

## Chapter 7

### A Day of Beauty and the Beast

That morning early in September, nineteen and forty-seven, the sky seemed unusually blue. An autumn sky, even though the morning's warm air signaled that summer still had a few weeks before its run would end. Here and there a maple tree wore a touch of gold. The downtown stores got ready to close at noon, customary on Wednesdays. At Kettle High School we neared the end of fourth period and began to close our books to go to lunch. Most everybody, teachers and students alike, had something to say about the football game coming up on Friday night, the Kettle Tops against Tipple High's Hornets. I walked Beverly to the cafeteria. Just an ordinary day in Kettle – until noon.

Shortly before noon a long black four-door Lincoln passed down Main Street and parked in front of Bertha's Place. Whit Saunders, later quoted in the *Kettle News Leader*, gave an eyewitness account of what happened. "I was sitting at the counter of the restaurant and got a surprise when I turned to look out the front window. It's not often we see a Lincoln parked on Main Street in Kettle. Two men and two women got out and walked into the Bertha's Place. They seated themselves at the front table and acted real comfortable, not at all like they were in a strange place, which they were. One of the women laughed as she told the others a story. Her laugh sounded familiar. Her face and blonde hair reminded me of somebody – I could have sworn I knew her. Bein' a friendly sort, I walked over and said, 'Excuse me maam, don't I know you from somewhere?' She looked at me and smiled. 'It's possible,' she said. 'Maybe you do.' She stood up and stuck out her right hand, 'I'm Ginger Rogers.' I did a double take and shook her hand. I felt dumbstruck and stood there shaking her hand with my mouth hanging open. She must

have figured me for an a-number-one-country rube. Imagine that, Whit Saunders shaking the hand of Ginger Rogers. I finally blurted out, 'Pleased to meet you, Miss Rogers, welcome to Kettle, to Bertha's Place,' then walked back to the counter and set down.

"She looked exactly like she does in the movies, except she wore a blouse and slacks – not one of them flowing gowns she wears when she dances with Fred Astaire." Further on in the article Whit added, "Bertha heard Miss Rogers introduce herself to me and got all excited. Without them even orderin' anything, she carried cups of coffee to Miss Rogers her friends. Bertha ended up with more coffee in the saucers than in the cups."

Right away Bertha got on the phone to her sister, who called two cousins who then called friends. When we walked into American history class right after lunch William White Wallace ran up to me and yelled, even though he stood no more than two feet from me, "Freddy, Ginger Rogers is at Bertha's Place!" He put his hands on my shoulders, poked his face right up next to mine and added in a voice turned serious, like he wanted to warn me of an outbreak of chicken pox, "She's there, at this very moment."

Ginger Rogers having lunch in our town – I couldn't believe it! I imagined her putting food in her beautiful mouth, chewing and swallowing and beaming looks around Bertha's Place, while the rest of us around town just went on about our business. I wished I could sit at the counter and gaze across the room at Ginger Rogers. Who knows, maybe she'd gaze back at me, then we'd stand and walk towards each other. Music from the juke-box would begin to play "The Continental." Ginger would extend her arms, I'd stand, place my arms around her, and we'd dance.

After school that day William White and I went to Bertha's Place. Whit Saunders sat at the counter. Ginger Rogers had seen him in his customary work clothes, his tall leather boots with his pants tucked into them, his red and black flannel shirt, and his wide-brimmed hat which he wore both outdoors and in. He pushed his hat back on his head and told William White and me that during the ninety-three minutes the "Ginger Rogers party," he called them, had lunch at the center table in the restaurant, the sidewalk in front of the restaurant filled with folks from Kettle. He paused and took a deep breath, and then gave the kind of sigh a parent gives when describing something silly a child has done. "Some of them pressed their noses to the plate glass window to watch her eat." Whit paused again, then said, "I walked outside and asked 'em, 'What're you people doing? Can't you see our guests just want a quiet lunch? Now please step back and give 'em some privacy.' When I walked back to my seat, Miss Rogers smiled at me. Imagine that, Ginger Rogers smiling at me."

Whit frowned and looked down. Then he looked at William White and me and in an exasperated voice said, "But wouldn't you know, when Miss Rogers and her friends walked out the front door, folks was maybe three or four deep along the sidewalk. They opened a path for her and her party to get to their car. Then they began to applaud. One fellow give a big whistle." Whit smiled, "And here's the good part. Miss Rogers, ever a lady, looked at them, smiled, and gave a little wave. The folks with her didn't seem too happy. They hustled her into the back seat of the car and drove off at a pretty fast clip. I wasn't sure what to make of Miss Rogers' friends, but I could see she was in touch with people like us. Maybe that's what makes her a star, a real star. In touch with common folks, understands us."

Bertha pointed out Ginger Rogers' chair to William White and me. We took turns sitting in it, on the very spot where she sat when she had lunch. After he sat in the chair William White stood up and said, "Hey, Freddy, watch. This is me and Ginger Rogers." Then he turned his back to us, wrapped his long arms around himself in a hug so we could see his hands on his back, turned his head sidewise, shut his eyes and puckered up his lips like he was kissing somebody. He whispered, loud enough for me and Whit and Bertha to hear, "I love you too, Ginger. Hold me." Whit and Bertha rolled their eyes.

Ginger Rogers holding William White? He'd probably pass out from the thrill of it. When I thought about her holding me I could feel my whole body tingle, though I didn't think I'd pass out.

You'd think an event like Ginger Rogers coming to Kettle would be enough excitement in one day to put Kettle on a map of the world. But one more event had yet to happen in a day we'd remember for years to come.

The second event began about eight-thirty in the evening, not long after sunset. The western sky had orange and pink hues that faded to a robin's egg blue overhead and then to a darker blue in the east. In the dusk of that Wednesday evening, out at Pappy Roosevelt's hog farm, Pappy Roosevelt's son, George Boy, and Junior Don Kincaid, both seniors on the Kettle High football team, passed a football in the yard behind the Roosevelts' old white farm house. A feature story in the *Kettle News Leader* the following week that reported the events of that night quoted George Boy, "Junior Don had just thrown a high pass towards me. I looked up to catch it when that strange thing appeared in the sky. I yelled, 'Look, Junior Don,' and pointed at a bright saucer-shaped red and yellow something in the sky just above the hills. It moved northeast to southwest,

real steady, and appeared to come to rest just on the other side of Broke Hill. Daddy had stretched out on the back porch glider and I yelled to him, 'Pappy Roosevelt, a flyin' saucer's landed on the other side of Broke Hill!'

"He jumped up and yelled through the kitchen door, 'Momma, call Chief Tackett. Tell him we got a flyin' saucer out here. Hit the ground on the far side of Broke Hill.' Daddy, who thinks way ahead of most folks, said, 'Momma, keep your eyes on the hogs, they may be in on this. Take a shotgun down to the hog pen and guard 'em.'"

Then Junior Don, Pappy Roosevelt, and George Boy ran across the field towards Broke Hill. It's called Broke Hill because of a ridgeline with a steep cliff and ravine right at the center of its crest.

At the time of all the excitement out at Pappy Roosevelt's hog farm, William White and I, along with five or six fellows, sat on the front steps of the Bank of Kettle. Early evening had to be my favorite time of day in Kettle. In warm weather, homework and chores done, boys from school and men from around town gathered on the Bank of Kettle's wide front steps to watch traffic on Main Street pass by and talk about whatever happened around Kettle that day. That evening we talked about Ginger Rogers's visit. Wink Winkler, wearing a khaki shirt and trousers rather than his blue gabardine "make a sale" suit, described her lunch order. His large eyes and long face took on a serious look as he said, "I got the whole story from a neighbor who heard it from Whit Saunders, a eye-witness." He bit off a piece of plug tobacco, chewed, and continued, "Ginger ordered a BLT with mayonnaise and a small tossed salad, French dressing. And iced tea. Bertha asked her, 'Do you want sweet tea or regular?' Well, Ginger looked at her and said, 'Sweet tea? I've never had sweet tea. I'll try that.' Then Bertha said, 'Honey, you won't

be sorry. It's real good." Wink looked at us with his mouth half open for a few seconds – I could see the wad of tobacco lying on his tongue – and then said, "Can you imagine that? 'Honey', she called Ginger Rogers. 'Honey, you won't be sorry. It's real good.' That's what Bertha said to Ginger Rogers. Now ain't that something?" Then he smiled and punctuated his remarks with his customary big wink.

Across the street the large silver outdoor telephone bell on the wall of the Police Station rang. Chief Tackett, who had been sitting on the top step listening to Wink's story, walked across the street. He hung up the phone and yelled across the street to us, "Boys, we got us a flyin' saucer. Hit's on the ground out at Pappy Roosevelt's place. Come down just over Broke Hill." Then he hightailed it towards his blue Oldsmobile. He revved the engine and tore down Main Street, siren screaming and red lights flashing.

Wink looked at William White and me and said, "Come on, boys, let's go," then ran towards his red nineteen and forty Ford pickup truck. William White and I ran to the truck and jumped into the front seat. Wink gunned the engine and we took off for Pappy Roosevelt's place.

Wink's old truck bounced over the hog gate that Pappy Roosevelt had put at the entrance to the farm. Most farmers called it a cattle gate, a little bridge made of pipes laid sidewise with enough space between them that the hoof of a steer or heifer would slip off the surface of the round pipes and into the crevices. Pappy Roosevelt built his gate sized for hogs' feet.

Chief Tackett had parked his Olds by the barn, left the driver's door wide open and the red lights on top the car flashing. Wink pulled his truck in behind the chief's car.

The chief stood just beyond his car looking towards Mrs. Roosevelt, standing with a shotgun near the large hog pen beyond the far side of the barn.

Chief Tackett yelled to her, “Whar’d they go?”

“Broke Hill.”

The chief looked at Wink then at William White and me. He said with excitement in his voice, “I’m goin’ in after ’em. If you boys want to come along, let’s go.”

We ran across the field towards the woods at the base of Broke Hill. When we reached the edge of the woods we heard voices and a thrashing of branches. Pappy Roosevelt, George Boy and Junior Don Kincaid came running out of the woods towards us.

Pappy Roosevelt took off his straw hat, wiped his brow and his bald head with a red bandanna. “Boys, they’s somethin’ in there. And whoever or whatever it is ain’t here on a social call. I figgered it was goin’ to attack us, Chief. Didn’t give it a chance. We ducked and run. Right now, at this very minute, Kettle West Virginia may be under attack. I say let’s arm ourselves and go in there shootin’.”

“Now Pappy Roosevelt, I recognize it’s your farm and this thing, whatever it is, is trespassin’ on your land. But I’m the law, and I’m in charge. I’m also armed.” Chief Tackett said in a calm voice.

“So’s Momma,” Pappy Roosevelt replied.

“I know that. I mean if anybody’s goin’ to start shootin’, it’ll be me. At least at first.”

William White said, “George Boy, what’s going on? What did you see?”

“Yeah,” Wink said, “tell us.”

George Boy told his story about passing football and seeing a red and yellow object pass west to east in the sky. His eyes beamed and his cheeks got red. "The thing was near as bright as a full moon in October, but not round like the moon. More oval-shaped. And it had other colors in it, not just yellow. Red and blue. Went down on the other side of Broke Hill." He paused and took a deep breath. "Me and Junior Don and Pappy Roosevelt run into the woods, up Broke Hill then through the center ravine. We headed towards the clearin' on the far side of the hill. But before we got out of the woods we heard somethin'. Well, I should say first we smelt somethin'. A sour smell, acid-like. My Pappy put his arms out and stopped us and we sniffed."

Pappy Roosevelt extended his arms.

"Then we listened, heard somethin' movin' around, over towards the edge of the clearin'. Dusk was fadin' fast and it was near dark in them woods. We didn't have no flashlight. We moved forward real slow-like, and then I saw a huge creature of some kind. It skeert the beJesus out of me. I yelled, 'It's a monster. Let's go!' And here we are."

Chief Tackett sucked in his belly, raised himself to his full height, and spoke with authority, "If'n that creature shows its face again, things'll be different." He pulled his thirty-eight revolver out of its holster. "Ol' Roscoe will be right in the palm of my hand." He waved his pistol towards us and William White ducked.

"Easy, Chief," Wink said softly, then winked.

"Sorry boys. Sometimes law enforcement gets to me."

I thought to myself, "Might get us, too."

Junior Don picked up a rock and threw it deep into the woods. "Let's go. This time we'll be ready."

Chief Tackett asked us to gather close around him. “Now I want you boys to understand somethin’ before we start. I don’t know what we may be facin’ in there. They said in July one of these boogers crashed in Roswell, New Mexico. It was in the Huntington papers. One story said they was four creatures from outer space. Two was dead and two was taken prisoner by the Army. I don’t know what we got here. It may be Martians or God knows...and we don’t know what they’re up to. But it’s likely they’re up to no good. No good a-tall. So, before we start I want you to know you can bow out. Right now. No hard feelin’s. I’ll understand, and if need be I’ll go in alone. The truth is those of us who goes in there could be puttin’ our lives at risk. And we all have friends and families to think about. So, if’n you don’t want to come along, now’s the time to step aside.”

Nobody spoke or moved. I thought about stepping aside, but couldn’t do it. The chief’s offer made me feel like a man, somebody who could make a decision to help out his community. Less than an hour earlier I had jumped into Wink's truck without much thought – something exciting was going on and I didn't want to miss it. But now we faced what could be a threat to ourselves, maybe to our town. Our little group might be all that stood between the creatures in that flying saucer and Momma, Daddy, Beverly, and our way of life. I couldn’t turn away.

“All right, boys, here’s the plan. We’re goin’ in two abreast. Got that?” The chief looked around and we nodded.

William White said, “Count on me, Chief. Got it.”

“Me and George Boy and my Roscoe here will take the lead. Then Freddy and Willam White. Next is Pappy Roosevelt and Wink. Junior Don, you guard the rear.” He

looked up at six-foot three Junior Don. “This is important, Junior Don. I want you to walk backwards and prevent that thing from sneakin’ up behind us.”

“Chief, I can’t walk backwards in the woods. I’ll fall for sure. How about if I watch over my shoulder?”

The chief pondered Junior Don’s question for a moment. “OK. Watch real careful-like.”

Darkness had nearly replaced the dim light of dusk. Chief Tackett unclipped his flashlight from his belt, switched it on, and pointed it at the ground. We looked at each other in the reflected light.

“OK,” the chief said, “now there’s one more thing. Who’s got a white handkerchief?”

Everybody searched their pockets. Pappy Roosevelt and Junior Don pulled out red bandannas. Wink had a blue one. Junior Don held his up. “Will this work, Chief?”

“Junior Don, is that white?”

Junior Don, Pappy Roosevelt, and Wink looked at each other then stuffed their bandannas in their pockets.

William White held out a white handkerchief. “Here’s mine, Chief.” I remembered that William White always carried a hankie. His Momma insisted on it.

The chief took it. “Thanks, William White.” He handed it to Junior Don.

“Carry this in your right hand,” Chief Tackett told Junior Don. “It’s possible we’ll be attacked. And, God forbid, I, possibly along with others of you, may go down. If that happens, you wave the white handkerchief, Junior Don, the sign of surrender. If them creatures is halfway intelligent, if they have any sense of human decency, they’ll know

what a white flag means. Those of you still alive give yourselves up to the creatures. What they may do to you I don't know. They don't teach this kind of stuff in law enforcement courses. But you'll be alive, at least for a while. Maybe you'll live to tell the story of what happened out here tonight."

He looked around the group, then at Junior Don. "Got that, Junior Don?"

Junior Don's voice cracked when he said, "Yep, Chief, I got it." After a pause he asked, "Chief?"

"Yeah, Junior Don."

"Are we gonna die?"

"Junior Don, what I'm sayin' to you is known in law enforcement as a contingency plan." The chief spoke in the same tone of voice he used when, years ago, he visited our third-grade classroom. "It's what you are to do if, I repeat, *if*, somethin' bad happens. Like if the monster does me in. Me, Junior Don, not you."

"OK, Chief."

"Everybody understand?" the Chief asked.

We nodded and muttered that we understood. Suddenly I wondered about being on the other side of Broke Hill in the dark of night, maybe facing a bunch of Martians. I wondered what Beverly would say about my being here.

"All right, everybody, line up," the chief said. We took our places in the order the chief set up. The chief passed the beam of his flashlight across us and gave our group a once-over, like a sergeant inspecting his squad. He took his place at the front of our lineup, waved the pistol in his right hand in a wide overhead arc, and said, "Come on, boys, we're headin' in."

We followed the chief's beam of light into the dark woods and up the hill to the ravine. I had hiked on Broke Hill many times in the daylight, but never at night. Twice I tripped over tree limbs. Up ahead I saw the chief's flashlight bobble then bounce along the ground when he tripped and fell. After he picked up himself and the flashlight, the beam dimmed. We had to wait for him to find his gun.

William White whispered, "Freddy, Roscoe's lost." I told him to shush.

When we came to the far edge of the ravine the chief spoke in a raspy whisper, "Everybody stop." He turned off his flashlight.

The woods around us filled with silence. Then in the distance I heard the soft flute-like call of a whip-poor-will.

George Boy said, "Take a deep breath."

Right away I smelled an odd, acid-like smell. Not a bad smell, just an odd one. Out of place.

Pappy Roosevelt said, "That's what we smelt a while ago. Just before we seen the monster. That thing is near, boys."

Where would I be in the morning – lying wounded or dead in these woods? Looking at Earth through the porthole of a flying saucer? When I left home after dinner, I hadn't said goodbye to Momma and Daddy.

The chief switched on his flashlight and whispered, "All right, slow and steady now. When we git to the far edge of the woods we'll stop before goin' into the open field. Out there we'll be exposed, and that may be where the saucer ship landed. For all we know them creatures may be able to see in the dark. Could be watchin' us right now,

though I don't think even they can see through trees. Not unless they have X-ray vision. Come to think of it..."

At a slow pace we moved forward. Near the edge of the woods we heard a shuffling noise in the branches of the trees ahead of us. "Stop," the chief ordered. He directed the beam of flashlight into the woods surrounding us.

William White grabbed my arm. "Holy cow!"

Up in the branches of a maple tree, at the other end of the chief's dim and now trembling beam of light a face looked down at us, the face of a creature that had to be at least ten feet tall. He had large round eyes and a long gray face. Something resembling a wide nose spread down the middle of his face. The tree branches partially hid his massive body.

With a quiver in his voice the chief yelled, "Who's there? Who are you?"

No answer, though the monster blinked his eyes.

"What do you want?"

Blink.

William White pulled on the chief's shirtsleeve and said, "Chief, maybe they don't speak English on Mars. Maybe the thing communicates by blinking. I know Morse code. Put the light on my face. I'll blink your words to him."

Chief Tackett shined the beam of the light on William White's face. "Tell him we come in peace, William White."

William White looked towards the creature and began long and short Morse code blinks of his eyes. The chief spoke loud and slow, the way somebody might talk to old person who is half deaf, "We – come – in – peace."

Pappy Roosevelt said, “Boys, blink at him about the hogs. Ask him, are the hogs in cahoots with him and his buddies?”

William White began to blink and the chief started to speak when in the branches of the maple a great stirring began.

The chief made a quick turn and swung his beam of light from William White’s face towards the monster. But he turned so fast the flashlight slipped out of his hand. At that moment George Boy burst into a run into the darkness towards the creature, yelling, “Come on, big man, just me and you!”

“Look out!” Pappy Roosevelt boomed.

The thing flew right at us.

In a heartbeat the chief commanded, “Hit the ground.” Lying on his stomach, Chief Tackett got off two shots at the approaching creature. Then as the monster flew beyond us into the dark woods, the chief rotated his body and fired four more times.

We lay still for maybe a full minute. I raised my head up and looked behind us, in the direction where the monster had flown. In the darkness I could only see Junior Don’s long arm up in the air waving the white handkerchief back and forth.

“Stay down,” the chief yelled. “There may be another attack. That thing flies like Superman.”

Lying beside me, William White whispered, “Where’s our Kryptonite when we need it?”

The chief stood and passed the weak beam of his flashlight around our group. “Everybody still here? Everybody OK?”

We stood up and brushed the leaves off our clothes. I asked, “Where’s George Boy?”

Then we saw George Boy lying face down, not moving. We ran to him. Pappy Roosevelt knelt, turned him over and lifted George Boy’s shoulders. He held his son’s head and patted his cheeks lightly. “George Boy, do you hear me?”

George Boy’s eye’s flickered, and then opened wide. “What happened?”

“Easy, son. Just take it easy.” Pappy Roosevelt motioned towards Chief Tackett, then pointed at George Boy’s forehead. “Shine your light here, Chief.” George Boy had a knot in the center of his forehead.

“Looks like he clipped you a good ’un, George Boy,” Pappy Roosevelt said.

The chief turned his light towards Junior Don. “Junior Don, step over here and hold George Boy’s feet up. ’Bout a foot off the ground. Lie still, George Boy. Pappy Roosevelt, lower his shoulders to the ground. Son, this’ll git the blood back up towards your head.”

Junior Don started to lift George Boy’s brogans, but George Boy kicked his feet and stood up. “Gimme one more shot at that dang monster.” He cupped his hands around his mouth and yelled into the woods, “Hey, if’n you’re out there, come on back. Let’s do it again. Just me and you.”

The chief put his hand on George Boy’s arm and in a calm voice said, “OK, George Boy, hold on. Let’s take a look around. There may be others of ’em. And somewhere out there,” he pointed his flashlight towards the edge of the woods and the field beyond, “they may be a flyin’ saucer. A space ship, parked and waitin’. Waitin’ for

what I don't know. Maybe they're a-takin' specimens back to Mars, or where ever.

Human specimens.”

“Chief, do you think it might be somethin' else?” Pappy Roosevelt had a slight quiver in his voice. He spoke slowly and it seemed hard for him to get each word out. “Maybe they's a-bringin' somethin' or somebody *to* us.” His voice cracked. “Maybe little Opal's spirit is on board.”

Nobody spoke. George Boy wiped his eyes and put his hand on Pappy Roosevelt's shoulder. Little Opal's spirit on board the flying saucer? If she appeared to us, would she look like the toddler who died? Or would she look older? She'd now be nearly twenty. Would Pappy Roosevelt recognize her?

Chief Tackett turned to William White, handed him the flashlight, and broke the silence. “William White, point the light at my belt.” The chief removed cartridges from his gun belt and reloaded his pistol. “OK boys, let's walk over to the field. George Boy, I'm a-givin' you a order. Whatever happens, you are not, repeat *not*, to charge that monster.”

George Boy was silent. When we started walking he turned towards Pappy Roosevelt and whispered, “He cain't stop me.”

It was only twenty yards or so to the edge of the woods. The night sky had no moon but bright stars. Out in the field we had enough light that at least we wouldn't trip and fall as we moved around. We stood under a large oak tree at the edge of the clearing and the chief flashed his beam across the field. Slowly, left to right. Then right to left. He did this a couple of times. In the weak beam of his light we didn't see anything out of the ordinary.

We walked about ten yards into the field. Pappy Roosevelt, on the right of the chief, yelled, "Chief, lookee here."

The Chief pointed his light at the ground in front of Pappy Roosevelt. "Dang, boys, looks like they done been here and gone."

There on the ground we saw weeds pushed down in the same direction, forming two long and parallel marks about a foot wide, maybe four feet apart, and about ten feet in length. "Skid marks," William White said. In between them lay a trail of large dark spots that resembled oil drippings, and at the end of the trail a small pool of oily liquid. Beyond the oily liquid a circular section of weeds had been burnt.

The Chief pointed his beam of light to the small burnt circle. "Well boys, it looks like we found their landing spot. Possibly their takeoff point as well, though for all we know they may be peekin' at us from just around the other side of the hill. Junior Don, give me William White's handkerchief. We'll put it here to mark this spot, then we won't have no trouble findin' it when we come back in daylight."

Junior Don handed the chief the handkerchief.

"Chief, my Mom keeps a count of my hankies. She'll kill me if I lose one."

"William White, this here is law enforcement. Tell your Mom to call me."

The chief cast his light around the area. "Boys, I don't think we're goin' to find anything else. There's nothin' more to be done out here. That thing, whatever it is, landed, launched a surprise attack on us, and has done took off. Hit and run, you might say."

Chief Tackett took off his cap and wiped his forehead with a blue bandanna.

"Let's head back to your place, Pappy Roosevelt." Then the chief's voice took on a most

serious tone. “Now boys, we’re goin’ to walk back through them woods. Hit’s dark in there and for all I know one or more of them creatures may be waitin’ for us, just like before. Then again, maybe not – possibly they got a taste of lead, I don’t know. We’ll go back through the woods lined up like before, except this time Junior Don won’t have his white handkerchief. So, listen carefully, I’m goin’ to give you a new contingency plan. Ready?”

We nodded.

“Here it is. I figure by now the creature probably knows I’m the law. So, if’n he’s still here, he’s likely to aim his attack at me. If and when that happens and I go down, I want you to take off runnin’, each of you goin’ in a different direction. Now there’s four directions, north, south, east, and west, and six of you.” The chief asked each of the four of us standing next to him say one of the directions and told us we should run in that direction. I got “south.” He assigned Wink northeast and Junior Don southwest.

Then the chief said, “That thing, no matter if he can fly, cain’t follow everybody all at once. At least one of you is likely to live. Go to Pappy Roosevelt’s place and call the sheriff. Tell him to call the National Guard. Have ’em bring tanks.”

Everyone looked at the chief and nodded. William White gave me a light tap on the shoulder. I did the same to him.

The chief continued, “For all we know, Pappy Roosevelt was right and the hogs is in on this thing. At this very moment them Martians may be over at Pappy Roosevelt’s place with the hogs doin’ God knows what to Mrs... Maybe them creatures and the hogs is going to reverse the tables on us and pack up human specimens for a slaughterhouse in space. Who knows? I don’t want to upset you, Pappy Roosevelt, and I pray I’m wrong,

but your wife may have gone down already. On the other hand, we ain't heard Mrs. Roosevelt firin' her shotgun, so let's assume things is OK."

"I'll kill them sons of bitches," Pappy Roosevelt said, slamming his right fist into his left hand.

"You'll have to git in line behind me," George Boy added.

"Everybody ready?" The chief looked around the group. "OK, let's move out."

We walked back through the woods in our column of twos following the chief's light, now flickering and ever dimmer. In the dark of the woods William White leaned towards me and made a ghost-like sound, "Whhooooo, whhooooo."

Chief Tackett stopped everybody, then walked back and put his light right in William White's face. "Son, there may be lives at stake here. It's possible Mrs. Ovieta Blankenship Roosevelt is already done in. This ain't funny."

"Sorry chief, Pappy Roosevelt."

After that nobody spoke. I walked behind the chief. A couple of times he pushed through low-hanging tree limbs and they came thrashing back into my face. I imagined Beverly walked along beside me, wondered what she'd be thinking about all this. I told her William White and George Boy had showed courage, so had Chief Tackett. She nodded. "Do you think we've been foolish to come into the woods?" She nodded again.

When we entered the field behind the barn Chief Tackett ran over to his car. He switched on the two-way radio and called the sheriff's office. Then the State Police. He talked fast and described what happened, and then added, "In my opinion we are under attack."

Pappy Roosevelt took off running towards the hog pens and we followed him. Before we got to the hog pens a shotgun blasted.

George Boy yelled, "Momma, you OK?"

"Yes, your Pappy startled me. I thought he was Martians."

Pappy Roosevelt told the Chief, "Hogs's a lot smarter'n most folks give 'em credit for. I figured they might a-worked out a plan to escape.

Chief Tackett nodded.

"Cain't say that I blame 'em. Even though some of 'em is show hogs and seems to take pride in their work, they all face the same end. I'd be lookin' for a ride outta here too."

Then everybody walked over to the back porch of the Roosevelt house. About the time Mrs. Roosevelt brought out glasses of cold sweet tea we heard sirens in the distance. Soon two cars pulled into the yard beside the house. One was a brown Chevy from the Sheriff's Department, and the other a blue Plymouth with "W.Va. State Police" painted on each front door. Deputy Sheriff Truitt Crabtree walked up to the porch. Most everybody knew Truitt, for he grew up in Kettle. He'd graduated from Kettle High about five years ago. A State Police officer joined Truitt on the porch.

"Evenin' boys," Truitt said. He looked good in his brown uniform, all starched and crisp. His wide shoulders, narrow waist, and height, just over six feet, gave Truitt a powerful look. Girls liked the way he combed his dark hair with a Marcel wave in the front. William White told me he heard that Truitt had worked on some important cases and built himself quite a reputation around the County Courthouse.

"Hey, Truitt," everybody said.

“Gentlemen,” the State Police officer said. “I’m Trooper Bill Persinger. What’s going on?”

Trooper Persinger had a short and muscular build, like a center on a football team, and his dark green uniform was all rumped. He looked to be about my Daddy’s age. His Smokey the Bear official State Police hat added some height to him but I whispered to William White that he’d need more than his hat to get in the big leagues of law enforcement with the likes Deputy Truitt Crabtree.

When Trooper Persinger looked towards William White and me, we lowered our heads. Trooper Persinger had stopped us one night when we drove his Daddy’s car too fast, just west of town on U.S. Highway 42. He gave us a good talking to, but no ticket.

Chief Tackett stepped forward, “Truitt, Trooper Persinger. I been the officer in charge here. But I’m really outta my jurisdiction. Still, we faced an emergency and somebody had to step in and take charge.”

Pappy Roosevelt interrupted, “The chief here’s a brave man. So’s my George Boy.”

Trooper Persinger said, “I’m sure you did the right thing, Chief Tackett. Why don’t you describe what happened.”

“Yeah, chief, tell us about it,” Truitt added.

The chief took the two men through the events in the woods and our discovery of the landing spot. Then he said, “George Boy, tell ’em what you first saw when you and Junior Don was passin’ football and you looked up and saw a red and yellow saucer-like object bright as a full moon comin’ west to east low in the sky appearing to come down

just beyond Broke Hill. And, yes, how you pointed and yelled for Junior Don to look up and he seen it too.”

“Well,” George Boy said, “it was like this,” then he went through what the chief had just said and in about the same words. William White looked at me and rolled his eyes. At the end, George Boy said, “Pappy Roosevelt told Momma to watch the hogs. Guard ‘em. It’s possible they was in on the whole thing. Plannin’ a escape.”

“That’s right,” Chief Tackett said. He snapped his fingers and added, “I forgot about them hogs. Still not sure about ‘em. This is one strange case.”

Deputy Crabtree nodded. Trooper Persinger pulled out a notepad and studied it.

A black two-door Mercury drove up alongside Pappy Roosevelt’s house and parked. James Garfield Worthington, editor of the *Kettle News Leader*, stepped out of the driver’s side. Nick Blasingame of the *Huntington Herald Dispatch* got out of the passenger side of the front seat. Both men wore white shirts and neckties pulled loose from their collars. James Garfield’s height and gray hair gave him a distinguished look. Mr. Blasingame, shorter than James Garfield, had short curly black hair. They walked over to the porch. Mr. Blasingame’s unfavorable article about The Great Kettle Riot of last summer came to mind.

After all the back and forth greetings, the chief asked James Garfield, “How’d you fellers come to know about this?”

“Well, I got a call from Truitt, Chief, and thought I’d better get out here,” James Garfield said. “Nick was already in town, covering the Ginger Rogers story. I figured he wouldn’t want to miss out on this, so I invited him along.”

Chief Tackett squinted his eyes and frowned at Nick Blasingame. “I hope you do a little better with this story than you done coverin’ that little incident last summer with them Bible salesmen.”

“I hope you do too, chief,” Nick Blasingame replied in a surly tone of voice.

Truitt spoke up. “Now, men, I’ll want to get statements from each of you. I heard what George Boy said, and I took a few notes. But it’s important to get personal accounts of what happened from each witness. I’ll start with you, chief, if it’s OK. Then let’s just follow the order you walked in in the woods. George Boy, then William White, Pappy Roosevelt, and so on. Chief, let’s me and you start by settin’ down over there in the porch glider.” After they sat down, Truitt took his notebook and pencil out of his shirt pocket and the chief began to talk. Later the chief said, “Truitt flipped that notebook’s cover open just the way Nelson Eddy done it in that movie about the Northwest Mounted Police.”

William White turned to me and commented, “The only difference is that Nelson Eddy didn’t drop his.”

Trooper Persinger said in a firm voice, “If it’s OK with you Deputy Crabtree, I’d like for these boys to lead me into the woods to where things happened. And maybe they could show me that spot in the field where the thing landed. You could take everybody else’s statements, and then get theirs when we come back.”

Truitt nodded.

Trooper Persinger turned towards William White and me. “Will you boys lead me to where it happened?”

I looked at William White and he looked at me. “I don’t know, Trooper Persinger. We been through a pretty scary time,” I said.

“Boys, no harm will come to you. Guarantee it. I’ll be armed.” His spoke in a voice low and firm.

William White didn’t look any too happy about going back into the woods. Maybe he didn’t want to be alone with Trooper Persinger. Me either. But I figured we could help the trooper, or we could sit here like knots on a log listening to Truit talk with everybody about what we already knew.

“William White, let’s help Trooper Persinger,” I said, emphasizing the word “help.” I added, “We’ll take an old feed sack with us. We can leave it in place of your handkerchief.”

After a few seconds William White said, “OK, I’ll go,” though he sounded uncertain.

“Trooper Persinger, Nick Blasingame and I would like to tag along, if it’s all right,” James Garfield said.

“No problem. Just stay behind us.”

I found an empty feed sack in the barn and we headed into the woods. “Just follow your path from before,” Trooper Persinger said.

Trooper Persinger carried a flashlight with a bright beam and he, William White, and I walked three abreast. He asked, “Can you boys tell me some more about what happened in the woods? What did the monster look like?” After we answered him, he asked us a couple of more times in different ways to describe the creature’s face. Then, “What about the nose?” he asked. “Tell me about his nose.”

I wondered why the trooper had such an interest in the monster's nose, and described it as best I could. Then William White took a turn at it. We'd described the monster's nose for what must have been the third time when Trooper Persinger asked, "Now what about the eyes? Tell me about his eyes."

Before we finished our description of the monster's eyes, William White got all excited and told the trooper how he figured the monster communicated by blinking. "I experienced it first-hand, Trooper Persinger. So did Chief Tackett. After the monster blinked at us, Chief Tackett put the light on my face and I blinked back at the monster in Morse code while Chief Tackett said, loud and slow, 'We – come – in – peace,' though we don't know for sure that the monster understood English or Morse code. But if he did, well, yes sir, you might say that me and the monster was face to face, communicating with one another. I'll never forget it. It's not every night you talk with a creature from outer space."

Trooper Persinger said, "Now that's a fact. Yes, sir, that's a fact."

James Garfield and Nick Blasingame had little penlights they shined on their notebooks. They wrote as we talked.

When we arrived at the tree where the monster had hidden, William White pointed up into the branches. "That's where he hid just before he attacked us."

Trooper Persinger handed William White his flashlight. "Shine the beam on the place where he was." William White placed the beam up in the tree. The Trooper asked, "Where was his face?" and William White rolled the light beam around branches about ten feet above the ground.

"Then he charged you? Came running at you?"

William White, his mouth moving like a car in high gear, told the trooper how the monster flew at us like Superman, and about George Boy's bravery in charging at the monster. "Over there, towards that rock. That's where the monster conked George Boy. Knocked him out."

Trooper Persinger flashed his light on the ground. William White poked me in the side and whispered, "He's looking for clues." He turned to James Garfield and Nick Blasingame. "Police work going on."

Then the trooper headed for the field beyond the woods. "Where are the tracks of the landing and take off?"

Right away we spotted William White's handkerchief. William White picked it up and tucked it into his hip pocket. He sounded relieved. "I'm glad to get this back. Momma's touchy about me losing hankies." I spread the feed sack on the ground.

Trooper Persinger put his light on the skid marks, and then pulled a small tape measure out of his pocket. He measured their length and width, then the separation between them. He made some notes in a small black notebook. He examined the oil drippings between the skid marks, and the small pool of oil at the end of the marks. He knelt down and put his finger in the oil and then sniffed it. Trooper Persinger pulled out his handkerchief and wiped it through the pool of oil, then folded the handkerchief and put it back in his pocket. He picked up some ashes from the burnt spot.

"Well, boys, I think that's about it. Let's head back."

Nick Blasingame spoke up. "What do you think about all this, Trooper Persinger? Is there evidence of a flying saucer? A monster?"

"We can talk later, fellows. There's a lot to think about."

When we got back to the back porch Truitt had just finished up with Wink. “Glad you’re back, boys. William White, it’s your turn.”

William White joined Truitt on the glider. Everybody else sat in the metal chairs spread around the porch. The chief pulled his chair up close to listen. So did James Garfield and Nick Blasingame. Mrs. Roosevelt refilled our glasses with ice-cold sweet tea. Trooper Persinger headed towards the barn.

Pappy Roosevelt watched him pass out of the yard and said in a matter-of-fact way, “I’ll betcha Trooper Persinger’s goin’ to get to the bottom of things with them hogs. If they had a escape plan, he’ll find it out.”

After Truitt finished making notes on the eyewitness testimony of William White and myself, he put his pencil behind his right ear and with a smooth move of his right hand flipped his notebook so the cover came over the top and closed.

James Garfield asked, “Well, Truitt, what do you think about all this?”

Nick Blasingame immediately followed with, “Do you confirm that there was a monster from outer space, Deputy Crabtree?”

Truitt slowly stood, stretched, and rose to his full height. He walked to the banister this side of the screen around the porch. He hitched up his trousers, then put one foot up on the banister and spoke softly, “Well, boys, there’s little doubt. Little doubt in my mind. Something strange went on, all right. Out there. In those woods and in that field. Tonight. You could call it otherworldly. Yes sir. Otherworldly. We have eyewitnesses. And there’s no question that a young man got conked on the head. Conked a good one. Whoever or whatever hit George Boy was not from around here.”

A couple of weeks earlier, Whit Saunders had said over at Bertha's Place. "Boys, there's two classes of people in the world. Class One is those that's from here. Class Two is those that's not from around here." He got a serious look on his face and said, "Watch out for Class Two." He grinned real big and added, "And some of Class One," then gave a big laugh.

Deputy Crabtree looked around the porch at us. "As an officer of the law I'm ready to render an opinion. Subject to review, you understand. By the sheriff. He always reviews our findings. But I don't think there'll be much question about this one."

Nick Blasingame spoke up, sounding a little exasperated. "Deputy Crabtree, it's getting late. What's your finding?"

"Boys, hear me out. Hear me out. This is from the point of view of the law. Not Deputy Sheriff Truitt Crabtree. The law sometimes moves slowly. In my view what we have here is a simple case of trespassing and assault. Trespassing and assault by person or persons unknown. Probably from outer space."

Pappy Roosevelt lit into a big grin. "Well I'll be... Imagine that, Momma, a creature from outer space. Right here on our farm."

Truitt continued. "It appears there's no harm done. No permanent harm I mean. Everybody had a scare thrown into them. George Boy's got a knot on his head. That'll go away. We have a case of simple trespassing and assault. And the offenders has fled the scene, fled into parts unknown."

Chief Tackett stood up and shook Truitt's hand. "Good work, Deputy Crabtree." He turned to James Garfield and Nick Blasingame. "One day this boy'll be widely known in law enforcement."

Pappy Roosevelt asked in a hesitant way, "Truitt, do you and the chief think them creatures is a comin' back tonight? I mean, do you think maybe they was lookin' for somethin'? Or maybe bringin' somethin' or somebody?"

There was a long silence. Pappy Roosevelt's words in the dark of the woods about little Opal rang though my thoughts. How had he learned to live with what had happened? Maybe he hadn't. Maybe I couldn't either.

The chief's voice brought us back to the present. "Pappy Roosevelt, nobody knows what might happen when you're dealin' with creatures from outer space. But my guess is them visitors found out what six slugs from a thirty-eight pistol can do. I don't think you'll be seein' any more of 'em."

Trooper Persinger stepped on to the porch. Nick Blasingame told him that Deputy Crabtree had concluded that a creature from outer space visited here tonight. He asked, "Do you concur with his finding?"

Trooper Persinger said he'd file a report in the morning. After the captain approved it, Mr. Blasingame could read it.

"Do you agree with Deputy Crabtree?" Nick Blasingame asked again.

"Read my report. Good night, men, Mrs. Roosevelt. Thanks for your cooperation."

"Well, boys, it's late," Pappy Roosevelt said. "George Boy has a goose egg on his forehead and a big game on Friday night. We got to get him rested and healed. Let's call it a night."

Wink looked at William White and me. "Come on, boys, the truck's a-loadin' up."

“I’ll lead the way back to town,” the chief announced. He got in his Olds and turned on the flashing red lights. Junior Don’s car followed Wink’s truck and our little caravan headed back to Kettle.

I asked, “Why do you think he has his red lights on, Wink?”

“Boys, this has been official business. Still is, till he turns those lights off.” Then he winked.

The next morning when I came downstairs to breakfast Daddy handed me the *Huntington Herald Dispatch*. He had folded it in half and circled a story in the lower portion of the front page. “A Saucer for Kettle?” Nick Blasingame’s name was beneath the title. I muttered “Uh oh.” The story had three long paragraphs of eyewitness descriptions of events out at Pappy Roosevelt’s hog farm, including George Boy’s sighting of the flying saucer, a monster purported to be ten feet tall and “... the attempt by Chief Tackett and William White Wallace to talk with the creature, who they believed communicated with eye blinks. Their message was transmitted by Mr. Wallace’s blinking at the creature in Morse code while Chief Tackett held the beam of a flashlight on Mr. Wallace’s face and slowly and loudly spoke the words ‘We – come – in – peace’.” The story went on to describe the attack on George Boy, and the chief’s emptying his revolver, and ended with the discovery of the skid marks, the oil droppings, and the burnt spot in the field.

The article then turned to the report on the incident written by Trooper Persinger. I did a sharp intake of breath. The story said, “Trooper Bill Persinger noted that the marks in the field were approximately the same dimensions as the rear tires on a tractor. The

spilled oil at the site is currently undergoing testing. Trooper Persinger stated in his report that early indications suggest it is well-used 30-grade motor oil.

“When this reporter asked Trooper Persinger about the monster itself, its height, large eyes, and massive nose, he said, ‘Anyone interested in following up on this incident might first check with an ornithologist. The face of a barn owl dimly seen through the leaves of tree branches at night could bear a strong resemblance to the description of the face of the alleged creature. And tree branches below the owl might resemble a large body.’ When asked about the blow to the head of George Boyd Roosevelt, Trooper Persinger answered, ‘If you tripped and hit your head on a rock you might incur about the same injury.’

“Commenting on the acid-like smell, deep in the woods, Trooper Persinger said, ‘I understand that Mr. Roosevelt’s farm produces many strange smells. The wind may do odd things with them.’”

I paused to catch my breath. I thought about Chief Tackett and William White. Pappy Roosevelt and George Boy. Wink Winkler, Junior Don, and Truitt Crabtree. And how they would feel when they read all this. Nick Blasingame’s article ended with these words. “But what about the sighting of the object in the sky? From Charleston and as far away as Baltimore, there were reports of what appeared to be a meteor in the sky about the time the object was seen above the Roosevelt farm. Was it a meteor? Or, did the town of Kettle get a saucer?”

I dropped the paper on the kitchen table and sat down. Beverly would read this, then she’d ask me about it. I put my elbows on the table. My head felt so heavy it took both hands to support it. I wanted to cry, but held back.

“It all seemed so real,” I said to Daddy. “I was proud of George Boy and Chief Tackett. Of everybody out there. Even Junior Don.”

Daddy sipped his coffee and his dark eyes took on a most serious look. “Freddy, the light of day is sometimes cold and harsh. But that doesn’t take away from what happened. Bravery is bravery. Out there in the dark of the woods you all believed you were in danger. George Boy and the chief had the courage to put themselves in harm’s way, between you and what they honestly thought was a monster. They and everybody else who was out there can take pride in that, no matter what is learned with hindsight.”

“I’m going to tell George Boy and the chief I’m proud of them.”

“I hope you do,” Daddy said. “And I’m proud of you.” He put his hand on my shoulder and gave me a couple of pats. Then I cried. I loved my Daddy.

Late that afternoon the weekly publication of the *Kettle News Leader* arrived in our town’s homes and businesses. James Garfield ran a major headline. “Flying Saucer Lands Near Kettle.” Then, right below it, just above the beginning of the story of the night’s events, a smaller headline, “George Boy Roosevelt attacked by monster. Injury believed not serious.”

Also on page one there was a second, smaller, story about Ginger Rogers’ lunch at Bertha’s Place, “Screen Star Visits Kettle.” Whit Saunders’s eyewitness description of the lunchtime events, including Miss Rogers’s order of a BLT, salad, and sweet tea, made up most of the story. The story ended with Miss Rogers’s wave to the crowd on the street as she left the restaurant, along with a comment “Kettle was privileged to play host to such a great star. Editor J.G. Worthington joins with Miss Rogers’s local fans in the fond hope that she will again join us for lunch. Maybe dinner too.”

I hoped Beverly had read the story, couldn't wait to tell her what happened out there on Broke Hill.

William White came running in the front door of our house right before we sat down to dinner. "Look at this, Freddy. Look at this." He waved a copy of the *Kettle News Leader* and pointed to the story about the Kettle monster. "There is a detailed description of my talking with the monster by blinking. And read this, how the chief unloaded six shots at the creature. Probably at least winged him, the story says."

Right after dinner William White and I went downtown. When we got to the front steps of the Bank of Kettle we could see that nearly everybody there had a copy of the *Kettle News Leader*.

Wink Winkler held up his *News Leader*. "Boys, fergit all about all that yeller journalism in the Huntington paper. James Garfield wrote the truth. Hit's right here, word for word. Listen to what the chief said." Wink read, "In over forty years of law enforcement, I'd never faced this kind of situation. There was no way of knowing what was out there. Or what that thing was going to do. I'll be frank, I was scared. I wondered if Kettle might be marked for destruction by forces far beyond our understanding. Far, far beyond. My job was to stop them.'" He looked around the group seated on the steps. Wink.

William White said, "Listen to this." He read aloud in a slow and prideful voice, "In the dark of night deep in the woods, with a single beam of light shining on his face, Kettle High School Senior William White Wallace," he paused and smiled, "William White Wallace faced the monster and courageously attempted to communicate with him using the apparent language of this visitor from another world, Morse code eye blinks.

‘We – come – in – peace,’ William White blinked as Chief Tackett spoke the words in a firm voice. William White’s gaze did not falter in the face of danger.”

Junior Don looked at William White and asked, “Wasn’t you skeered, William White?”

“Well, Junior Don, you were there. It had to be done. I knew I had to do it. At the time I felt there was a chance I might build the monster’s trust in us. If I was successful we might get a look inside that flying saucer. Maybe later teach him about our town and the American way of life.”

Across the street Chief Tackett parked his Olds beside the Police Station. He climbed out and walked over to our group. William White said, “Chief, listen to this. ‘The hulking creature, looming ten feet in height, suddenly became airborne and launched a frontal attack on the small group of brave Kettle men, led by Police Chief Arthur R. Tackett. Kettle High’s star halfback George Boy Roosevelt attempted to tackle the monster and was knocked unconscious by a blow to the head from the creature.’ Then, get this, ‘Chief Tackett faced the flight path of the oncoming monster, raised his revolver and fired, probably saving George Boy from the monster’s clutches. The chief dove to the ground, quickly rotated his body and continued to fire as the airborne creature passed over the group. The fired his pistol until the only sounds were the hollow thuds of the pistol’s hammer falling on empty chambers.’”

The chief’s face beamed. “That’s what I done, I reckon.”

“That’s right, Chief. By God, that’s what you done. You saved George Boy’s life. Probably our’n too,” Wink Winkler spoke with pride. He looked around. “You fellers shoulda seen him,” then he gave a big wink.

“Boys, I just done my duty. You’da done the same thing.” The chief sighed as he sat down on the top step. “Feels good to take a load off my feet. Today was quite a day. Ginger Rogers comes to Kettle in the mornin’ and a monster from outer space comes to Kettle in the evenin’. Quite a day. Yes sir, a day of beauty and the beast.”