

## MID WATCH

Slowly Steve's eyes came open. "Where am I?" he thought. Bit by bit it came back to him until he had the whole picture. His name was Steve Johnson, a seaman apprentice in the United States Navy. He was going to Fire Controlman school at Great Lakes, Illinois, and he had the fucking mid watch.

Steve reached over and shut off his alarm. As quietly as he could, so he wouldn't wake up his roommates, he started to get ready for his watch. He thought about the next four hours as he slipped on the dress blue jumper top. He had a rover watch at the school from 12:00 AM to 4:00 AM. Being a rover meant he had to walk around the three story building making sure no unauthorized visitors were lurking about.

Steve finished getting dressed and looked at his watch. He had five minutes to get there. He had to relieve the watch fifteen minutes until the hour according to watch standing regulations. He had always thought that was stupid. If he had to be there fifteen minutes early why didn't they just call it the 11:45 to 3:45 watch? It was just the Navy way.

Steve locked his room door behind him and went to sign out at the messenger desk. Showing his ID to the quarter-deck watch he exited the barracks and headed for the school. The school was just across the street so at least he didn't have very far to walk. He walked past a door that had a sign reading **E5 AND ABOVE ONLY**. It would have been a lot faster to use this door but the lowly E1-E4 had to go all the way to the back to get in. Steve made his way around to the back and went inside. Once inside he spotted the rover and the quarter-deck watch and walked up to them.

"She's all yours," the rover said to Steve.

"You can keep her if you really want to," Steve said to him.

"No fucking way, bud. I'm going to hit the rack." He unbuckled the white guard belt around his waist and handed it to Steve. "Have fun," he said and started for the door.

"Oh, I'll try real hard."

Steve put on the guard belt and signed into the log book. For the next four hours he was to make sure that everything was normal and if not to report it to the quarter-deck watch. In a few minutes the relief for the quarter-deck watch came and signed into the log.

"Anything to pass down?" he asked the person he was relieving.

"Yea, there is a leak in the woman's head on the third deck. There is a can catching the water and it has to be emptied every fifteen minutes. Also, there is a leak in the basement. There is a swab bucket catching the water but it still needs to be checked every now and then. You can have your rover check them."

"Oh that's just great," Steve said sarcastically, "Well, I guess I better get roving." He turned the corner and headed down the hall. There were three decks in the building with a ladder well at each end and in the middle. There was no set pattern but the rover was supposed to cover all three in a round. Since he was supposed to check the leak in the women's head he decided to go straight there first and work his way down.

He opened the door to the north end ladder well and ascended the stairs to the third deck. The women's head was right beside the ladder well and in the dead silence he could already hear the drip drop of the leak. He reached the door and read the sign on it.

**WOMEN'S HEAD  
MALE PERSONNEL SOUND OFF  
BEFORE ENTERING FOR CLEANING**

Steve chuckled to himself. If there was a woman in there at this time of night she had a lot of explaining to do. He reached for the door and opened it.

“Ahhhhhhhhhhhh!”

Steve almost pissed his pants as he jumped back and let the door shut. What the fuck was that? He swore he could have heard a girl scream. This was crazy. It's just my imagination he thought. He opened the door and heard it again. This time however, he stood his ground and looked for the source of the sound. He could have kicked himself in the ass when he found it. He walked over to the open window and slammed it shut. The wind had been blowing through the screen and his vivid imagination had amplified it into a scream. Steve pushed the incident to the back of his mind and got his thoughts back on his duties.

He looked down and saw the leak in the radiator. There was a Folder's coffee can under it collecting the water and it was just about to run over. Steve picked it up and dumped it into a toilet, then put it back under the leak. With that done he opened the door and walked back out. Once outside he started his rounds. Each deck was arranged in a rectangle with classrooms and labs on the outside and inside so that the hall made a square. Steve started to walk that square to the south.

He walked down past all the classrooms to one end of the building and then headed up the other side. As he came close to the north end corner he stopped. This was the part of the building he hated the most. Here the overhead dropped to about seven feet and it was almost totally dark. He always felt closed in when he was walking through it and he had a feeling that something was watching him. That's ridiculous he told himself, but it didn't help. He bit his lip and walked through. As he got close to the other side he was walking so fast he might as well have been running.

He got to the ladder well and went down to the second deck to continue his rove. The second deck was half classrooms and half offices for the officers and chiefs. He finished his rounds there and went down to the first deck. After that he headed for the quarter-deck watch.

“All secure,” he told the third class that was on watch. He chatted with the quarter-deck watch for a while and then started his second rove. As he stepped out of the ladder well on the second deck he heard a crash at the other end. He hurried down to the other end to see what it was and felt a cold draft coming from the week 14 classroom. Steve made his way down to the classroom and cautiously peered in. On his first glance he didn't see anything unusual but when he flipped on the lights he saw what had made the disturbance. The windows in the building were hinged and opened to the inside. It

looked like one of the windows had not been closed securely and it had fallen open and broke. Glass was everywhere and cold air was pouring into the room.

Steve walked back down to the quarter-deck and reported the problem to the watch.

“O.K. I’ll log it in and notify building maintenance in the morning. You go up and clean up the mess,” he told Steve.

Great! Not only do I have the mid watch, he thought, but I’ve got to be a fucking janitor too. It was probably one of those night school pukes who left the window unlocked. Steve, of course, was on the squared away day school shift. He went back up to the classroom via the women’s head to empty the can. When he got there he picked up a trash can and began cleaning up the glass. One relatively large piece of glass was still in the frame and Steve was trying to pry it out when he noticed something odd. There was no screen on this window. He thought that odd since all the other windows had heavy duty security screens and he knew how paranoid they were about security around here. Something must have happened to it he thought and dismissed it as coincidence.

At the completion of the rove he remembered that the bucket in the basement was suppose to be checked every now and then, so he headed that way. There was only one way into the basement and that was in the middle ladder well. He walked down the flight of stairs and stopped at the door. He had never been in the basement before and didn’t know what to expect. It didn’t sound like a nice place and when he opened the door he found out it wasn’t.

For one thing it was barely lit by one feeble light bulb hanging on a cord which caused all kinds of eerie shadows to flicker on the walls. In the basement was a huge boiler to provide heat and electricity to the school. The noise from the boiler hurt his ears and made even thinking hard to do. All this made Steve a little jumpy and what made it worse was that he couldn’t see the bucket that he was supposed to dump. That meant he would have to poke around down here until he found it, and that didn’t make him happy at all.

He looked around for a good ten minutes and was about to give up when he noticed a half hidden passageway behind the boiler. He squeezed behind it and found what he was looking for. Sure enough, there was the bucket already overflowing from a leak in a pipe above it. He dragged the barrel over to a deep sink that was used for filling swab buckets and dumped the water out. He replaced the bucket and started to leave when his curiosity overrode his fear.

Why was this passageway here? He noticed several pipes running down it and disappearing into the darkness. He followed the pipes down for about ten feet and found the answer to his question. The pipes ended abruptly and had steam flowing from them. The passageway must be a steam tunnel and it probably led to a vent down by the lake. Man I’d hate to go through there he thought.

Steve made his way back up to the quarter-deck and told the watch about the basement.

“Yea, sounds pretty scary,” the watch replied, “You’re relatively new here aren’t you?”

“Yea. Week five,” Steve replied.

“Then you probably didn’t hear about the guy that went crazy about eight weeks back.”

“No. What happened?”

“A guy over in company 304 kept telling his platoon leader that he heard strange noises in here when he was on the mid watch. One night when he was on watch he went running out of the building back over to the barracks yelling about something he’d seen. His company commander told him to get back on watch, but the guy promptly told him to go fuck himself. The company commander didn’t take that advice too well and wrote the guy up. He went to see the old man and ended up getting discharged on a psyche discharge.”

“Damn, that’s crazy! Well, I don’t think we’ll have that much excitement tonight. Gotta go, see ya in about 15 minutes,” Steve said.

“Oh, before you go. I have a note here from FC security. He wants you to wake him up fifteen minutes before you get off watch.”

“O.K.,” Steve replied and started another rove. FC security was one of the first class maintenance men who pulled duty maybe once a month. All they had to do was sit in a little office all day. It even had a bed to sleep in at night. FC security was supposed to handle any major threat to the school so they gave him a .45 pistol, although Steve couldn’t figure out what good the gun would do in his office. In his opinion the rovers should be the ones packing the heat. But of course, they were only little non rates with no experience, they were expendable.

Steve walked down the hall on the first deck to the non-smokers lounge. He fished in his pocket for 50 cents, which he produced and dropped in the coke machine. He pressed the button for a Mellow Yellow and nothing happened. Damn! Ripped off again! He rocked the machine and gave it a hard kick to the side, still nothing. He got down on his knees and pried the little door in the tray up to see what he could see. CLANK! The can suddenly dropped into the tray sending a sharp metallic sound reverberating through the once deadly silent room and sending Steve crashing backwards into the tables and benches.

“Son of a bitch!” he muttered and picked himself up. He straightened the tables and benches and then removed the can from the machine. “Come here you little bastard,” he said and popped the top open to take a drink. Ahhhh, that was refreshing. Watches weren’t supposed to drink anything while on watch, but who was going to see him anyway?

Steve continued his rove, stopping by to empty the coffee can, and then he came down to that damn corner on the third deck again. Man why couldn’t he get over this funny feeling? It was stupid to act like this. All he had to do was walk around the corner and get on with it. There is no way anyone could be in here and there is no such thing as monsters right? Steve walked around the corner. Wrong.

Steve’s mind blew a fuse. It must have, because his eyes were telling him that there was something in the hall that couldn’t possibly exist. Yet it was there. What was there you ask? Hold on while Steve gets it together and comes up with an adequate description. OK, this is how it looked to him. Something was in the middle of the hall and it looked like a cross between a crab and a jellyfish except magnified ten times. The body was mostly what looked like hard shell and six crustacean legs, three on each side.

The head region was a massive blob which sprouted many tentacles too numerous to count.

You may be wondering why Steve stayed around so long to come up with this artist's conception of the monster. Well, he really wasn't there that long. This first impression came to him in about the length of a micro second before his reflexes took over and he turned tail and ran. Something wasn't working out to well, though, because he didn't seem to be getting very far. In fact Steve noticed a sharp pain on his right ankle and then the floor was coming up to meet him face to tile.

He turned around and saw one tentacle wrapped around his ankle pulling him closer toward the massive blob of the creature. Then he saw the remaining tentacles part the way to reveal a ring of razor sharp teeth surrounding a dark hole which he could only assume was its mouth. Steve knew he only had a few seconds to live and in desperation he used the only weapon he had available, the Mellow Yellow can that had scared the shit out of him a few minutes ago. He took the best aim he could and let the can fly toward the creature. It missed by a mile.

Well so much for that weapon right? Not so fast. This little can that had given Steve so much trouble did in fact save his life, not in the way he had intended it too, but nevertheless it did. You know those little red exit signs you see in the doctor's office? Well, there was one of those here that pointed to the nearby stairwell and that little yellow can slammed right into it, shattering the red filter glass. A pencil beam of white light shot from the sign and into the blob region of the creature. The creature gave a loud shriek and threw up all its tentacles around its head releasing Steve.

Steve began to back up until he hit the wall. What was this? This thing couldn't stand white light? All he had to do was get to the circuit breaker panel that controlled the passageway lights and turn them on. As if sensing his thoughts the creature lashed out and with one quick blow of a tentacle, obliterated the light bulb in the exit sign. It then began to move toward Steve probing with all its tentacles. He noticed that it didn't move with super speed but in a sustained race with this thing he would surely lose, and not just the blue ribbon, but his ass!

He took off running until he came to the week one classroom and bolted inside. He ran his hands over the wall searching for his salvation while all the time the creature advanced. Where was it? The scratching noise of the creature's motion became louder and he knew he didn't have very long. His hands found the light switch and rammed then into the on position. Beautiful white light filled the room and arced into the passageway.

The creature stopped abruptly where the light made a line across the darkness outside the room. It sat there as if contemplating the situation. This led Steve to believe that it had some degree of intelligence. Then almost too quick to follow, Steve saw a tentacle shoot into the room and smash the light bulb closest to the door. The line of light that was previously out in the passageway now retreated into the room. The creature immediately moved to the door and tried to repeat its action on the next light bulb. But try as it might it couldn't reach it. It tried several times and Steve could tell that it must've been feeling pain because with each try, it made a terrible screeching sound and the tentacle seemed to be withering. It eventually gave up and just sat there like it was watching Steve.

Now that Steve had succeeded in stopping the thing for now, he turned his thoughts to escape. He went over to the windows and looked at them. No good. Even if he could get the screen off, which he doubted (they looked more like prison bars), he was three stories high and there was no way down. He inspected every portion of the room coming last to the ceiling before it hit him.

He stood on top of a table and pushed up on one of the sheetrock tiles in the ceiling. The tile held for a split second and then moved up and slid away. Steve needed something taller to stand on to get a good look so he jumped back down and winced at the pain in his ankle. In all the excitement he had forgotten about his injury. He now looked at it and almost tossed his cookies then and there. His skin looked like it had been eaten away from the secretion of the tentacle. There was no blood flowing from the wound but it looked charred as if burnt. He took off his neckerchief and tied it around the wound and then put it out of his mind. He had work to do, like getting the hell out of here.

He picked up a chair and put it on the table. Then he hopped back on the table and up onto the chair, sticking his head up in the ceiling. All right! Just as he hoped, the area between the sheetrock ceiling and the roof ran all over the building with no walls intervening. He was outta here! He took a leap up into the ceiling and onto the metal supports holding the tiles. At once the supports started to groan under the stress of Steve's weight and he wondered if this was such a great idea after all. What was he thinking? It was the only idea. It had to work. He began to crawl in what he hoped was a direction out of the room. The supports continued to groan but they held.

As soon as Steve had disappeared from the room the creature realized he was getting away. He started to throw a fit and lashed out at a ceiling tile above him. Up above, Steve almost shit his pants when the ceiling tile next to him blew apart! The tentacles came slithering up into the hole and toward Steve. He said a quick prayer and started crawling away as fast as he could, not even caring about the stress he was putting on the metal supports. The tentacles reached their length and came up just short of reaching Steve. They retreated and then Steve heard a tile further away blow apart, and then another one. He guessed that he must have crawled over a wall and cut the creature off. Steve came to a stop so he could catch his breath and listen. Soon, all but his breathing was silent. He sat there wondering what to do now on how he was going to get down. His answer came shortly when the metal support he was sitting on broke loose and sent him crashing into the room below.

Steve was disoriented in the free fall but was soon jarred back to reality when he landed on something hard. The wind was driven sharply from his lungs and for a few seconds his vision was blurred. When he was able to breathe and see again he realized that he was laying on a pool table. A pool table? Where am I, he wondered. He got off the table and looked around. He saw a lot of lounge chairs, a refrigerator, and a big screen TV. Then it hit him, he was in the forbidden instructors lounge. Even forbidden from the rover who was only supposed to check that the door was locked. No student had ever been allowed in here and now he could see why. Look at the luxuries they enjoyed.

But back to the business at hand, he now knew where he was and most of all he knew that he was closer to his goal. The instructors lounge was right by the middle ladder well and near that was a little room that contained the circuit panel that controlled the white lighting for the passageways on this deck. He slowly opened the door and stuck

his head out looking both ways. He saw nothing so he quietly exited the lounge and walked down to the ladder well. He reached the little room and grasped the door handle hoping that it wasn't locked. He turned it and click, the door came open. Great! At least something was going right. The good feeling didn't last long. When he walked into the room and examined the place where the circuit breaker panel should have been all he saw was a jumbled mess of wires. All the wires looked like they had been chemically burned!

Steve ran his hands frantically through his hair trying to think of what to do. He thought about trying the circuit breakers on the other decks and then realized that the creature would have taken care of those too. Then he heard a distant scream echoing through the building. The quarter-deck watch! Without even thinking Steve took off toward the quarter-deck. What he found there made him sick to his stomach. There was nothing but blood smeared all over the deck and the walls. There was no trace of the third class petty officer.

This was too much. He was getting out of here! He made a bee line for the door and tried to open it but it wouldn't budge. It looked like the locking mechanism on the door had been melted and twisted, keeping the door from being opened. He frantically ran to every other door on the first deck and found the same thing. In desperation he began to beat on the door and yell for help. But it was no use. Even if anyone was close to the building at this time of night they probably wouldn't be able to hear him thought the security door. Wait a minute, security? A light bulb went on in Steve's head. He calmed down and started moving cautiously, always checking for the sound of the creature. He made his way up to the second deck and down to the door that said **FC SECURITY**. He should have come here sooner.

He pounded on the door and waited. Nothing. He pounded a little harder. Finally he heard someone stirring and could hear him say, "All right, all right. It's 3:30 already?" Steve started to say something when he heard the guy yell, "What the hell?"

The door came crashing open and there stood a half dressed first class petty officer who didn't look too happy. "It's only a little after two," he bellowed, "Why the fuck are you waking me up now?"

"There's trouble," Steve said.

At the mention of trouble, the first class calmed down and became a little more professional and said, "Tell me about it." Steve came into the room and told him everything. When he finished he looked up at the guy. The first class just stared at Steve for a minute and then began to chuckle.

"I know it sounds crazy but it's true," Steve insisted.

"Yea, sure kid. You're just another lazy ass no load trying to skate out of the mid watch."

"Look at my ankle," Steve showed him, "See that proves it."

"That don't prove shit. You could have done that with a cigarette."

"Please man! You gotta believe me. I'm telling you the truth."

The first class sat back in his chair and sighed. "What am I going to do?" he said to nobody in particular. "What am I going to do?" He sat there thinking a little longer and then said, "Just sit there while I finish getting dressed." He put the rest of his uniform on and then picked up the guard belt with the .45 pistol on it and buckled it around his waist. He then stood up and beckoned to Steve.

“Does this mean you are going to help me?” Steve asked him.

“Sure kid,” he said and grabbed Steve’s arm pulling him into the passageway, “I am going to help you walk over to your company commander and tell him about this stunt you’ve pulled. You just bought yourself a one way ticket to see the old man.”

“No!” Steve yelled.

“Shut up!” he said and began to drag Steve down the hall. Then he stopped.

“Wait. Listen.” Steve could make out the sound of something scrapping against the deck and he knew what it was.

“That’s it!” Steve said.

“Don’t start that shit,” the first class said and then yelled down the hall, “Hey, whoever you are, you’re not supposed to be in here. Now come out so I can see you!”

Whoever it was obeyed and came around the corner, but it wasn’t a “who” it was an “it” and it was coming straight toward them.

“Shit!” yelled the first class and pushed Steve back. He pulled the .45 from it’s holster, leveled, aimed, and then pulled the trigger. Nothing happened. He had forgotten to chamber a round. That was all the time the creature needed. A tentacle flashed out and wrapped around his legs pulling him to the deck. The pistol went flying. Steve made a desperate attempt at catching the gun but he missed and it hit the deck and slid down the passageway. He started after it when he heard the first class call out for help.

Steve turned around and saw that the creature had its mouth open and that the guy, who now had several tentacles wrapped around his body, was almost in reach of it. He grabbed the guy’s arms and tried to pull him back. He only gained a few inches before the creature renewed its efforts and began to pull both of them towards its gaping mouth. The guy’s feet disappeared into the opening and he let out a blood curdling scream. he was ripped out of Steve’s grasp as the combination of mouth, teeth, and tentacles devoured the body of the first class. The creature had momentarily lost interest in Steve while the body disappeared into the mass of the creature. Soon there was no trace of the first class except the bloody mess left on the deck.

The creature started to shake all over and make an awful screeching noise. This brought Steve back to his senses and he got up and ran down the hall. He quickly located the gun and picked it up. He pulled the slide back and let it slide home, chambering a round. The creature stopped its antics and began to move toward him. Aiming toward the center mass of the creature, he pulled the trigger five times before the slide cocked back indicating that the gun was empty.

The roar of the gun was deafening but Steve still saw that two of the bullets hit the creature on its hard shell and ricocheted, shattering a picture of the old man on the wall. The other three bullets penetrated into the mass of tentacles. The creature backed up, shuddered, and then laid still. Steve watched it from a distance and when he was satisfied that it wasn’t going to move again he ran back to the security office.

Inside he went over to the desk and grabbed the telephone that was sitting on it. He picked up the receiver and dialed the number for the barracks. It rang several times and he was beginning to wonder if anyone would answer when the watch picked it up.

“BEQ 635, Company 304 Petty Officer of the watch speaking. May I help you?”

“Yessss!” Steve said, “This is (click)...” The line went dead. “Hello? Hello?” He heard nothing but static.



He ran back out and down the passageway. What he saw or rather what he didn't see made him want to cry. The creature was gone!

He hurried back to the security office and shut the door. He sat down and tried to think. Suddenly the lights in the office went out, leaving him enveloped in darkness and without his last line of defense. What the hell was he going to do now? He tried to calm down and think. There wasn't anything he could think of to do, unless, there was something he had seen earlier that might help. What was it? Then it hit him, it was risky but he really had no options left, and it would take care of this fucking abomination once and for all.

He rummaged through the desk and found a flashlight. He flipped it on and was rewarded with a beam of white light. Brandishing the flashlight like a light saber he steadied his nerves and then peeked out the door. Nothing. Slowly and very quietly he made his way to the middle ladder well and down to the basement. Once inside he moved over to the boiler and ran the beam of light over it, inspecting all the gauges and valves. When he found what he was looking for he went to work. Grabbing hold of a big valve labeled OUTPUT; he turned it as far clockwise as he could, shutting it. He then located another valve labeled PRESSURE RELIEF. He reached inside his jumper top to the concealed pocket inside and removed a pen that he always carried. He then jammed it up into the latch on top of the relief valve. A little spring popped out and went rolling across the deck.

Well that takes care of that, he thought. He examined a gauge that indicated the internal boiler pressure, noting that the needle was already beginning to rise. Now to get the hell out of here. He climbed the ladder well up to the second deck and took a peek outside. The passageway was clear so he scurried over to the week 14 classroom. Once inside he went over to the broken window that he had cleaned up just a few short hours ago. It seemed like an eternity.

Steve stuck his head out the window for a few minutes looking around. Well, it's either this or die he thought. Wondering what he was thinking about? Well, there is an entrance to the school building for officers which is all decorated by things like two big sixteen inch shells by each door and pictures of battleships all over the walls. Outside the two double doors it is all nice and neat with a big decorated floor mat with the Navy seal on it, but most importantly to Steve was the big red, white, and blue canopy covering the mat. Week 14 classroom, and Steve's probing head, happened to be directly above it.

Oh yea, that's what he was thinking. He's was going to take a little leap right into that canopy. Why not? It always worked in the movies. Steve sat the flashlight down and then hopped up and steadied himself in the window frame. He took a deep breath and then jumped. The cold air rushed all around him as he saw the canopy that had seem so far below now rushing up to meet him.

Suddenly Steve stopped in midair and slammed into the wall! The canopy was still a good six feet below him. There was something around his neck! There was something burning his neck! Slowly he began to slide back up the building wall. The creature pulled him all the way back into the room where he fell to the deck. The creature had one tentacle wrapped around his neck and began to pull him towards its mouth.

All Steve could think about was the pain in his neck. Several more tentacles wrapped around him pulling him within inches off the mass surrounding its mouth. He

began to flail his arms about and found the flashlight on the deck. He quickly shown it on the tentacle around his neck and it withered and fell away. He shown it on other tentacles wrapped around him but as fast as he could disable one another would show up and take its place, and he was still moving toward the mouth.

In a desperate attempt Steve rammed the flashlight into the mass of tentacles. He felt his hand sink into what felt like jelly and it immediately exploded in excruciating pain. The creature jerked back and what was left of Steve's right hand came out. The creature started shaking and convulsing and Steve bolted from the room and down the ladder well. He had to get to the basement and open that valve before the whole building went up in flames.

Back in the basement he ran over to the valve and tried to grasp it with both hands. That was when he got a really good look at his right hand and knew it would never be grasping anything ever again. It was nothing but a twisted and burnt mass of flesh. He grabbed the valve with his good hand and tried to turn it. It wouldn't budge. He tried again but to no avail. There was just too much pressure and he only had one hand to turn it with. He looked over to the relief valve which should of been wide open and blowing out steam. But of course it wasn't, thanks to his sabotage. He looked at the pressure gauge and saw that the needle was well into the red area, indicating danger.

Steve gave up. He just sat down and gave up. He sat there and didn't think about anything except to wonder what was going to kill him first, that vile beast or this boiler. That's when he noticed something wet on his ass and looked down to see a pool of water on the deck where he was sitting. Oh well, I forgot to empty the bucket, he thought. Yea he'd really screwed that one up. Would probably get written up for dereliction of duty. That thought made him laugh. Then he began to laugh even harder and soon he was in hysterics.

All of a sudden he stopped laughing and began thinking. The water was coming from the bucket. The bucket had been catching water for a steam pipe. That steam pipe ran into a tunnel. That tunnel went down to the lake! Freedom! Steve got up and squeezed behind the boiler. He ran into the tunnel and where the pipes stopped the tunnel narrowed so that he had to crawl on his knees. He crawled faster than he had ever run in his life and yet it still seemed like a century had passed before he ran into something in the dark. He felt it with his good hand and realized that it was a steel grating at the end of the tunnel. Yes, he could now hear the waves lapping at the shore of Lake Michigan.

No! The grating was chained! All this way to be stopped by a little grating. He pushed with all his might on the grating and it gave way just enough to reveal a small opening. But that was it, he couldn't move it another inch. He knew he only had seconds before the boiler would explode, and abandoning all feelings of pain, Steve made his body fit through that opening. How he did it I do not know, but a person can do amazing things when he is desperate. His body twisted in all directions, but soon he was out and rolling down the hill where he came to rest next to a road that ran along the shore of the lake.

Steve tried to get up but his body wouldn't obey, so he just laid there staring up at the sky. Then the night was turned to day as a terrific explosion rocked the base. A column of flame shot out of the tunnel above Steve and then retreated back. Up where the school used to be he could see nothing but flames.

“Got you mother fucker!” Steve began to yell, “Got you!” Then the darkness closed in as he lost consciousness.

LEVINWORTH, KANSAS.

A little white window opened on a little white door attached to a little white room that Steve was sitting in.

“Letter for you, Johnson,” a voice said flipping the letter through the window and then closing it.

Steve stirred from a trance that he had been in since they had brought him here. This was the first time he had been allowed to read mail. With his good hand he snatched it up from the floor and tore it open. It was from his mother.

*Dear Steve,*

*How are you doing son? All right I hope. We could be doing better here but we'll make it. You'll have to forgive your father for not writing. He's not taking this too well, but he'll come around. Son, I know you think you had good reasons for doing what you did. God only knows I don't understand them but that's not important now. What is important is that you get better and come home to us. I know that must seem impossible now, but one day we'll see each other again. Well, that is about as much as I can write now. Oh yea, Susan said to tell you hi. She's graduated now and went off to college. Well, son I love you. Take care.*

*Love,*

*Mom*

Steve held the letter to his chest and began to cry. He cried so hard that he didn't even notice that something was wrapping around his neck until it was too late. A black and charred tentacle led from a heating vent in the wall to his neck. It contracted, strongly closing about his neck. Steve let out a strangled scream that echoed down the halls of a place where screams were heard on a daily basis.

*The End*