

Four Quarters for a Dollar Moon

by Dean West

There's a large tunnel that runs under my house. I can only estimate but it's not deep below the ground and that's what worries me.

I hear digging and if whatever lives there decided to climb up to the surface and reached the crawlspace under my house, would it stop there or rip through the floor boards? And what if I was asleep when that happened? I kept this worry to myself until Bernie showed up for a visit.

Bernie is my best friend and I confided to him about my worries. At first, he said I was foolish and laughed. To be polite, but mostly to make Bernie happy, I laughed with him because I don't have a lot of friends. But he could see I was nervous and my laugh artificial so he put his beer down on the porch railing, leaned over and looked straight at me.

"How often do you hear this digging?" Bernie asked.

His seriousness embarrassed me so I tried to change the subject.

"Don't change the subject, Wilburn."

I apologized for ever bringing up the issue and tried again to switch the conversation to the dry weather.

Bernie wouldn't have any of it and took the beer out of my hand before I could complain.

"I'm not interested in the drought, Wilburn. How often do you hear the digging?" This time, Bernie wasn't letting me change the subject.

"It's worse at night. That's why I can't sleep." After I confessed, he gave me the bottle back and I finished it before he could change his mind.

"Do you hear it only under the house?" Bernie asked as he pried the cap off of another Bud.

I waited until I had both hands firmly around that bottle before I answered.

"It runs under the garden, too."

Bernie slapped his knee real hard like he was mad at me. I talked faster so he couldn't get madder.

"That's why I don't go out there to pick greens, anymore. Say I'm whistling some silly tune and I don't hear it and it comes up through the ground. You know I can never keep quiet. I like to whistle while I work, Bernie."

"You're a good whistler, Wilburn."

"Yeah, I am...so there I'd be in the garden and there's no wooden floor out there, nothing between me and it." I let my tongue play with the bubbles from the beer.

"What exactly is *'it'*, Wilburn?"

"That's what I don't want to find out." I shook my head and the bubbles climbed up into my nose.

“Did you ever think it might all be in your head?”

I hear that question a lot. It seem's a trick question to me like where do they bury the survivors after a plane crash. After Bernie first asked me what to do with survivors, I thought about that plane crash for a long, long time. I'd spend half the night in my dreams trying to dig enough graves for everyone. But Bernie finally explained it to me and I was grateful and slept good after I understood. Thinking it might be in my head is definitely a trick question and I won't fall for that again. Everything's in your head. Bernie knows that.

‘Look at me Wilburn.’ Bubbles came out of my nose but I looked at Bernie anyway. “You got to get that out of your head. Don't think anymore about tunnels and digging...none of that, you hear me?”

“I don't know how to do that, Bernie.” I almost cried because he was being so hard on me.

“You got to replace it with something else. I want you to think about....”

Bernie looked long into the distance for some time until he turned and asked the question that still bothers me.

Bernie didn't smile when he asked, “How come the moon's worth a dollar?”

That was the last time we sat on the front porch together and drank cold beer.

Some people came by later and told me Bernie was in a plane crash and there weren't any survivors and asked me if I'd like to go

to the funeral and then on to the graveside. I laughed at them, told them I wasn't a fool, that I knew you didn't bury survivors.

I offered them some beer that Bernie left but they said they were in a hurry to go. When they got into their car and I could tell they were comfortable, I yelled out, "You know why the moon is worth a dollar?"

They didn't answer me. They probably didn't know either.

I hope Bernie gets back soon. I've collected over a sack of empty bottles from the ditches and have more than enough money. I'm willing to spend a dollar on the moon.

