side of the pond and pick 25 berries. Then proceed to squeeze the juice out of them and mix it with two teaspoonfuls of pond water."

Alan swam to the other side of the pond and followed the procedure given to him by the frog. He applied the dye and decided to wait for someone to come by so he could ask them how it looked. Five minutes passed before someone happened by. This particular someone was the optometrist of the area, Sam, the snail.

"Hello, Sam!" hollered Alan.

Sam turned, put his monocle to his eye, and remarked, "Why, Alan, your spot's gone! How in the world did you manage to get rid of it?"

"I didn't get rid of it," returned Alan with glee. "I covered it up with the dye from the goffleberry bush."

Rejoicing, Alan dashed back into the pond and swam to the other side to tell the frog.

"Fred, Fred, look, the dye worked!"

"What are you talking about, Al, your spot is as plain as day. The water must have washed the dye off your back."

"Oh, no," sighed Alan. "What can I do now, Fred?"

"Well, give me a little while to think about it alone. Come back in a few hours."

So Alan went away thinking, himself, of something he could do about his problem. Maybe it was a spot of paint he acquired when he was a tot. If so, he could remove it with turpentine. No luck. It looked as if it was there to stay. He might try swimming on his back all day, but that was too uncomfortable. Besides, he found it very difficult to get turned over again. Wait, he could go to the Indian witch turtle and ask for a hex on the spot or a potion he could drink to make it disappear. That's it, he would go immediately.

The witch turtle's hut was in an awfully dark section of the woods, but Alan had little trouble finding it.

"Mr. Witch Turtle," Alan called, looking into the hut, "are you in there?"

Out came a huge box-turtle with a painted face and a string of snail claws around his neck.

"What you want?" asked the witch turtle in a deep, gruff voice.

"It's like this, W T. I've got a spot on my back that's giving me trouble. I was wondering if you could do something about it for me?"

"You can take your pick of the hex treatment or today's special potion mixture."

"What's the difference?" Alan asked.

"The hex treatment is a dollar extra," replied the witch turtle.

"Oh, well, in that case I'll take the potion."

So Alan drank the potion and waited five minutes (according to the instructions) and lo and behold, the spot disappeared. Alan thanked and paid the witch doctor and left. Overjoyed, he went back again to tell Fred the frog of his good fortune. But once again Fred had to tell him that the spot was still there.

"What!" yelled Alan. "I just drank a potion that made it disappear."

"It must have worn off. But never mind that; I think I have found a way," and he held up a small bottle.

"But what could be in that little bottle that could help me?"

"Spot remover," replied Fred.

He applied it to Alan's back with a cloth and then looked.

"Is it working?" inquired Alan.

"Ah, I think it needs a little bit more." And he added more of the liquid and rubbed vigorously.

"How about it, Fred?"

"Nope, Al, it's not working. I'm afraid that that spot is just a part of you."

"But it can't be, Fred. What about the potion? That had a temporary effect."

"That could have been just a coloring agent such as dye."

So Alan left the lily pad and went home. He moped around for about a week before he met a girl turtle from another pond. She was wearing a beautiful sweater. Alan walked up and asked, "What's your name?"

"My name is Alice. What's yours?"

"It's Alan. Aren't you going to turn and run?"

"No," said Alice, "I can help you."

"You can?" retorted Alan. "That's wonderful, but how?"

"I'll just knit you a sweater like mine. You see, I used to have the same problem as you." She turned around and pulled the sweater off of her back. There, to Alan's amazement, was a bright spot similar to his.

Well, of course Alice and Alan were married and lived happily ever after. But that isn't the end of the story. The sweaters became very popular and spread all over the pond and eventually all over the world, and they are a very mod piece of clothing today. You can guess what the sweater is called. That's right. The turtle-neck sweater.

# The Void Within

By Frances Stoneberger

My muffled footsteps beat softly on the dirt path. Headed for the public library to return a book, I was taking a short-cut through a small, wooded park rather than going around it. It was a time when I felt like being alone, and I preferred the silent trees to the running, laughing children who would have been my companions out on the sidewalk. Fumbling in my jacket pocket to make sure I still had my library card, I came across a crumpled envelope. Absent-mindedly I drew it out, looking carelessly at its smooth white surface soiled with meaningless markings. Eventually it registered; it was a letter I had written the night before to a friend. I hadn't seen her since the close of school more than a month ago, and hearing that her parents were getting a divorce, I wrote in hopes of cheering her. I was glad I'd forgotten to mail it that morning, for now it gave me something to think about as I walked along. I imagined her finding it among the mail, opening and reading it, maybe smiling or even laughing a little at the funny parts.

I placed the letter back in my pocket for the moment, felt again for my card, found and withdrew it. Intending to slide it between the pages of my book to have it handy when I needed it, I was startled when the wind snatched it from my hand. I saw the card land in a pile of fallen leaves off to my left and went after it.

After about ten minutes I began to notice how terribly the rustling of the leaves, as I looked among them, grated on the stillness of the forest air. I paused. The wave of silence rolled back intact. Somehow unable to continue my search, I moved gingerly back to the path: the dry leaves cried out to condemn my intrusion. Standing there alone, surrounded by the imposing trees, barely breathing, I heard it.

Definitely, out of the throbbing silence came a series of short, very small sounds. Seeking its source, I crept forward about one hundred feet to where the path diverged. As I paused, listening, I could discern more distinctly the muffled, disconnected sounds. I could also tell they were coming from a common source and that this source was immediately to my right and most assuredly nearby. I moved cautiously in that direction until the parting branches of a small fir afforded me a view of the clearing from which emanated the sounds I had heard.

Straight ahead and with her back toward me was a young woman. She was seated at a stone picnic table, all that remained there from an early state camping area. Her rich, dark hair, tangled with dried leaves, engulfed the arm on which she rested her head. Obviously she had run to this retreat, being none too careful of her way. I stood there for so long in silence I was convinced that she was asleep and that I had been mistaken about the sounds, but as I turned to leave, they came again. Made by the woman before me, they were more like the gasps of someone drowning in the oppressive air than the sobs they were in reality.

My mind raced frantically for some word, some gesture, anything I could say or do to lessen her grief, whatever the cause, but each time I came up blank. In a few moments I realized why — that which I sought did not exist. For, whatever closeness may exist or however great the longing, it may never be sufficient to allow the assuming of another's sorrow. I knew that it was not her I sought to relieve, but myself, from the empty, useless feeling that stifled me. Unable to overcome this internal void or to face it, I turned and ran crashing through the trees, pulling the unmailed letter from my pocket, tearing it, and cursing its smugness as I ran. Even yet I cannot remember what I did with the pieces.

## Communication

By Melanie Grusczenski

*Out of the depths of the night  
I whispered your name  
And you answered.  
I was frightened and alone;  
The blackness enveloped me.  
You reached out to me in the darkness  
And touched my soul.  
You touched my mind, too,  
And the hidden corners of my heart.  
Before, I had no one.  
But now I do.  
I'm part of you.*

## Funeral

By Mikie Meginnis

*Ignore me people,  
Don't say hi,  
Come to my funeral  
When I die.*

*Sit by my casket  
Cry crocodile tears  
Speak of me never  
In future years.*

*Hiss at me now  
Don't say why  
I know you don't like me  
Don't you lie!*

*I know you'll be there  
Even if you've a fever  
I wish you'd not bother  
I don't like you either.*

## Musings

By Frances Stoneberger

*Of all the things we now employ  
To make us more attractive,  
A simple smile is easiest  
And truly most effective.*

*Birds chase birds,  
Fish chase fish,  
Animals chase animals,  
Men chase men  
And rainbows*

*Our rivers choke with dying fish  
Our drinking water's green.  
Who cares so long as we can keep  
Our clothes spotlessly clean?*

*Our elders taught us how to hate  
As children unaware  
Thinking we might build a better world  
On the fault that ruined theirs.*

*Confusion is a branching route  
Either leading to surrender  
Or fresh things to think about.*

*I may not share your sadness  
But may only stand and watch  
Face to face with uselessness  
Being able to do naught.*

*A friend is one we may talk to  
Not "at" as we most often do.*

*To have no need of anyone  
Is to be truly free.  
But someone who is truly free  
It is impossible to be.*

*Man discovers  
Man employs  
Man exploits  
Man destroys  
Man.*

## Remembering

By Margo

*I heard an old song last night.  
It used to make me cry —  
Remembering.*

*But now it fills me with  
A kind of joy —  
Remembering.*



## Self

By Margo

Once I was so sad  
I could not understand  
Why seasons changed as usual,  
And people talked and laughed  
And were happy.

Now my heart is filled with joy  
And it is strange to see  
The weather dark and dreary  
And people quiet and discontented.

## A Poem About Death

By Pat Oberg

There're times I fear the thought of death  
As I fear the thought right now.  
What would happen if I died?  
Would I be missed? Just how?  
Would the shock be great for mom and dad?  
And how well would they bear it?  
My sister, brothers, friends and loves,  
There's grieving, will they share it?  
How will you all remember me?  
As a lion or as a lamb?  
Lots of laughs? I ask you please —  
Remember me as I am.  
I'm not the greatest thing on earth,  
And still I'm not the worst.  
Often selfish, I know I was;  
then again, I'm not the first.  
I have my dreams, I have my faults,  
My life has just begun.  
What then—if in a second's time  
the earth is minus one.  
Being dead is really great, a lot  
of fun, believe me!  
And still the pain's too hard to bear  
My world, why did you leave me?  
There're times I fear the thought of death,  
As I fear the thought right now.  
I'll close my eyes, sleep with the night,  
Guess I'll pull through some how.

## Reincarnation

By Melanie Gruszczenski

Go  
thou, my Beloved,  
To the hilltop where we once would lie.  
Abandon the emptiness,  
Befriend thy loneliness.  
Journey to that long-forgotten crest and  
Conquer it, as does the king his rightful  
heritage.  
Find me, my dearest, the purest, reddest  
blossom.  
Take care that the thorns  
Cause thee no more pain and sorrow  
Like the briars clinging to thy grievous heart.  
Plant the ruby floret  
Amidst the moss and clover,  
Flourishing above the dark and somber tomb.  
It is to be your final love-offering.  
Do not nourish it with tears of sorrow, for  
It shall wilt with bitter droplets.  
Above all, my dearest love,  
Let the rose be our bond.  
It shall yield to the winds,  
Rejuvenate in the sun's warmth,  
And thrive in heaven's moist showers.  
Though I can no longer revel in the wild winds,  
Whirling so they take the breath away  
Or bask in sunlit wheat fields or  
Run, laughing, through a spring rain,  
I will be content  
For I am reborn in the rose.

## Reflections

By Mary Ann Jackson

She stood sideways and every which way, but nothing seemed to help, not even her newly-made slacks. Still the reflection painted an image of a rather tall, skinny, and curveless figure. Pulled back in a sash, her dusty brown hair, streaming coarsely down her back, made her narrow face appear even longer. Concentrating on the honesty of the reflection, a doggie-eyed, 18-year-old stared frozen in distress.

"Standing in front of the mirror all day isn't going to change anything, Margie," teased a rather pretty-looking woman in her mid-thirties, as she glanced up from her sewing machine.

"Well, I guess they don't look that bad," Margie responded, trying to manage a convincing smile, as she slowly pivoted around to face her mother. "And that A-line top you're making will make them look even better." She paused just long enough to pivot again and ran on excitedly, "Everything just has to be right for Debbie's party Saturday, because if I don't get asked to the Prom by Saturday it

"It won't be the end of the world," her mother emphasized firmly

Hearing that defense a thousand times before, Margie turned away in defeat and retreated to her father who was slouched in a chair in the far corner of the den reading the evening paper contentedly. If the sports page was not concealing his face from view, one would see a man in his mid-thirties with a handsomeness appropriately complementing his wife's beauty. "Hey, Dad, how do you think they look?" she said, taking a pin-up stance before her father.

"Just great, little lady, just great," came her father's rushed and mechanical reply, which was partially muddled by yesterday's sporting events.

Hands on hips, Margie, flustered by her father's false flattery, pleaded, "Oh, Dad, can't you just for once be honest and put down that paper and forget that you're my father and I your little lady and pretend you're a boy at Debbie's party?" Pausing to catch her breath, she questioned, "Would you ask me to the Prom if I wore these slacks at Debbie's party Saturday?"

Margie stood motionless at the unusual suddenness with which her father reacted. Abruptly, he slammed down his paper and launched forward in his chair. His placid, green eyes fiery and his tawny face a burning scarlet, he blurted, "You better just get those fool ideas out of your head, little lady; next thing you know you'll be going to bed and getting yourself pregnant!"

Utterly dazed at her father's anger and words, Margie clumped lifelessly to the floor. She hurriedly reached for the pile of magazines sitting by the edge of the chair. Flitting nervously over the pages, she saw only blurred mazes of the smart, new summer fashions and hairdos which would have normally caught her eye.

"How could he say such a thing," she murmured to the blurred faces in disbelief. "I only want to go to . . ." Drifting in her thoughts, she remembered back to junior high and how she longed for entrance into high school—the acclaimed date kingdom. But the famed date kingdom hadn't been so generous as far as Margie was concerned. Her brief exchanges with the opposite sex had left her only empty and discontented. She probably should have felt insulted at her father's words, but she was too dazed in anger to grasp any implications. She could hear her mother with her intended comforting, but instead agonizing, sayings, "There's time, you can wait." It kept ringing her mind, "There's time, you can wait," "There's time, you can wait."

But I can't wait any longer!" screamed Margie, springing up unconsciously from her daze with tension mounting in her face. "I'm 18-years-old, a young woman, and attracted to the other sex and bubbling for them to recognize me. Is that so unnatural?" Tears streaming down her cheeks, her hair wisping down over her forehead, she turned and ran jerkily out the doorway. A sob-muddled, "You just don't understand!" followed her out of the room. Those words lingered emotionally in the room. Her fallen hair sash lay crumpled on the floor.

Her father pulled himself slowly up out of the chair. His footsteps breaking the heavy silence, he walked over toward the door and bent over to pick up the fallen sash. His wife still sat at the sewing machine, apparently untouched by the flurry. Sitting down on the stool beside her and reaching out affectionately for her hand, he said, "I don't know what we're going to do with that girl, Hun. She's so young and so innocent, and I want to protect her so."

"She'll get over it, dear, you wait and see," she said, trying to reassure her husband with a tiny trace of enthusiasm in her voice.

How he wished that he could tell his daughter how he and her mother were once teenagers just as sensitive and restless as she. And when they went out on a date, an evening yielded consequences which they have had lived secretly and painfully with for the past 18 years. "Oh, little lady, we do understand . . ." he murmured unconsciously to the reflection.

In the room above Margie lay exhausted from crying. Leaning up on her elbows with palms on her tear-stained cheeks, she tried to sort out the whole mess which fluttered in her heart. She pondered why her father was so strangely bitter and apprehensive and her mother so cool and procrastinating. But she was too tired to search for an answer now. Hastily, she chalked it all up to the generation gap, which she comfortably assured herself was a very acceptable and logical explanation whenever parents and kids are concerned. Her mind finally at ease, she lay down and rolled over to continue the probe of her new outfit and Debbie's party Saturday.

## A Pain in the Toe

By Larry Laws

The doctor's office was shiny and modern. Behind the desk, the doctor glanced up from his paperwork through dark, thick glasses at James Wheatley.

"Now then, what seems to be the trouble?"  
"This might seem silly," Mr. Wheatley said, "but I've been having this pain in my toe."

"Indeed!" said the doctor, "Well now, just how long have you been having these pains?"

"About six months now, but it hasn't been that bad until last week. You see —"

"I see," echoed the doctor. "Getting worse all of the time, you say?"

"Well, you might say that," he replied, painfully wiggling his toe. "You see, when I first —"

"Tell me, Mr. Wheatley, how old are you?"  
"Fifty-five."

"Fifty-five," repeated the doctor, as he leafed through his records. "According to this, you haven't had a checkup in over ten years!"

"Well, you see, I —"

"Come now, Mr. Wheatley, we aren't living in the Middle Ages you know. Even if you feel all right, that doesn't necessarily mean that you're all right. See, and now you're having pains in your toes!"

"One toe," corrected Wheatley. "The little one on the right. It seemed to me —"

"You know that fifty-five is a dangerous age, and no checkup in ten years!"

"I suppose I should have seen to it, but, you see, it's just that my toe —"

"My dear fellow, your toe is part of you. It just doesn't exist down there all by itself. If it hurts, there has got to be a reason!"

"But I thought that you could just give me something to —"

"To stop the pain," he said. "I guess I could, but that wouldn't be getting to the root of the problem, would it? It could be an inflammation, or a tumor or who knows what?"

"Perhaps you could take my blood pressure, or something," offered Wheatley.

"Well, I guess I could, but it wouldn't mean too much to me because that's not my field. "But, there's nothing to worry about; we have a fine hypertension man over at the diagnostic clinic. Let's see, I can give you an appointment at 9 a.m. Monday morning."

"Very interesting!" a red-haired doctor exclaimed, while looking at the x-rays. "See this shadow in the upper duodenum," he pointed out.

"All this is my toe?" asked Wheatley as he edged toward the group of doctors who were huddled over his X-rays.

"Your toe! Oh my, no, that's the orthopedic radiologists' department."

"I'm a gastro enterologist man myself. Upper. Dr. Shultz here is the lower."

He then turned back to his colleagues while Mr. Wheatley sat down and rubbed his aching toe.

"We'll have to call in a few more specialists to locate the problem," said one of the doctors.

Mr. Wheatley sat there, dumbfounded as the huddled team of specialists discussed his case.

"No doubt in my mind that it's a . . ."

"But we can't ignore the endocrine complications, doctor . . ."

"Yes, you're right, but a tubular function man should look at those kidneys, first; after all, he is fifty-five years old."

After awhile, James Wheatley rose from the bench and slipped out of the door, limping slightly as he left.

The room was small and dark, with heavy Turkish curtains covering the windows. A suggestion of incense hung in the air. Then, a small, dark, scrawny man with a thin mustache appeared wearing a turban. He bowed solemnly.

"You come with a problem?" he asked in an accent.

"As a matter of fact, yes," James Wheatley said hesitantly. "You see, I've been having this pain in my right little toe . . ."



# A Sea Story

(Continued from Page 1L)

seemed interminable to the impatient captain.

"The Penguin," the old man murmured.

"The Penguin?" the captain asked in a lowered tone. "Are you a survivor from the Penguin?"

The old man nodded.

"What happened to her, and how long have you been adrift?" the captain pursued, a little vexed with the old man's silence.

"Ah, what happened," responded the old seaman with a slight sigh. "I'll tell you what happened," he started slowly.

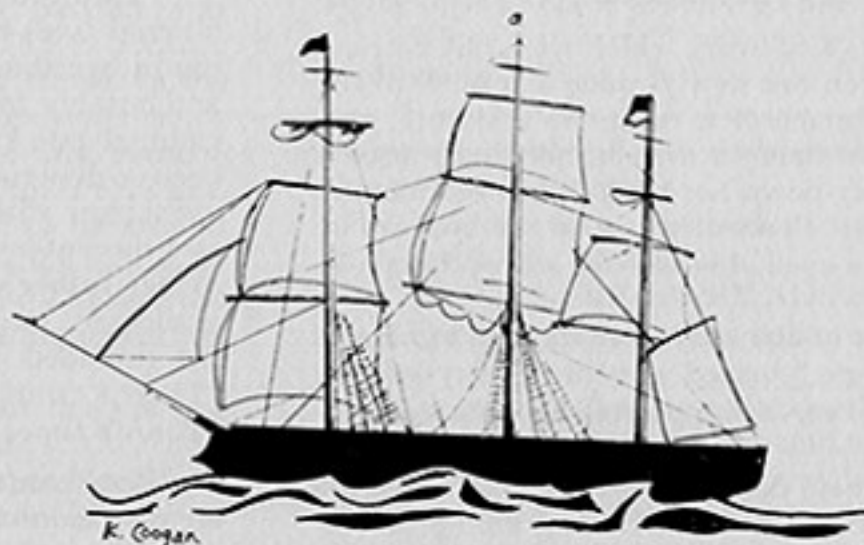
"The Penguin was a whaler — the best whaler out of New Bedford — and was my ship. I'm Captain Robert Forrester, captain of the Penguin, or what used to be the Penguin. We were sailing these waters some four weeks back, looking for a school of California grays.

The graceful whaling ship Penguin sliced through the azure waters of the North Pacific, all sails billowed with the wind. A few scattered clouds raced across the summer sky. The beauty of the day had a marked effect on the crew, smiling for the first time in days as they went about their duties. The exhilarating weather, however, was not to be enjoyed by the Penguin's captain, Robert Forrester. He had confined himself to his cabin for a good deal of these recent days, plagued with the burden of an empty hold and already one week overdue at port. On this day, he paced the foredeck, one hand behind his back and the other hidden behind a dark beard. From high atop the mainmast, a lookout cried, "Whales, ho! Grays off the port beam! One thousand yards!"

Within an instant all hands were gazing off into the distance. The tell-tale stream of churned water indicated the school of California gray whales. Great slate hills were rolling slowly in and out of the water. From the midst of the group, a geyser of steam hissed some thirty feet into the air before falling back down to the sea. A murmur of excitement ran throughout the crew as the captain ordered port helm.

"Make ready the longboats!" sang out the first mate after a nod from the captain. "Furl the topsails — watch your speed, helmsman." The conversation droned on amid the bustle on deck as Captain Forrester again cast his gaze on their quarry. He thought to himself that of all the whales he had tracked, these California grays were the most peculiar. The plume of white foam following the lead whale indicated a very fast speed for a whale — ten knots, perhaps. It seemed as though they were running from something.

He had to change his position now that the bow was swinging around toward the school. He walked forward with a brisk pace, turning over the idea of frightened whales in his mind. Once at a desirable perch on the forecabin, Captain Forrester lifted his spyglass toward the excited pack. They were sounding! Some had already submerged, while others were riding their cavernous lungs of the last spouts of used air and re-inflating them with fresh. Forrester jerked the glass away from his eye and rammed it closed angrily. He could now either follow the school, which would mean many hours of



searching and possible wild-goose-chases, or he could give up the pack and search for another, which could take weeks. After weighing the odds for a few moments, he decided to follow the whales.

"Hoist the topsails!" he ordered to the nearest officer. "The whales have sounded. We're in for a long ride. Tell the helmsman to get us over the spot where the grays dived, then right rudder until we are parallel with their course. Step lively! We mustn't lose those whales!" He emphasized his last order with a bang of his fist, hitting the gunwale, causing the officer to jump with a start.

For one-and-a-half hours the Penguin followed the submerged school of whales, rotating men on watch for the tell-tale bubbles as often as every quarter hour, yet still no sign of the whales surfacing. Captain Forrester, who maintained the belief that one hour was the outside limit for a whale's submergence time, bit his lip and impatiently scanned the horizon. The crewmen occasionally shot glances at the figure hunched over the railing with a spyglass to his eye, as doubt began to grow in their minds as to the captain's competency. Suddenly, a waterspout five-hundred yards off the port bow. Then another, and another. The whales were surfacing. Lookouts cried, "There she blows," and the crew men chorused together in rounds of hurrahs. Captain Forrester's brow brightened. The men needed no orders from him; they scurried to their posts excitedly as more and more whales blew out their mighty spouts of steam. The Penguin changed her course a little and raced toward the thrashing pack. The captain was happy and certain of a large catch until, between orders, he watched stunned as several whales started to dive again. Within several minutes the entire school was submerged. The men's shouts died in their throats. The Penguin was perfectly still except for the lapping of the waves across the ship's bow and the gurgling of stray bubbles surfacing. Slowly the crew's shock was replaced by depression, and those already sitting in the longboats wearily climbed back on deck. The men began to shuffle back to their posts. The first mate drew up slowly to the captain,

and asked in a low tone, as if not to disturb the ship's silence, "Orders, sir?"

"The same," he replied without looking away from the spot where the school disappeared. "Follow them."

The rest of the afternoon was spent in pursuit of the elusive whales, with several incidents similar to the first encounter. By six o'clock that evening, Captain Forrester was ready to give up. He surmised that the whales were definitely fleeing from something, and they weren't about to stop long enough to be caught, by either their pursuer or him.

Darkness had already fallen by the time the captain had finished his evening repast. He mounted the quarter-deck and lit a well-used pipe which he drew out of a deep pocket. Leaning over the railing, the pipe clenched between his teeth, he stared into the swirling wake of the ship. Only a moment the small eddies and swirls held his penetrating gaze, as a young officer approached him.

"Begging the captain's pardon, sir, but I wonder if you had noticed the change of the wind's direction," he said, pointing to a pennant just visible atop the mast.

Forrester turned to the young officer. "This is your first voyage, isn't it, as a petty officer?"

He nodded.

"Well don't you think that a captain with twenty-six years of experience at sea knows the signs of a storm?" he shouted in a rage. The young officer mumbled an apology and beat a hasty retreat with a reddened face.

As with the captain, everyone's temper was short. The thoughts of lowered wages haunted all the crew. They moped about the decks very sullenly and without spirit. Upon receiving orders to make the ship ready for the oncoming storm, a moan ran through their ranks.

Already dark clouds were racing across the pale moon, which had risen only a little while before. The dark swells gradually grew in size. The wind picked up and produced an eerie, low howl. Captain Forrester went about the ship, supervising operations to make the ship fast. Already a light mist was falling. The sails were furled, but the loose articles around on the

deck had yet to be secured. As the crew's pace stepped up to beat the storm, a lookout high on top of a mast sung out, "Whales! All around us!"

"What?" the captain cried in disbelief. "Whales? Now?" An excited murmur ran through the crew as the lookout repeated the unbelievable report. Forrester clutched a nearby line so firmly that his knuckles turned white.

"They've come back to laugh," he thought angrily to himself as he cursed them. "No longboats out in this weather," he called to the crew. "Leave 'em be."

The men accepted the order with mixed emotions. Some realized the suicidal risk they would run if a storm broke while they were in a longboat. Others craved excitement and saw the impending storm as a chance for more adventure.

The ship began to pitch amid the ever-increasing waves. Rain started falling in torrents as the fury of the storm was suddenly upon them. All at once, a violent jolt shook the ship. One sailor ventured to the gunwale to watch in horror and amazement a whale slowly backing away from the side of the Penguin. Several more jolts followed as the confused whales pounded the ship's hull.

"They're stoving the ship!" he cried as he stumbled up to the captain. "What'll we do?"

Before Captain Forrester could reach a decision, a bolt of lightning ripped across the sky, illuminating the raging sea for an instant. The sea was alive with whales! Ten or maybe twelve on one side of the ship alone, all thrashing against each other and, in their panic, jostling the ship with their mighty flukes. Before Forrester could order a new course, the whales began to scatter and dive. As the last one plunged into the churning water, a violent gust of wind and ocean spray knocked the captain to his knees. He looked up in time to see the entire upper portion of the mainmast being severed, taking torn sails and entangled lines crashing into the sea. The figure of a lookout was seen dangling from a yard-arm before he too fell into the inky depths. A peal of thunder smothered his shriek, if he did scream at all. A few sailors attempted to throw him a line, but the heaving deck sent them sprawling and nearly being washed overboard themselves.

Captain Forrester managed to regain his footing against the strong wind, and look out through the downpour to sea. The momentary brilliance of a lightning bolt played upon the broken surface of the water, illuminating a ghastly apparition which made the captain's blood run cold. The image of ten or more snake-like arms writhing half in and half out of the water lingered on the captain's retina. A second flash verified it; the monster was flailing fifty-foot arms, each lined with several rows of discs. As it rode high on a wave, a huge head lifted out of the water, revealing two glowing red eyes separated by a beak of soft flesh, displaying an array of razor-sharp teeth. Another wave carried the creature broadside into the Penguin. The crew had seen the monster and were scrambling to the safety of the below-decks. But one sailor slipped before he could reach the open hatch. Before he could get up, a leathery arm shot across the deck and curled around him. The captain staggered to another companionway, dashed down the ladder, and returned with an axe in hand. However, by the time the captain reached the unfortunate sailor, the immense arm lifted its victim high into the air and slithered back into the sea. Another arm was now reaching for the captain, who ran stumbling toward the stern of the ship. Several more of the writhing arms wrapped themselves around the masts as three crewmen dashed out of the open hatch, each with an axe.

"Back here!" the captain shouted above the din of the storm.

The three stumbled aft and joined the captain in front of a lifeboat.

"We've got to get at its head," the captain bellowed, as the wind tore half the words from his mouth and carried them out to sea. "Everyone in," he yelled, gesturing toward the lifeboat.

The sailors exchanged incredulous glances at each other, and started back for the hatch when two more huge arms twisted their way toward them. In a panic, one crewman tried to dash for the hatch. But as he was about to climb below, a strong arm whipped across the deck and wrapped around him. Before Forrester or the other two sailors could reach him, the arm pulled the man off the deck and into the depths.

The crewmen wanted to stare at the disappearing tentacle, but the captain grabbed them both and pointed to an approaching arm. All three ran for the lifeboat, and had it lowered quickly. As the frail craft battered its way around the Penguin, the giant head of the monster came into sight. It was at least twenty feet in breadth, with short screams issuing forth from its hideous mouth.

"Take her in fast!" Forrester screamed above the wind, as the crewmen strained at the oars. When the soft-skinned head was within arm's reach from the tossing boat, the captain stood, lifted his axe high above his head, and with all his might, brought it flying down. The axe-head sunk deeply into the grey flesh and a torrent of blood gushed forth from the wound. The entire frame of the monster shuddered, and a shrill shriek penetrated the crashes of thunder. Forrester raised the axe again, this time aiming for the large red eye which stared up at him. He brought the axe down on its mark, splitting the eyeball wide open. But before he could repeat his attack, a sudden lurch sent him falling to the bottom of the boat. Several of the long arms were wrapping themselves around the lifeboat. Both the sailors were wielding their axes in an attempt to cut the boat free. When the captain recovered his balance and began chopping at the muscular tentacles, another shot out of the depths and curled around one of the sailors, squeezing the life out of him almost instantaneously. His limp form dangled from the constricting grip of the tentacle as it lifted him high above the water and dropped him into the inky abyss. Forrester and the remaining seaman resumed their own life-or-death struggle with the last encircling arm, which they severed together. The lifeboat drifted away from the wretched monster, which bled profusely. In what appeared to be a last effort, it wrapped all its arms about the masts of the Penguin. With a mighty heave, all three masts toppled into a heap of confusion. The captain and last sailor watched unbelievably as the beast withdrew its tentacles from their grips around the shattered masts and wrapped them entirely around the ship. Slowly the bleeding creature squeezed the whaler; its timbers creaked and split under the fantastic pressure. Then all at once, the battered ship seemed to give up, and with a tremulous crash, was split in two. It was but a matter of moments before both sections of the Penguin were gone, as well as the monster.

"We weathered the storm in the lifeboat for two days, until the sun finally showed itself. Tired and hungry, we tried to fish, but with little luck. About five days after the wreck, that sailor died — of beriberi, I think. He left me alone, all alone on the sea, all alone." The old man's voice droned off as his head slowly turned to one side.

The surgeon leaned over the withered form, with one ear to the old man's chest. He turned to the captain and nodded.

The captain stood, shook the cramps out of his legs, and went up on deck. The sun was shining brightly as he strode about the ship. He paused when he reached a gunwale, leaned on the railing and looked out to sea.

"Twenty-armed monsters!" he chuckled to himself. "The old coot must have been delirious." As he was guffawing, the young blond sailor who lead the rescue operation came up to him.

"Captain, sir, could I have a moment?"

"Certainly, what is it?" the captain responded.

"Well, sir, it's about that boat we picked up this afternoon. When I was scapin' the bottom of her, I came across this stuck to it." He held out a piece of decaying flesh which looked like a section from a large snake. Upon inspecting it, the captain turned it over to find several rows of concave discs. He looked up to the sailor, then returned his gaze to the rancid piece of flesh. He slowly gave it back to the waiting sailor.

"Somethin' the matter, sir?" he asked concernedly.

"No," he said, after a pause. "Nothing's the matter."

"Well, sir, what'll I do with it?"

"Throw it overboard," the captain falteringly said.

The young sailor gave it a mighty heave and then excused himself. As the captain feared, it floated, staying close to the side of the clipper, as if it knew its last victim was on board.

That evening, the old man was buried at sea. The ritual was simple, lasting only several minutes as the captain read a few lines from a Bible. As the sack was about to be lowered, the water-logged section of tentacle floated around the ship and hovered in the water directly below the chute. The captain saw it out of the corner of his eye, repressed a shudder, and nodded to the sailors by the chute. The canvas sack slid off the chute and splashed into the still water. When the crew had dispersed, the captain tried to resist looking over the side, but could not. He stared down into the water as the vile hunk of flesh slowly began to sink, following a few stray bubbles. He thought he saw it moving as it slid deeper and deeper, but a murky veil soon obscured it from view.

The captain remained, staring into the depths of the sea a few moments longer, then straightened, pocketed the Bible, and walked towards his cabin.

## Night Chase

By Larry Hanna

The polished white top of Pete Vance's highway patrol car reflected a glimmering portrait of the full moon rising slowly toward the zenith as the vehicle glided, phantom-like, through the lonely, pitch-black prairie night. It had been at least a half-hour since the veteran trooper had passed a sign of civilization — that being a giant tractor-trailer ferrying a new bulldozer up to the copper mine at Sheridan Wells, the town in which Vance lived and from which he began his nightly forays.

Now he was alone with his thoughts as he guided the Fury at an even 50 miles-per-hour pace down the perfectly straight stretch of road, oblivious to the occasional chatter of dialogue on his radio and the faraway cries of night creatures. Through his open, left-front window, he surveyed the infinite expanse of stars parading across the night sky, seeming unusually close in the clear Great Plains air. Slowly he allowed himself to drift into a state of reverie, and he silently wondered if other civilized worlds existed out there somewhere, and whether they too were having wars and crime and hunger and pollution as was Earth. And this line of thought eventually led him to the question of whether people in other worlds had a desire to explore the Universe, as did those on Earth.

Vance had always possessed an active imagination, and he was an avid reader of science fiction and books about "UFO's," spiritualism, sea monsters — anything dealing with weird or yet-unknown happenings. Of course, this strange pastime of his made him the target for a lot of ribbing from the other men at Barracks Four and from his friends, but most people wrote it off as just being Vance's way of mentally escaping from the gruesome daily realities of his job.

And so it was that he now had his mind

on the unknown as he cruised along lonely U.S. 87, and he still had it on his mind at the moment when he looked into his rear-view mirror and saw an odd sight.

Off to the west and rapidly gaining on him was what appeared to be a misshapen conglomeration of red, blue, and yellow lights, some blinking on and off, others permanent. "Damn, that's one fast-moving jet," thought Vance to himself as the object overtook and passed his car. But now he noticed two strange things about this flying apparition. It made no sound whatsoever, and its lights were arranged in a circular fashion, as if the object were a disc of some kind.

Unnerved by what he saw, Vance instinctively reached for the microphone dangling beneath his two-way radio. But he immediately withdrew his hand as he considered the consequences of any rash action. "If this turns out to be really nothing, nobody in these parts will ever let me live it down," he mused. "They'll say all those books I read have finally driven me off my rocker." And so he decided to follow the object for a while before doing anything.

He stepped his speed up to 80 miles per hour, and as a precaution, turned on his siren and dome light.

But the soaring lights were getting farther away. Vance's curiosity was now overcoming his fear. The speedometer touched 100.

And now an amazing thing was happening. The flying disc seemed to be slowing down, and Vance's car was now rapidly gaining on it. Then, as he watched partly in terror and partly in bewilderment, it appeared to stop dead about a mile ahead, near where a little side road cut off from the main highway. Now Vance was truly frightened. He grabbed the mike and began to send out a call for help. But the radio responded

only with a loud metallic buzzing sound — it had, for some reason, gone completely dead.

Seconds later, he arrived at the place where the smaller road turned off. Sure enough, about a quarter-mile down the little road hovered the lighted disc. All the time issuing a slight whirring noise, it was settling to the ground. Trembling, he pondered his choices. Should he forget about this strange phenomenon and get out of there? Or should he turn down this side road and perhaps become the first human to greet some extra-terrestrial expedition?

Patrolman Vance jerked his steering wheel and sped off down the little road, straight toward the flying disc.

Two highway patrolmen, decked out in boots, leather jackets, and peaked caps, stepped out of the headquarters building and into the bright early morning sunshine.

"Know what Lieutenant Mathews just told me?" said the one on the right. "Remember Pete Vance, who got transferred over to Sheridan Wells last year? Well, they found him dead on some little back road last night. Car was all smashed up, by the side of the road. Been dead about a week. Some uranium prospector wanderin' around up there stumbled onto him."

"Yeah?" The other cop stared back in disbelief. "That's too bad! I used to know the guy pretty well when he was stationed here. He was an all right guy, but sort of a dreamer. Liked to read far-out books, things like that. Maybe that's why he ran off the road. Got to havin' some wild pipe dream about somethin' and didn't watch where he was goin'."

"Yeah, maybe," returned his partner. "Too bad, anyway. That puts this year's traffic fatality toll at 45 and this is only June. Looks bad when it happens to a highway patrolman, too."

They got in their car and drove off.

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