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HONK IF YOU DON'T LIKE NOISE

by William C. Anderson

I'm sure there is a little Walter Mitty in all of us. We weren't galloping Rocinante along Interstate 15 through the shimmering Nevada desert; I was in the cockpit of a Liberator B-24 cruising at 26,000 feet, leading a wing of bombers over Germany. "OK, lads," I growled into the microphone, "tuck it in close. We want to make a tight bombing pattern on that Messerschmidt aircraft factory."

I turned to my copilot. "Copilot, we're turning onto the bomb run. Pour a head on my coffee."

"Not now," said my copilot.

I looked over at my redhead, who had a white-knuckle grip on a book she was reading. "I thought a cup of coffee would go well. Since you're close to the Thermos, it being in your lap and all, you might like to..."

"Later. I'm about to find out who is responsible for the dastardly deeds."

It's a sad state of affairs when Stephen King outranks Walter Mitty. Hoping to dispel the boredom of the lonely desert road, I turned on the CB radio. Maybe a trucker would talk to me. A huge 18-wheeler had filled my rearview mirror and was blinking its turn signals, preparing to pass. I listened a moment, and there was no traffic chatter.

"Breaker 19. Blue semi passing the motorhome: Got your ears on?"

There was a pause, which I expected to be interrupted by the usual stentorian tones of a bored truck driver. Then, "Roger, motorhome. Comin' back at ye. My call sign is Hanky Panky."

I was startled to hear not the deep drawl of a tired trucker, but the very mellifluous tones of a feminine female.

"My handle's Red Riter," I said. "That's an interesting handle you've got."

"Ain't it. My husband gave it to me. Wilbur's such a card. He's back in the cab asleep. Where you headed, Red Riter?"

"Boulder, Colorado."

"Hey, we're headin' to old Denver town ourselves. Got a truck full of California strawberries.

That's why we're making tracks. You know strawberries. They got a shelf life of about 20 minutes."

"So you and your husband are sleeping in relays?"

"That's a 10-4, good buddy. This old diesel ain't been turned off since we left Ventura. Hey, thanks for blinking your lights when it was safe to swing back into your lane. Ya know, most motorhome drivers don't do that."

"Most motorhome drivers don't rap enough with truckers. I learned a lot from the old knights of the road."

"Ah guess. You know the old sayin': Trucker spend most of their lives cussin' out motorhome drivers until they get enough money to retire and buy a motorhome so they can spend the rest of their lives cussin' out truckers."

"Roger that. There's bound to be friction. Motorhome drivers are mostly retired, or vacationers just tootin' along, smelling the roses. Truckers don't make a buck unless they scratch gravel. Sometimes we have a clash of philosophies."

"My pet peeve about the bread-box drivers is that sometimes ya find one that won't take a turnoff when there's dozens of vehicles tryin' to pass. Like that case in Idaho when the motorhome driver ignored the people behind him who were trying to tell him his wheel was blazin'. He actually started a forest fire."

"Well, all the truckers don't wear halos either. Truck accidents last year were at an all-time high."

"That's a 10-4, good buddy. More trucks on the road than ever. We got our share of dingbats. But these truck accidents ain't always the truckers' fault. Some of these hot-rodders that like to dart in front of us, or tailgate in our blind spot, are just askin' for it. A lotta people don't know it takes over a city block to stop this sucker when it's rollin' at freeway speed. Best advice: Don't tailgate; if the driver can't see our backup mirrors, we can't see his vehicle. And never zip in front of us and slam on your brakes—unless you got a thing for cemeteries."

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