

The Honeymoon

Charlie Hobbs decided fifty-eight was not too old to enjoy a honeymoon as he walked along Lake Erie and held Mattie Ferguson's hand. His hair was barely streaked with gray, and he was still slimmer than many men his age. Admiring the lean, fit Mattie, he marveled that her short, dark hair was only spotted with few signs of aging.

It was the last night of their week-long honeymoon. Mattie strolled the beach, saying, "I can't believe we're here. This place is so nice!"

Charlie responded, "As far as I'm concerned, you made it nice for me."

Mattie squeezed Charlie's hand and smiled. "Do you figure that's Canada over there?" she asked, pointing at a distant light.

"I doubt it," Charlie answered. "Surely, we can't see that far."

Mattie speculated, "That must be a boat out there. It keeps moving around."

"Maybe so," Charlie agreed.

As soon as Charlie spoke, the object rushed toward them.

"That's no boat!" Charlie shouted, nearly jerking Mattie's arm out of the socket as he dove for cover.

A silver light covered the shore as Mattie shrieked, "What is that thing?"

Charlie and Mattie hid behind a green rowboat and watched the craft zoom along the beach before heading toward deeper water and disappearing into the lake.

As quickly as it entered the lake, the glowing object rose from the water and headed toward Charlie and Mattie.

Mattie gasped, "Oh, no!" and burrowed into the sand.

As the craft sailed overhead, Charlie said, "Keep your head down."

No sooner had Charlie spoken than the object crashed into the trees.

Charlie peered from behind the boat before he got to his knees. "I guess the danger's over," he said.

"I hope so," Mattie replied. Looking at the burning debris, she said, "Do you think we ought to go over there and see if anyone is alive?"

"It won't be anyone," Charlie answered. "Maybe anything."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

Charlie rose, saying, "It means that's no plane I've ever seen!"

Mattie pushed on the boat and rose, asking, "What was it, then?"

"Do I look like a scientist?" Charlie asked.

Mattie slowly shook her head as she and Charlie watched a hermit-looking man on horseback survey the scene before a police car went by.

"Looks like there are enough people to keep things under control here," Charlie commented.

"What do you think they'll find?" Mattie asked.

Charlie answered, "I'm not sure I want to know. Let's head back to the room."

Although they were supposed to head back to Wooster the next day, Charlie and Mattie visited the scene where the glowing craft had crashed the previous night. The National Guard had picked up debris not long after dawn, but pieces were still hidden by clumps of burned grass and larger pieces under tree stumps. By the time Charlie and Mattie showed up, locals started inspecting the site as the National Guard prepared to leave.

Charlie approached the area and watched the troops drive away until she and Mattie became the target of a way-too-friendly observer. The skinny bystander was Harley Masters, a fixture around town that most people tried to avoid. Since government forces were in the neighborhood, Harley decided it would be a good day to carry his shotgun. His teeth were left in another era, and the few that remained caused Mattie to wince as he approached the pair.

"Some sight, huh?" Harley said as he drew nearer.

Mattie stiffened when Charlie replied, "We were here last night to see the big tadoo."

"Ya don't say?" Harley mused. "I heard it was one of those zeppelin things like the huns used in the war."

Charlie shook his head, replying, "It wasn't like any zeppelin I've ever seen. That thing must have been going a thousand miles an hour!"

Exposing his mushy gums, Harley asked, "Didja see it crash?"

"Oh, yeah," Charlie affirmed. "I thought it would take our heads off before we ducked down."

"Hmm," Harley mused before letting the information process. "You folks from around here?"

"We're on our honeymoon," Charlie answered.

"How nice," the codger replied with a grin that made Mattie almost sick. "Where y'all from?"

Mattie looked at Charlie and said, "We're from Wooster, Ohio, and heading back later today."

"That's a pretty fair piece," Harley said. "Waddya do down there?"

Surveying the toppled trees, Charlie answered, "I guess I'm gonna be opening a good dry store pretty soon."

"You guess?"

Not wanting to get into a long story, Charlie replied, "I used to have the store but had to close up for a while. Now I'm getting it back up and running."

"Yep, yep, yep," the geezer said. "Every man's gotta do something."

"What is it you do?" Charlie asked as the trio began walking in the same direction.

Harley pointed to a distant hill, saying, "I got a farm just over that rise yonder. Saw the glow last night, and me and Tic came out this morning right after the sun came up."

"Tic?" Charlie questioned.

"Yep, he's my favorite coon hound—or was."

Mattie was looking at the ground but looked at Harley.

The old man shook his head and sighed. "Yeah. We came out here right after dawn. Ol' Tic found a piece off that flying machine and started chewing on it before he let out a yelp likely to wake the dead." After another heavy sigh, Harley continued in a softer tone. "Anyways, I thought maybe he burnt his tongue, so we headed over to the lake to get a drink of water. 'Bout halfway there, he started barkin', ran a couple circles before going stiff and falling over dead right then and there."

Mattie tried to console Harley, saying, "That's some story."

Changing the subject, Charlie said, "Looks like the National Guard beat us to the punch. They got all the good stuff."

"Not so fast!" Mattie said, pointing at a shiny object half-buried in the sandy soil.

"Looks like those soldier boys missed something," Harley commented as the trio rushed toward a metallic cylinder. Harley jerked his shotgun to the ready and warned, "Can't be too careful."

The round object was slightly larger than a can of beans, with no discernible seals or closures.

Charlie and Mattie knelt beside the metal tube as Harley watched for interlopers.

"Careful," Harley warned. "Don't pull a Tic on me."

Charlie held his hand inches above the cylinder. "Feels cool to me."

Mattie surveyed the area and said, "Whatever it is, I don't see any others around."

Charlie grabbed a stick and moved all the dirt hiding the object.

With his shotgun at the ready, Harley glanced at Charlie and Mattie. "Any idea what we got?"

Charlie pounded the cylinder against the palm of his hand. "What do you think?" he asked as he tossed the metal object to Harley.

Catching the cylinder with his left hand, Harley replied, "Why, it's no heavier than a cigarette."

Charlie declared, "Looks like we have a souvenir after all."

"And a safe one at that," Mattie added.

Harley pointed his shotgun at the ground and said, "Let's look for some more!"

As she grabbed Charlie's hand, Mattie said, "We have to get packed to go home."

"Huh?" Charlie stammered. "I thought..."

Leading Charlie by the hand as she headed to their room, Mattie explained, "We have to get moving. It's a long trip back to Wooster."

Harley waved his hand, saying, "That it is."