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# The Day of the Dog

Anderson Horne



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Author: Anderson Horne

Illustrator: Ed Emshwiller

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*They came home from a strange journey... And heroes they might have been—  
a little dog and a man!*

*Illustrated by Ed Emsh*

BY ANDERSEN HORNE

## The DAY OF THE DOG

CAROL stared glumly at the ship-to-shore transmitter. "I hate being out here in the middle of the Caribbean with no radio communication. Can't you fix it?"

"This is a year for sun spots, and transmission usually gets impossible around dusk," Bill explained. "It will be all right in the morning. If you want to listen to the radio, you can use the portable radio directional finder. That always works."

"I want to catch the 5 o'clock news and hear the latest on our satellite," Carol replied. She went to the RDF and switched it on to the standard broadcast channel. "Anyhow, I'd feel better if we could put out a signal. The way we're limping along with water in our gas is no fun. It will take us twenty hours to get back to Nassau the way we're losing RPM'S."

Bill Anderson looked at his young, pretty wife and smiled. "You're behaving like a tenderfoot. We've plenty of gas, a good boat and perfect weather. Tomorrow morning I'll clean out our carburetors and we'll pick up speed. Meantime, we're about to enter one of the prettiest harbors in the Bahamas, throw over anchor ..."

The RDF drowned him out.

"The world is anxiously awaiting return of the chamber from the world's first manned satellite launched by the United States ten days ago. The world also awaits the answers to two questions: Is there any chance that Robert Joy, the volunteer scientist who went up in the satellite, is still living? There seems to be little hope for his survival since radio communication from him stopped three days ago. Timing mechanism for the ejection of Joy are set for tonight. And that's the second question. Will the satellite, still in its orbit, eject the chamber containing Joy? Will it eject the chamber as scheduled, and will the chamber arrive back at earth at the designated place?"

"There are many 'ifs' to this project which is shrouded in secrecy. The President himself has assured us of a free flow of news once the chamber has been recovered, and this station will be standing by to bring you a full report."

Carol switched the radio off. "Do you think he's alive?" She suppressed a shudder. "God! Think of a human being up there in that thing."

"Well, the dog lived for several days. It was just a question of getting it back, which the Russians couldn't do. I don't know about Joy. He sounded real cheerful and healthy until his broadcasts stopped." Bill peered into the fading twilight. "Come on now, let's put our minds to getting the hook over!"

They concentrated on the tricky entrance to the lee side of Little Harbor Cay. It meant finding and passing a treacherous coral head north of the adjoining Frozen Cay. Little Harbor Cay was midway in the chain of the Berry Islands which stretched to the north like beads in a necklace.

"There's the cove," called Carol. About a mile of coastline ahead was the small native settlement. Once the center of a thriving sponge industry, the island was now practically deserted. A handful of small cottages, a pile of conch shells on the beach and two fishing smacks gave evidence of a remaining, though sparse, population.

Dusk was rapidly approaching and Carol strained her eyes against the failing light. Bill heard her call his name and saw her pointing—not ahead to their anchorage, but amidships and toward the sky. He turned his eyes to where she was indicating and saw a dullish object in the sky, some thousand feet up. The object seemed to be falling leisurely towards earth.

"What in the world is that?" asked Bill. "It's not a bird, that's for sure."

The object seemed to be parachuting, not falling. The breezes were blowing it towards the island. Before they could study it further, it was lost in the lowering dusk and darkness of the shore line.

"Looks like a ball on a parachute," Bill finally said. However, the business at hand was to make secure the *Seven Seas* and together they spent the next quarter hour anchoring.

After "setting the hook" securely, Carol and Bill donned swim suits, dove overboard and swam lazily the 300 yards in to shore.

"Let's try to find that thing we saw. It shouldn't be too far from here," said Carol the moment they hit the beach.

They climbed inland on the rocky island. Little green lizards scooted underfoot and vines scratched at their ankles.

Bill was leading, when suddenly he called, "Carol, I see something up ahead! There's something lying on the ground!" He hurried toward what he had seen.

The dying sun reflected on a luminescent bolt of cloth, somewhat like a spun-aluminum fabric. Thin wire lines were entangling it, and about ten feet away lay three fragments of what appeared to have been a dull metal box.

Carol knelt at the closest piece, evidently a corner of the box. It was lined with wiring and tubes.

"It looks like electronic equipment," decided Carol, peering intently at the strange piece. Bill had approached the second and largest fragment.

He carefully turned it over. It was filled with black and yellow ... fur?

"Oh no!" he cried, knowing in a flash, yet denying it in his mind at the same time. Stunned, he stared at the perky ears, the dull staring and unseeing eyes, the leather thongs that held the head and body of a dog to the metal encasement. Carol saw it the next instant.

"It's some horrible joke!" she gasped. "It couldn't be the second Russian satellite, it couldn't be Muttnik! My God, no, it couldn't be!"

Bill kept staring, his thoughts racing. There were rumors of an ejection chamber for Muttnik. But they had been denied by the Russians. But suppose the Russians *had* planned an ejection chamber for the dog Laika when they launched the satellite and had only denied it after they thought it had failed?

But if it *had* worked, why had it taken so long to find its way to earth? The satellite itself was supposed to have disintegrated months ago.

"Damn," thought Bill. "I wish I were a scientist right now instead of a know-nothing artist!"

He touched the dog with his toe. It was perfectly preserved, as though it had died just a few hours before. It was rigid, but it had not started to decompose.

"Carol, are we crazy? Is this some dream, or do you believe we are looking at the ejection chamber of the Russian satellite?" he asked, doubting even what he was saying.

"I don't know." Carol was wide-eyed. "But what shall we do now? We'd better contact the authorities immediately!"

Bill tried to keep reason from overcoming his disbelief of their discovery.

"But how, Carol? Our radio transmitter isn't working. It won't till morning. And there's certainly no other way to communicate with anyone. We can't even take the boat anywhere with the speed we're making. We'll have to wait till morning."

"What shall we do with the dog?" asked Carol. "Do you think we ought to bury it?"

"Lord no, Carol. The body of the dog will be extremely valuable to science. We've got to get someone here as quickly as possible." Bill was trying to steady his nerves.

"Let's go back and try to raise someone on the radio. Let's try again, it may work," called Carol, running in the direction of the boat. Bill followed her. They stumbled on the craggy

rocks and exposed sea grape roots, but together in the darkness they struck out for the boat.

Bill was first aboard and went directly to the ship-to-shore radio.

"Try the Nassau marine operator first," Carol panted as she clambered aboard. "He's a lot closer to us than Miami."

As the receiver warmed up, static filled the cabin. Bill depressed the transmitting button. "This is the Yacht *Seven Seas* calling the Nassau Marine operator," he called into the phone. Only static answered.

"Bill!" Carol said in sudden inspiration. "Give a May Day. Try every channel with a May Day. If anyone picks up a May Day call you'll get emergency action."

"May Day, May Day! This is the Yacht *Seven Seas*. Come in anyone!" Bill called urgently into the mouthpiece. He switched to the Coast Guard channel, then to the Miami Marine operators channel. Only static filled the cabin. No welcome voice acknowledged their distress call. Bill flipped the switch desperately to the two ship-to-ship channels. "May Day! Come in any boat!" Still static. Nothing but static.

**I**T WAS night. A night without a moon. The island loomed dark against the black waters. The dark was relieved only by a small fire burning at the native settlement a half-mile down the coast, and the cabin lights of the *Seven Seas*.

"What will we do now?" Carol tried to sound unconcerned, but her voice sounded thin and wavering.

"I don't know what we can do, except wait until daybreak. I'm sure we can get a signal out then," Bill replied, calmly as he could. He hoped she couldn't hear the pounding of his heart.

"What about the dog?" she asked. "Will it be all right there? Should we bring it aboard?"

"We better leave everything untouched. Our best bet is to get some sleep and place our call as soon as day breaks."

Neither of them could eat much supper and after putting the dishes away, they made up their bunks and climbed in. After a very few minutes, Bill handed a lighted cigarette across the narrow chasm between the bunks.

"I can't sleep. My head is spinning. Do you really believe that's what we've found?" Carol's voice sounded small.

"Yes, I do. I believe we've found the Russian ejection unit, complete with the dog Laika and instrumentation."

They lay quietly, the glow of two cigarettes occasionally reflecting on the bulkhead. Bill finally arose.

"I can't think of another thing but what's sitting out there on Little Harbor Cay!" He walked up to the main cabin and switched on the RDF. For a few minutes there was music, and then:

"Flash! The United States Government has just officially released the news that at 10:09 p.m. Eastern Standard Time the U. S. Satellite ejection chamber was successfully returned to earth at the designated location. This was some six hours earlier than expected. The chamber, into which Robert Joy voluntarily had himself strapped, has landed at an undisclosed site and is being raced under heavy guard to the Walter Reed Hospital at Washington, D. C. There is no hope that Joy is still living. Word has just been released by Dr. James R. Killian that instruments measuring Joy's pulse rate indicated three days ago that all Joy's bodily processes ceased to function at that time. We repeat, all hope of the survival of Robert Joy is now abandoned as the result of scientific data just released by Dr. Killian.

"The satellite is being brought intact to Walter Reed Hospital and leading physiologists and scientists are racing to the scene to be on hand for the opening of the unit scheduled for 6 a.m. tomorrow morning. Further reports will be given as received. This station will remain on the air all night. Stay tuned for further developments. We repeat, the U. S. satellite's ejection chamber, containing the first human being ever to go into space, has been successfully

returned to earth as predicted, though all hope has been abandoned for the survival of Robert Joy, the man in the moon. The chamber will be opened for scientific study tomorrow morning. Stay tuned for further news."

Bill tuned down the music that ensued and returned to his bunk. "You heard that, Carol?" He knew she wasn't asleep.

"Yes. And it makes this whole thing that we've found seem more plausible. I've been lying here trying to make myself believe it's some sort of dream, but it isn't. If we could only ..." Carol's voice faded softly into the night.

There was absolutely nothing they could do. Nothing but lie there and smoke and pretend to sleep. They didn't talk much, and keenly felt the terrible frustration of their enforced silence on the ship-to-shore. They heard several more news reports and several analyses of the news, but nothing new was added throughout the night. The radio only reiterated that the ejection unit had been recovered, that hope had faded for Joy's survival and that the chamber was to be opened in the morning as soon as scientists had convened in Washington.

**D**AWN, long in coming, broke about 4:30. With the lifting of the dark, the sun spots which interfered with radio reception miraculously lifted also. Bill and Carol sat next to the ship-to-shore and turned it on. This time they heard the reassuring hum of the transmitter, not drowned out by the awful static of the night before. Bill switched to the Coast Guard channel.

"May Day. May Day. This is the *Seven Seas* calling the United States Coast Guard. Come in please!"

And a voice, almost miraculously, answered, "This is the U. S. Coast Guard. Come in *Seven Seas*. What is your position? Come in *Seven Seas*."

"This is the yacht *Seven Seas* back to the Coast Guard. We are located at the Berry Islands at Little Harbor Cay. We want to report the discovery of what we believe to be the second Russian satellite."

"This is the Coast Guard to the *Seven Seas*. Do we read you correctly? Are you reporting discovery of the Russian satellite? Please clarify. Over." A stern voice crackled through the speaker.

"Last evening on entering the harbor here we saw an object fall to the ground. On inspection, it was a metal box which was broken apart on impact. In it are electronic equipment and the body of a small dog. Over." Bill tried to be calm and succinct.

"Coast Guard to *Seven Seas*. Is your boat in distress? Over."

"No, no! Did you read me about the Russian satellite?" asked Bill, impatience in his voice.

"Will you state your name and address. Will you state the master's full name, and the call letters and registration of your craft. Over," crackled the voice from the speaker.

"Oh my lord, we're not going to have red tape at a time like this, are we?" Carol asked exasperatedly.

"This is Bill Anderson of Ft. Lauderdale, owner and skipper. Our call letters are William George 3176, Coast Guard registration #235-46-5483. What are your instructions regarding dog satellite?"

"Please stand by."

Bill and Carol stared at each other while the voice on the radio was silent.

"This is the United States Coast Guard calling the yacht *Seven Seas*."

"*Seven Seas* standing by."

"We wish to remind you that it is illegal and punishable by fine and or imprisonment to issue false reports to the Coast Guard. We are investigating your report and wish you to stand by."

"Investigating our report?" Bill fairly shouted into the phone. "Good God, man! The thing to

investigate is *here*, laying in three pieces on the middle of Little Harbor Cay. This is no joke." Despite the emotion in Bill's voice, the answer came back routine and cold, "Please stand by. We will call you. Do not, we repeat, do not make further contact anywhere. Please stand by. Coast Guard standing by with the *Seven Seas*."

"*Seven Seas* standing by," shouted Bill, almost apoplectic, his face reddening in anger.

"Now what? It looks like they're going to take their time in believing us. At least until they find out who we are and if we're really here," said Carol.

Bill paced the deck in frustration. Suddenly he decided, "Carol, you stick with the radio. I'm going ashore again and take another look at our Muttnik. It seems so incredible that I'm not even sure of what I saw last night. Once they believe us they'll want to know as much about it as we can tell them." Bill hurriedly put on his swim suit and heard Carol shout as he dove overboard, "Hurry back, Bill. I don't like you leaving me here alone!"

Bill swam with sure even strokes to the shore where they had gone last night. The water felt cool. It soothed his nerves which jangled in the excitement of the discovery and in the anger at the disbelieving authorities. He reached shallow water and waded towards shore.

Suddenly he stopped dead, his ankles in five inches of water. His eyes stared ahead in disbelief. His brain was numbed. Only his eyes were alive, staring, wide in horror. Finally his brain pieced together the image that his vision sent to it. Pieced it together but made no comprehension of it.

His brain told him that there was a blanket of fur laying unevenly twenty feet back from the shore line. A blanket of yellow and black fur ... covering the earth, covering mangrove roots, fitted neatly around the bent palm tree trunks, lying over the rocks that had cut his feet last night ... smothering, suffocating ... hugging the earth.

Bill shut his eyes, and still the vision kept shooting to his brain. All yellow and black and fuzzy, with trees or a tall mangrove bush or a sea grape vine sticking up here and there.

He opened his eyes and wanted to run, for the scene was still there. It hadn't disappeared as a nightmare disappears when you wake up. Thick yellow and black fur lay on the ground like dirty snow. Covering everything low, hugging the base of taller things.

"Run!" his mind told him. Yet he stood rooted to the spot, staring at the carpet of fur near him. It was only ten feet away. Ten feet? His every muscle jumped. The lock that had held his muscles and brain in a tight vice gave loose and a flood of realization hit him. "It's moving!" he realized in horror. "It's growing!"

**A**S HE WATCHED, slowly, slowly, as the petals of a morning glory unfold before the eye, the yellow and black fur carpet stretched itself in ever-increasing perimeter.

He saw it approach a rock near the beach. The mind, when confronted with a huge shock, somehow concentrates itself on a small detail. Perhaps it tries to absorb itself in a small thing because the whole thing is too great to comprehend all at once. So with Bill's mind. He saw the yellow and black fur grow toward the rock. It seemed to ooze around it and then up and over the top of it. Bill saw, when it reached the top of the rock, that it dropped a spiny tendril to the ground. Like a root, the tendril buried itself into the earth below the jutting rock, and slowly the rock was covered with the flowing fur.

Bill's thoughts sped ahead of his reason. The dog. The dog ... growing like a plant. Its hide covering the ground, putting out roots, suffocating everything, smothering everything, growing, growing.

With almost superhuman effort, he turned his back on the awful sight and swam desperately out to the *Seven Seas*.

"Bill, what's happened?" cried Carol, when she saw his white and terrified face.

"Carol ... the dog ... it must have had some cosmic reaction to its cellular structure ... some cancerous reaction ... when the chamber broke open and the cells were exposed to our atmosphere again it started some action ... started to grow ... doesn't stop growing ... it's

horrible ..." Bill's words were disjointed and hysterical.

Carol stared at him. "Bill, *what* are you saying?" Bill pointed mutely to the shore. Carol rushed to the cockpit. She stared at the island. She ran back to the cabin where Bill was sitting, holding his head in his hands. She grabbed the binoculars from the bookshelf and turned them to the island.

"Bill! It's ... oh no! The whole island looks as though it's covered with ... fur!" She screamed.

Bill grabbed the binoculars and ranged the island with them. A quarter of a mile down he could see small figures in the water, floundering around, climbing aboard the two fishing smacks. All around, the black and yellow mounds of fur carpeted the pretty green island with a soft rug of yellow and black.

"Get the Coast Guard, Carol!"

"They called back while you were gone. They're sending a plane over immediately."

"Call them, Carol!" Bill shouted at her. "Don't you realize what this could mean? Don't you realize that something, only God knows what, has happened to the cellular structure of this animal, has turned it into a voracious plant-like thing that seems to grow and grow once it hits our atmosphere? Don't you realize that today they're going to open that satellite, that other one, in Washington? Suppose this is what happens when living tissue is exposed to cosmic rays or whatever is up there. Don't you see what could happen?" Bill was hoarse from fright and shouting. "Smother everything, grow and grow and smother ..."

Carol was at the ship-to-shore. "What time is it, Carol?"

"I don't know. 5:30 I guess."

"They plan to open the ejection chamber at six. We've got to tell them what happened here before they open it! Hurry with the damned Coast Guard!"

"May Day! May Day! Coast Guard come in. This is the *Seven Seas*. Come in and hurry!"

"Coast Guard to the *Seven Seas*. Come in."

Bill grabbed the phone. "Listen carefully," he said in a quiet determined voice. "This is God's own truth. I repeat: This is God's own truth. The remains of the dog we discovered last night have started to grow. It is growing as we look at it. It has covered the entire island as far as we can see, with fur. Stinking yellow and black fur. We've got to get word to Washington before they open up the satellite. The same thing could happen there. Do you understand? I must get in touch with Washington. Immediately!"

There was no mistaking the urgency and near-panic in Bill's voice. The Coast Guard returned with "We understand you *Seven Seas*. We will clear a line directly to Dr. Killian in Washington. Stand by."

With his hand shaking, Bill turned on the standard broadcast band of the portable RDF. A voice cut in: "... latest reports from Walter Reed General Hospital where the first human-manned satellite ejection chamber has just been opened. All leading physiologists and physicists were assembled at the hospital by midnight last night and plans to open the ejection chamber at 6 a.m. this morning were moved up. The chamber was opened at 4 a.m. Eastern Standard Time today. Our first report confirmed that volunteer moon traveller, the man in the moon, Robert Joy, was no longer alive. Hope had been abandoned for him some 80 hours previous, when recording instruments on his body processes indicated no reactions. Of scientific curiosity is the fact that though dead for more than three days, his body is in a perfect state of preservation ...

"Flash! We interrupt this special newscast for a late bulletin: The body of Robert Joy has begun to shoot out unexplained appendages, like rapidly growing cancerous growths. His integument appears to be enlarging, growing away from his body ..."

"Hello *Seven Seas*," broke in the ship-to-shore. "We are still trying to locate Dr. Killian...."

**END**

## **Transcriber's Note:**

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