

Frank Mazer

Oregon Wood

What are these dozens of people doing walking in the middle of this road in front of my car? It's 2:00 a.m. It's dark. I am driving my old Mazda car over the coast range of mountains between Portland, Oregon and the beautiful Oregon coast. It is a moonless night. Here I am in the middle of the woods. I have not seen another car for thirty minutes. I am not seeing well at any rate. I am exhausted. I have stepped off of an airplane late at night after a weekend visit to family in California. Sleep is in great demand. Work is demanding I must be back at the school to teach at the Oregon coast by Monday morning. Thus, I am behind the wheel foolishly squinting. The radio has been playing static for some time. The window is rolled down for air. It has not helped as my mind has drifted to faraway European places and friends and I am not present on this small two lane road through the thick tall trees of

the Oregon forest. There is a light fog across the road. There is a fog across my mind to match it.

I am hallucinating perhaps. My foggy mind sees, in the forest mist, the figures of the walking people ahead in the beam of the headlamps enough that it tells my foot to remove itself from the pedal and slow the car down from 100 kph to much less speed. My mind begins to groggily bring itself into an attempt to figure out what planet I am on. I begin to look more closely at these people. I wonder how I got here?

There is something odd about these persons. Are they some kind of alien creatures from the planet Zorgon here to explore the woods where no one is found in the night?? This thought, in my groggy mind, actually plants some roots. This turns out to be a good thing as it causes a sudden surge of adrenalin wrapped in fear of alien abduction! It awakens me. They don't seem to have seen me! Thank goodness. Maybe I will not be taken to their mother-ship after all. Or maybe I was already taken to the

ship and that explains why I cannot remember how I got here in the past hour! My heart is pumping widely. I do not want to meet alien probes entering parts of my body not meant to be inspected! Heck, I am fearful enough of the doctor with his stethoscope! I see his face leaning over me, no, wait it has huge eyes and it's a grey face! I hit the brakes and bring the car to a stop in the middle of the road 5 meters from the "aliens".

I blink. I take a deep breath of fresh cold air. I begin to see more clearly. I sit leaning on the steering wheel breathing hard. I see the dark Oregon forest all around. I see them lit up in the road up ahead. They are deer. A herd of dozens of deer. Standing in the road with their rear-ends facing me. I have been staring at the backsides of deer thinking they were two legged forms of intelligent beings. I sit there making sure these surreal looking forms in the Oregon mountain mist are actually deer. I am too tired and sore to laugh. I suddenly am feeling fortunate that their form frightened me. It prevented me from a highway disaster of crashing into their midst on a deserted road in the middle

of the night in the mountains. Now, I take a deep breath and consider how to negotiate going through them. Surely they will scatter as I arrive close among them.

I am wrong. I drive into their midst very slowly. Some move aside grudgingly. Some ignore me. I must negotiate my way cautiously among the deer butts. I need to stay on the road but I need to move to the shoulder in order to avoid these deer. Not being a famed deer hunter I find myself surprised at the height of the deer posteriors looming at windshield level. After 15 minutes I suddenly find myself with clear highway and clear brain ahead in the headlights. I increase speed toward the coast feeling fortunate. In forty minutes the road winds and descends down toward the cliffs of the coast as it emerges from the mountains. Soon I make a left turn and I am driving along the coast highway.

The Pacific Ocean lies off to my right and 200 meters below. During the day the beauty of the ocean and the rocks below is breathtaking. In places chimney- like rock

formations rise up out of the ocean up to 50 meters. A small beautiful village full of art galleries lurks off the road near-by. Redwood trees grow along some of the mountains reaching up to my left. I am aware of these sights. I have often stood in places here along the coast with my breath taken away by the natural wild beauty of the surging ocean waves below touching the rocks and throwing spray skyward. In this night I can see only blackness between patches of fog. After an hour of cautious driving I drive down into the village of Manzanita and arrive at my apartment next to the beach. Time allows for one hour of sleep. Dreams of spaceships awaken me with a lurch up in bed in time for going to work.

My knees protest as I softly step my way across the little wooden deck and down the three steps to the gravel driveway which makes its way to my small secluded abode located between tall vines , bushes and some trees about 20 meters from the beach.

I am reminded of my first nights here near the thundering of the mighty ocean storm waves. However, that is a story of another sort. Thus, I make my steps to my car and drive a mile to the espresso café. They recognize me here. For some reason, I keep my name unknown to them. As I enter, I am invigorated by the thought of the gorgeous young woman behind the counter who's reddish-brown windswept hair and glowing sense of wit and humor greet me on these frequent morning visits. This morning, my feet do not cooperate. My left foot catches on the small final step into the coffee house as I open the door. I stumble forward awkwardly toward a possible crash landing on my face with my feet reacting wildly beneath me as I put my hands out to catch my fall. To my right I see the little reading room with its rack of surfer and photography magazines. To the left I see what I hoped I would not see. I see her watching me. She has seen my entrance. It is too late to salvage any pretense of dignity. My hands on the wooden floor I push myself upward in sections to stand. I look into her big blue eyes which are smiling. She asks,

“long night was it?” I chuckle and say, “oh, you have no idea”. She tilts her head and says, “were you abducted by aliens or something?”