

BECKY AND THE BIG HOT THING

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Chapter 1. Discovery.

“Read this Mom,” Becky said, dropping her book in her mother’s lap.

“Not now, Honey. I’m busy,” her mother replied. “Why don’t you go ask Dad?”

Becky picked up her book and went looking for her father. She had just gotten a new book for her birthday. Her mother had already read it for her, but she really wanted to hear it again. Becky found her father in the garage tinkering around under the hood of the car.

“Can you read this, Dad?” she asked, handing him her book.

“Not now, Honey. My hands are all dirty, and I’m very busy. Why don’t you go ask your sister Laura?”

Laura was busy playing cards with Becky’s other sister Jenny, so Becky went looking for her brother Michael.

“You need to read this Michael,” she said dropping her book in front of him.

“Becky! You dropped your book right on my new model,” Mike shouted. “Get that book out of here, and go see Mom.”

But Becky was tired of looking for someone to read to her. “You have to read it Michael, you just have to. Everybody else is too busy,” she said.

“I’m too busy too,” Michael replied. “Now if you don’t get out of here I’ll tell you something that’s so scary you’ll never stop crying.”

Becky batted her eyes, and tried her best to be sweet and charming. She bent over and looked straight into Michael’s eyes. “Please, Michael, please?” she said.

“Ok, Becky. Now I’m going to tell you something *really* scary,” Michael said in his most threatening voice.

Becky decided that this would be better than no story at all and sat down to listen.

“One night,” Michael began, “a Big Hot Thing landed in our yard.”

“What’s a Big Hot Thing, Michael?” Becky interrupted.

“It’s a big round thing with long skinny arms. Its alive, and its really really hot. If it touches you it will burn you up! Now be quiet and listen.”

“One night a Big Hot Thing landed in our yard. It was flying through the sky, and it saw the pond next to our house and thought ‘I’m thirsty. I think I’ll land in that yard and get a drink from that pond.’

“It landed in our yard right between the pond and the house, but it was so tired from flying it couldn’t walk down to the pond. It said, ‘I think I’ll just sit here and sleep for a while,’ and so it did. It slept on our lawn all night, and woke up early the next morning. When it woke up it looked at our pond and said, ‘I think I’ll drink up that whole pond.’ It flew over the pond and went down under the water. It drank and drank and drank, but there was too much water, so it said ‘I think I’ll fly out of here,’ and so it did.

“There was a big burned place in the lawn where it had slept. It said ‘I’m not thirsty any more, but boy am I hungry! I think I’ll look in that house for a little girl and gobble her right up.’ and so he flew up to the house and began looking in the windows.

“You know what night that was Becky?” Michael asked, making his voice sound really scary. “It was *last* night. And the Big Hot Thing is outside right now looking for *you*. It’s going to gobble you right up.”

Becky just laughed. “There’s no Big Hot Thing, Michael.”

“Yes there is, Becky. There he is now looking in the window!” Michael shouted.

Becky still didn’t believe it, but she ran to the window anyway and looked out. Of course there was nothing there. Still, the whole idea was a little scary, so she ran and jumped into her mother’s lap and cried, “Mommy, I don’t want the Big Hot Thing to gobble me up.”

“Michael, have you been scaring your sister again?” Becky’s mother shouted. “I told you not to tell her those silly stories.”

“There’s no Big Hot Thing, Honey,” she reassured Becky, “Now go and play, Mommy’s busy.”

Becky went off to her room, and pretty soon she forgot about the whole thing.

That night was very stormy, even for Florida. Every time Becky fell asleep, a loud crash of thunder would wake her up. After one particularly loud crash, the streetlight outside her window crackled and went out. She looked at the clock on her dresser, but it was also completely black. “Looks like the electricity went out again,” She thought. Finally everything got quiet, but Becky was still wide awake from all the noise. As she lay in bed looking out the window, she thought she saw a light flickering in the distance. At first she thought it might be the streetlight coming back on, but no, it was too far away for that. Then she thought it must be more lightning in the distance, but she never heard any thunder.

After a while the flickering light got brighter and finally became an orange glow. Becky could also hear a strange humming sound, like nothing she had ever heard. “That is really weird,” she thought. She looked out the door of her room and noticed that the light was much stronger in the hall. She jumped out of bed, and ran down the hall to Mom and Dad’s room. The light seemed to be coming through the windows in her parents’ room. Becky ran to the window and looked out.

And there it was, sitting on the lawn. A big orange glowing ball: The Big Hot Thing!

Becky was too terrified to move, or even to make a sound. As she watched, the big hot thing floated up into the air, and moved over toward the pond. As it hung over the surface, a long skinny arm came down and reached into the water. Whenever the arm touched the water, it sizzled and steamed. Then slowly the big hot thing went down, down into the water. The water sizzled and steamed as it closed over the top of the big ball. Finally there was nothing left but a dull glow under the water, and after that, nothing at all.

As the big hot thing disappeared, Becky started to scream. Then she turned and jumped in bed with her Mom. “Mom, Mom,” she yelled, “The big hot thing is outside looking for me. It’s hiding in the pond, and it’s going to come out and eat me.”

“Uhhhhhh,” said her mom.

“Wake up, wake up!” Becky yelled, “The big hot thing is going to eat me.”

“What ... ? Oh, its you Becky,” her mom said. “What’s the matter?”

“The big hot thing was right outside Mom! It went down under the pond, and tomorrow it’s going to come out and eat me!”

“Becky, don’t be silly, you just had a bad dream. Now go back to bed.”

“Mom, it wasn’t a dream, I swear!” Becky shouted. “It was right outside your window!”

By this time Dad was also wide awake. “What on earth is all the yelling about?” he groaned.

“It’s the big hot thing, Dad! It’s right outside the window.”

Picking his glasses up off the nightstand, Dad got up and stumbled over to the window. “There’s nothing out here, Honey,” he said.

Becky ran over to the window. “It was right there on the lawn,” she exclaimed, “and it was almost as big as our house. Then it flew into the pond and went down under the water.”

“Becky, the pond is only a few feet deep. Something as big as our house couldn’t go down under the water,” Dad objected.

Still Becky insisted that she had seen the big hot thing, and that it was down under the pond drinking up all the water. The more she insisted, the more Mom and Dad insisted that there was no such thing as the big hot thing. Finally her mom said, “Enough, Becky. Whatever you saw isn’t there now, and it certainly isn’t going to hurt you. Now go back to bed.”

Slowly, Becky went back to her room. She crawled into bed, but she was too excited to fall asleep. “I know that big hot thing is out there waiting for me,” she thought. “I’ll just have to figure out a plan to keep it from getting me.” She thought and thought, but couldn’t think of anything except hiding under the covers. She was so tired, that this seemed like a really good idea, so she pulled her covers up over her head and fell asleep.

Chapter 2. Engagement.

Becky awoke just as the first rays of sunlight were peeking in her window. At first she just lay there, enjoying the sunshine. Then suddenly she remembered what she had seen the night before. She jumped out of bed thinking, “I’ve got to hide from the big hot thing.”

Nobody else was up, so she went downstairs and looked out the window. There was a circle burned in the grass, right where she had seen the big hot thing. “Now I know I’m right!” she thought. She crouched down next to the old piano, and peeked around the corner of the window. There was a steady stream of bubbles in the pond, right where she had seen the big hot thing go down. “It’s still there,” she thought. As she watched, she could see something moving in the water, right near the edge. As she watched, a little man-like figure struggled up out of the water, and climbed up on the bank. The front of it’s face was all shiny like glass, and there was a long tube that went from its waist back down under the water. Becky gasped, and then she ran upstairs and hid in the hall closet.

“Becky, Becky, where are you?”

“Come out come out wherever you are!”

It was the voice of Becky’s sister Jenny. “Mom says it’s time for breakfast.”

Becky had fallen asleep in the hall closet. It was now broad daylight, and everyone else was up.

“What are you doing in there?” Jenny asked as she opened the closet door.

“I was hiding from the big hot thing. What do you think?” Becky snapped back.

“Well the big hot thing is gone, so come down and eat,” Jenny replied.

On their way downstairs, Becky asked, “Jenny, if there was a big hot thing hiding under the pond, and the big hot thing had a little monster with it, and the little monster came out of the pond to get you, what would you do?”

“I’d hit the monster with a stick,” Jenny replied.

“You can’t hit it with a *stick*. It’s a *monster*.”

“Well, I’ll tell you what,” said Jenny. “I wouldn’t use a stick either. I’d use Mom’s magic broom.”

“Magic broom? Mom doesn’t have a magic broom,” Becky objected.

“Oh yeah, come with me,” Jenny exclaimed.

They went into the kitchen, and Jenny dug through the broom closet. At the very back of the closet, Jenny found a big heavy broom with most of the bristles missing. There was a big chunk of metal that used to hold the bristles on, but was now mostly just decoration. “This is Mom’s magic broom,” Jenny said. “I’d hit the monster with this. Now, come and eat.”

After breakfast Becky got Mom’s magic broom out of the closet, and went outside to look for the monster. She crouched down by the corner of the house and waited. Before long, she saw something move in the water. Just as before a little man-like figure, a little shorter than Becky, came struggling up out of the water. The monster seemed to have trouble getting out of the water, but once it got past the mud by the side of the pond, it seemed to do much better. It walked slowly up to the side of the house, and began peering in the window. As before, a long cord ran from its waist back under the water. Becky gathered up her courage. She sneaked up behind the monster and gave it a terrific whack on the head with Mom’s magic broom. The monster stumbled, and fell backwards. It landed on its back with its shiny face looking up. Becky gave it another terrific whack, right in the face.

Becky was surprised to see that the monster’s face was now cracked, and making a low squealing sound. The monster began waving its arms and legs. Suddenly, the cord at the monster’s waist grew tight, and it began moving slowly back towards pond. Becky gave the monster a few more whacks before it disappeared under the water.

“Becky, what are you doing out here?”

It was Jenny again.

“Mom’s magic broom was great,” exclaimed Becky. “I got that monster really good.”

“That’s fine Becky, now put the broom back before Mom catches you.”

Chapter 3. Trickery.

Later that night, after dinner, Becky told Mike about her adventure with the little monster. “That big hot thing isn’t going to get *me*,” she cried. “I got his little monster, and now he’ll go away and leave me alone.”

“But Becky, you forgot!” Mike replied. “The big hot thing doesn’t have just one little monster, he has hundreds of them. And they’ll keep coming and coming and coming ...”

“Michael!” Becky screamed. She gave Mike a whack, and ran off. Mike gave chase, and soon, both of them got sent to bed.

Becky laid awake until Mom and Dad went to bed. As soon as she heard Dad start snoring, she sneaked into their room and looked out the window. There were still bubbles coming up out of the pond where the big hot thing had gone down. There was no sign of the little monster. But wait! What was that strange light coming out of the culvert? Yes, there it was again! And steam was coming out too. There must be something down there! The light faded and disappeared. Becky waited for a long time but it never came back. Eventually she fell asleep with her head on the window sill.

“Uhh ...” Becky awoke with a start. She had slept by the window all night. Mom and Dad were still sleeping soundly. She got up to sneak back to her room, but as she did something outside the window caught her eye. There was something like a small tank sitting next to the pond. There was a thing like a cannon sticking out of it. As she watched, the cannon turned to the right and to the left. The tracks began to turn and the tank moved slowly away from the water. As soon as the little tank began to move, Becky’s dog Sadie started barking furiously.

“I know what to do,” Becky thought.

She ran downstairs and opened the front door. Sadie ran out, and was after the tank in a flash. When Sadie appeared, the tank put on a burst of speed and began dodging to the right and to the left. When it couldn’t outrun the dog, it scurried into the bushes in the front of the house. There it sat, with Sadie running back and forth barking.

“What on earth is wrong with that dog?” Dad yelled. “She’s going to wake up the entire neighborhood.”

Dad tried to get Sadie to come inside, but the dog refused to leave the bushes. She quit barking and laid down right where the tank had disappeared. Dad wanted to go out and drag her inside, but he was in his underwear, and it was already broad daylight.

Becky ran upstairs to Mike’s room. “Mike, Mike, you were right,” she said, out of breath. “The big hot thing sent a tank to get me. Sadie has it cornered in the bushes.”

“A tank wouldn’t be afraid of Sadie,” Mike objected sleepily. “It would just run over her.”

“But it’s a little tank, Mike. What can I do to get away from it?”

“Well,” Mike replied yawning, “My friend Sam tied his toy tank to the bumper of his dad’s car, and when his dad went to work the tank got dragged behind the car and got all wrecked. Maybe you should try that.”

“Come show me how, Mike” Becky pleaded. “I don’t know how to tie good knots like you.”

Normally Mike would have had better sense than to tie something to the bumper of Dad’s car, but he was still sleepy, and not thinking straight. Mostly, he just wanted to get Becky to stop bothering him.

He dug around in his closet, and came up with a 100-foot coil of rope.

“This is my best rope, Becky.” He said. “It better not get wrecked.”

They went down to the garage, and Mike tied one end to the back bumper of Dad’s car. He tied a slip-knot in the other end of the rope.

“Now take this , and slip it over the top of the tank, and leave me alone!” Mike said, heading back into the house.

Becky screwed up her courage and crept back behind the bushes. There was the little tank with its cannon pointed right at Sadie. She could hear Dad in the garage getting ready to go off to work. “I’d better hurry,” she thought.

“Will you look at that!” she heard her father say. “That stupid dog is still sitting in front of those bushes.” He took a leash out of the garage, hooked it to Sadie’s collar, and dragged her into the house. The cannon on the tank followed the movements of Dad and Sadie. Once the dog was safely in the house, Dad hopped into the car, and started to back down the driveway. Becky quickly slipped the noose over the end of the cannon and ran out of the bushes. Dad’s car was in the street, and was turning to head off to the corner. The rope was so long that there were still several coils of it lying loose on the ground. Becky saw the tank starting to come out of the bushes, and ran to get away from it. Just as she was rounding the corner of the house, Dad’s car got up to speed, and the rope snapped tight. The little tank jerked out of the bushes, across the front lawn, and went bouncing down the street. It hit an especially large bump and went bouncing high in the air. It smashed back down onto the street, cracked open, and burst into flames. With a loud “WHUMP” it disappeared in a ball of flames.

Dad’s car screeched to a halt. He got out and looked at the rope. By this time, the little tank had burned away to nothing, so there was nothing left to see but the rope. Dad untied it, coiled it up, and drove back to the house. He tossed the rope in the front door, and yelled up the stairs at Mike. “Mike, I’ve told you a thousand times, not to tie things to my car! If I wasn’t in such a hurry, you’d be in big trouble.” He returned to his car and drove off to work.

Chapter 4. Sweet Revenge.

Becky kept watch most of the morning, but saw little else of the big hot thing or its little monsters. “I know he’s still down there,” she thought. “I’ve got to figure out some way to get rid of him for good.” Remembering the light from the culvert, she went over to it and looked down inside. It was a little hard to see the bottom, but it looked like there was something shiny down there, maybe a tube or something. “I’ve got to find out what that is,” she thought.

She tried to get the lid off the culvert, but it was either too heavy, or it was stuck. “Maybe Laura can help me,” Becky thought. “She’s big and strong.” Laura was Becky’s oldest sister, and she was so big that she was in high school.

Becky came running in the house all out of breath. Laura was sitting in the family room watching TV. “Laura, you have to help me get the lid off the culvert,” she said.

“I don’t want to take the lid off the culvert,” Laura replied. “Besides, don’t you need a special tool for that?”

Becky stopped and thought for a while. She had seen some men working on the culverts in the road behind the house, and yes, they did have a special tool for taking them off. Deep in thought, she wandered out to the back yard. From the back yard she could hear sounds coming from the other side of the back wall. "Sounds like the men are still working back there," she thought. After a while the sounds died down. Curious, Becky climbed up on the back wall to see what was going on. The men had sat down under a tree for lunch. Becky looked down, and there, leaning against the wall was their special tool for opening culverts. It was long and thin, and taller than she was. She laid down on top of the wall, and reached down as far as she could. She was just able to grab the tool. She picked it up carefully so the men wouldn't hear her. Once she had the tool, she jumped down from the wall and ran back inside the house. "Laura, look!" she cried, "I got the special tool, now you have to help me get the culvert lid off."

Laura looked at the tool feeling confused. "Did Dad ask you to do this or something?" she asked. Becky made no reply, but just stood and waited. Finally, Laura sighed, took the tool, and went out to the culvert. After fiddling for a while, she managed to get the lid open.

"Ok, Becky, now you and your friends stay away from here until Dad gets home. I don't want you falling in there."

With that Laura dropped the tool and went back inside.

Becky lay down on her stomach, and crawled toward the open manhole. She peeked over the edge, and yes, there was definitely something shiny down there, something that didn't belong there. She ran inside, got a flashlight, and ran back and shined the flashlight on the shiny spot. She saw that it was a big shiny tube that someone had poked into the side of the culvert. Every now and then it would make a puffing sound, and a little cloud of steam would come out. "Wait a minute," she thought. "Nobody poked that into the side of the culvert. The big hot thing poked that through from the other side, from under the pond. I'll bet that's part of the big hot thing!"

Becky dropped the flashlight and went back inside the house looking for Mom. She found her upstairs sorting the laundry. "Mom," she said, "do we have any bombs?"

"Bombs! What kind of bombs? Like bomb-pops or something?"

"No, I mean like real bombs, that blow things up."

"No, Becky, bombs are dangerous! We wouldn't have anything like that!"

"Well, do you know how to make a bomb?" Becky asked.

"No, I don't know how to make a bomb! Why are you asking me this?"

"Well what about poison? Do we have any poison?"

"What do you need bombs and poison for?"

"Well, if we were really mad at somebody, or really scared of them, we could blow them up or poison them!"

"Becky, that's horrible! You can't go around blowing people up or poisoning them! If you're mad at somebody, you should talk to them and try to be friendly. Then after you get unmad, you could be friends."

"But what if you just can't be friends with someone?" Becky asked.

"You have to try very, very hard to be nice and become friends, Becky," Mom replied, "Remember that you can catch more flies with sugar than you can with vinegar."

Becky walked away deep in thought. “Maybe Mom’s right,” she thought. “Maybe if I give the big hot thing some sugar he’ll be friendly and be nice.”

She went down to the kitchen and got the new bag of sugar that Mom had bought at the grocery store the day before, and carried it out to the culvert. Looking down, she could see that there were steps down one side of the culvert. Struggling, she climbed down the steps with the bag of sugar. When she got to the bottom, she opened the bag and poured it into the bright shiny tube, and waited to see what would happen. The sugar seemed to have gotten all brown and gooey, and the puffing sound had stopped, but other than that, nothing much seemed to happen. “Well, I guess that didn’t work,” she thought, and climbed back out of the manhole.

To her horror, she saw that the little monster was back at the edge of the pond, and he was coming right for her. Becky picked up the manhole tool, and gave the monster a big whack. She started to hit him again, but he raised some sort of weapon and fired it at the manhole tool. The tool got all red and bendy in the middle. Becky dropped it and ran off down the street screaming.

Chapter 5. Weighty Problems.

As she passed Katie’s house, Becky decided to stop and hide in the bushes. She dove down and scurried behind the big bush by Katie’s front door. She peeked out and looked back at the pond, but couldn’t see anything of the little man. She was so terrified that she just sat there and shivered.

After about twenty minutes, Becky heard a voice. “Becky, why are you hiding in that bush?” It was Katie.

“Oh, Katie, it’s just awful!”

Becky told Katie all about the big hot thing, and the little monster, and everything else.

“You know what my dad said?” Katie asked, “He said if anybody scared me, he’d come down on them like a ton of bricks!”

“I wish my dad was here now,” Becky replied.

Becky and Katie decided to go around behind Katie’s house to get out of sight of the pond. Katie had a new sand bucket, and a bright shiny new wagon. The girls soon got so busy filling up the wagon and pulling it around the yard that they forgot all about the big hot thing. But when they stopped to rest, Becky started thinking about it again.

“You know, maybe we could drop a ton of bricks on it,” Becky said.

“On what?” asked Katie.

“On the big hot thing, silly! Mr. Arnold is building a wall behind his house, and he might have some bricks left.”

Katie thought that the big hot thing was just a game, but decided to play along anyway.

“How can we drop bricks on it if it’s underground?” she asked.

“It went down right near the edge. We can stand on the bank and drop bricks right on it,” Becky answered.

“But how can we get the bricks from Mr. Arnold’s house to the pond?” Katie asked. “I tried to carry a brick once, and it was really heavy. And Mr. Arnold lives all the way down at the end of the street.”

“I know,” Becky exclaimed, “We can use your new wagon.”

The girls set off down the street to Mr. Arnold’s house. Mr. Arnold’s wall was only partly finished, and there was a big pile of bricks waiting for the bricklayer. Becky immediately started filling the wagon with bricks.

“Wait Becky,” Katie objected, “I don’t think these are extra bricks, I think he might need these.”

“We’ll bring them back when we get done,” Becky said without looking up.

The girls piled the wagon high with bricks, and set off down the street. The wagon was so heavy they could hardly push it. It took them fifteen minutes of struggling just to get it to the sidewalk. Then they set off down the street at a snail’s pace.

“Beep, Beep!” they heard a loud voice behind them. “Clear the way! Coming through!”

It was Josh with his new go-cart.

“We can’t clear the way, we can barely move this thing,” Becky cried.

“Why don’t you help us?”

“I have an idea,” Josh said. “Why don’t I push your wagon with my go-cart?”

This seemed like a really good idea, so the girls stood aside and let Josh drive his go-cart up to the wagon. At first the wagon would barely move, but then it began to go faster and faster. By the time they got near the pond, it was going almost as fast as the girls could run.

“Help! I can’t stop this thing, Becky yelled. Katie was no help either. Josh stopped the go-cart and ran to help the girls. Josh wasn’t much more help than Katie, but between the three of them they were able to turn the wagon toward the water. The wagon rushed down the bank and off the edge into the water. The kids expected it to sink out of sight, but it flew through the air and landed with a big boom on something just below the surface. It stood there in the water shuddering. Then, whatever was holding it up started to groan and give way. There was a grinding, crunching sound as the wagon disappeared beneath the water.

The kids heard a low rumble, and the ground began to shake. The rumble got louder, and seemed to be coming from all around. Suddenly there was a loud Boom, and the wagon, bricks and all, flew up out of the water. Most of the bricks landed on Josh’s go-cart, smashing it to pieces, but one flew high in the air and crashed through Mr. Stanley’s front window. The shiny new wagon, now all bent and twisted, landed with a crash in the middle of the street. The kids scattered heading for home. Becky ran up to her room, jumped in bed, and hid under the covers.

Chapter 6. Great Wonders.

It was late in the day, and it seemed like the phone would never stop ringing. With every phone call Dad seemed to get angrier. What was going on? Becky pulled the covers up over her head and tried not to breathe. The stuff that happened that day was

just too scary to think about. She could hear Dad talking to Mom in a loud voice. “This is outrageous!” she heard him say. “Whatever possessed her to do all that? She’s really going to get punished for this.”

All the while, Mom was saying “Calm down, calm down.”

Finally, she heard Dad calling her.

“Becky, get down here right now!”

Slowly Becky came down stairs, and stood in front of Dad’s chair.

“Becky, did you take the broom out of the closet?”

“Yes,” Becky admitted hanging her head.

“The special antique broom that Mom was going to fix up for the craft fair?”

“Yes.”

“And did you get the end of it all burned, and lose the metal clamp off the end?”

“Yes.”

“And did you talk Mike into tying a rope to the bumper of my car?”

“Yes.”

“And did you steal a manhole tool from the city workers and then wreck it? And did you talk Laura into opening the culvert? And did you leave the culvert open, and leave the flashlight laying out beside it?”

“Yes, Yes.”

“And did you steal a bag of sugar and dump it down the culvert, and did you steal a bunch of bricks from Mr. Arnold, and throw one through Mr. Stanley’s window? And did you wreck Josh’s go-cart and Katie’s new wagon?”

“Yes Dad, Yes.”

“But why? Why did you do these things?”

By now, Dad was shouting at the top of his lungs.

“It was the big hot thing, Dad. I was trying to get away from the big hot thing.”

“You did all of this to get away from some stupid thing your brother made up?” Dad screamed, falling back in his chair.

Mom came over and patted Dad’s hand saying “Calm down, calm down.”

Dad just sat for a while, and then said slowly and quietly, “You did all this to get away from some stupid thing your brother made up?”

“The big hot thing isn’t made up, Dad, it’s real.”

Dad shook his head and giggled. He seemed really crazy. He mumbled, “My daughter, ... My daughter. ... She wrecks half the neighborhood, and then tells me that some stupid thing my son made up is real.”

“Come outside, Dad, I’ll show you.”

Dad threw up his hands, “Why not,” he cried. “Why not? Every other stupid thing has happened today, why not go outside and look for the big hot thing. Why not indeed?”

Becky took Dad’s hand and led him outside. By now it had gotten very dark. They walked over to the edge of the pond, and Becky pointed down into the dark water.

“It’s down there,” she said, “Hiding.”

“Hiding? Well, of course its hiding!” Dad yelled. “That’s why we can’t see anything ...”

Dad’s voice trailed off, as he looked down at the water. There *was* something there! An orange glint. Not too bright. There it was again. It was getting brighter.

The ground began to shake, just as it had that afternoon. Becky started to run, but Dad just stood at the edge of the pond staring. There it was! Coming up from its hiding place. The big orange ball that Becky had seen a few nights earlier.

As it rose from the pond, Becky could see that the big hot thing wasn't round any more. There was a big dent in one side, probably from the wagonload of bricks. It rose higher and higher, and finally floated up in the air. It emitted a high-pitched whine, and started to climb toward the stars. Up, up, up it went, until it was almost out of sight. Just as Becky lost sight of it, there was a flash. Not a tiny flash, not a medium flash, but a huge orange flash that filled half the sky. Burning streaks of light went everywhere.

And there by the side of the pond was Dad, staring up into the sky with his mouth wide open.

Chapter 7. Perspectives.

People had been talking about aliens for years, but late in the 20th century they finally arrived. No one noticed. Well, almost no one. Perhaps they were too busy, or just thinking about other things. But late in the 20th century one of the most important moments in human history came and went almost without notice. Almost.

We can stop talking about aliens. They have already been here. They have gone, and they will never return. Far out in space there is a beacon. The beacon screams out "Danger! Turn back!" No alien will ignore that warning. Some, who are more curious than others, will stop and listen, and hear the longer message, the final transmission from the only aliens brave enough to visit Earth. It was transmitted from their ship just seconds before it exploded.

This is commander Firth reporting from the first Earth mission. I curse the day I ever saw this frigid planet. Since landing, we have suffered one misfortune after another. Our mission was simple. Locate a suitable structure, exterminate any inhabitants, and set up a beacon to guide the larger ships down from orbit. Shortly after landing Lieutenant Genry located a suitable structure, but was attacked by a native. The attack cracked his face plate and he died almost instantly. We used his umbilical cord to drag him back to the ship. Later, Lieutenant Tang was deployed in an armored probe to complete the extermination of the inhabitants. Somehow, the probe was destroyed, and Lieutenant Tang was killed. We are not clear about the details, but we believe that the same inhabitant was responsible for both killings. In accordance with regulations, we extended the exhaust tube of our nuclear reactor through the soil of the planet into an empty space. The same inhabitant that killed Genry was detected tampering with the vent. Commander Jeng was sent to investigate. Jeng was also attacked, but managed to fight off the attacker. He died later of internal injuries sustained in the attack. Shortly thereafter, the ship sustained irreparable damage in a final attack by the same inhabitant, this time with two accomplices. Captain Yan was killed in the attack, leaving me in charge.

We repaired the damage as best we could and took off. We will try to rendezvous with the fleet soon. As we were making repairs we were able to monitor the conversations of the inhabitants. From these conversations we made a most shameful discovery. The inhabitant that attacked us, killed our crewmen, and damaged our ship was, in fact, a young child. The adults took no notice of us. It seems that these people are so powerful, that planetary defense is left in the hands of small children. Surprisingly, the adults seemed quite angry with the young child. Apparently, the children are supposed to perform their planetary defense duties quietly without disturbing the daily routines of the adults. ...

“Yes, Yes, what is it? Can’t you see I’m making a report?”

“What do you mean the reactor vent is plugged? Can’t you clear it? No? But that means we’re all going to ...”