The Bubble

Bruce Butterfield*

*Iowa State University

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IT WASN'T Lem's idea to have anyone find out about it. Besides, he was indifferent to the spectacle and excitement of the "outside" world. Lem was content to ignore the unusual, and when the unusual was placed before him, he ignored it.

Unfortunately, this could not go on forever, the farmer thought to himself. Sooner or later some city folk would find out about it and in the onrush his peace of mind would be destroyed. This came all too quickly.

The nearest neighbor was twelve miles away and that was too close.

"But what is it?" the neighbor asked.
Lem looked up at the thing hovering over his chicken house. He took his time about spitting out the first wad of tobacco, then he answered, "A bubble."
"A bubble?"
"Aw, hell," Lem growled suddenly. "Can't ya see it's a bubble?"
"Yeh, but I never seen a bubble like that!"
Lem prepared for the second shot of tobacco. "Course not," he said with profound country dignity.
"What are you goin' to do?" asked the neighbor.
"What do you mean?"
"Ain't you gonna tell somebody 'bout it?"
"Course not! Why should I?" Lem asked.
"I don't like it," declared the neighbor. "Mighty strange around this country. I never seen nothin' like that before. I never seen nothin' like that before. Don't it scare ya?"
"Why should it?" Lem was chewing at a vigorous pace. "It's just a bubble." He spat cleanly over the fence in front of him.
“Must be fifteen feet long,” said the neighbor, tipping his head up.

“Ain’t either. It’s twenty feet long, thirty feet wide. I measured it.”

“A lop-sided bubble!” said Lem’s visitor. “But how could you measure it?”

“It comes down nights and rests on the ground. I took the stepladder and measured it. In the daytime it just stays up there above my chickens.”

“I still don’t like it,” snorted the neighbor, squinting at the thing in the air. “What with all them a-томic gadgets and bombs and things, a person can’t trust nothin’!”

“Atomic!” Lem exclaimed between chews.

“The thing might be dangerous. It might blow up!”

“I hope it does,” said Lem. “Maybe I’ll get more eggs if the hell is scared outa my chickens!”

The man saw nothing funny in the remark. He just stood there and watched the bubble. “Well,” he said a moment later, “I ain’t stayin’ here long enough to find out what the thing’s goin’ to do. I’ll see ya later.”

Lem had had enough foolishness for one day. He didn’t wave good-bye to the farmer, he just returned to his house. The wife had already set the table for the evening meal.

She was pleasant to him when he sat down. “Bubble’s still there, I see.”

Lem soured right away. “Yeh,” he growled.

“The neighbor say anything?”

“Yeh.”

“Hope he don’t bring anybody out here,” she went on. “Hope not.”

“Wonder what time it is.”

“About six,” Lem told her as he prepared his plate.

“I guess it’ll be right on schedule,” she replied, going to the window. She watched the bubble as Lem just dug into a bowl of sweet potatoes.

The bubble moved from side to side until the clock struck six and then, as if it was inhaling, it blew green mist inside itself. Before Lem could finish his meal, the bubble was a bright green and had lost its transparency. His wife, Martha, watched it as she had watched the birth of one of
the prize calves. "Right on time," she declared. "Still nice and green. I like green."

Lem's mouth was still full. "Sit down, Martha, ham's gettin' cold," he grumbled.

"Sure is a pretty sight," she said, as she returned to the table.

"It ain't good," Lem said. "We'll have all kinds of people trampin' around here. It ain't right botherin' peaceful folk!"

"Least it gives us a little change. Things get kinda dull around the farm between fairs and such."

Lem didn't answer, he just stuffed a potato in his mouth. "Change!" he tried to say.

Lem finally lost his patience when the fourth day after the discovery came along. So far, the neighbor had brought the town editor, the sheriff, three other farmers, and a man from the local tavern who was in no condition to judge anything.

Later that day, Lem was confronted by more than just a few people.

"I'm from Life Magazine," repeated the man in the dark blue suit. "What's your story on this thing?"

"I keep tellin' you folks there's no story!" cried Lem impatiently. "I don't want to be bothered with all this hub-bub! You people keep comin' back and givin' me all this damn commotion . . ."

"Come on, Pop!" pestered the reporter. "You've got a story here, and the public wants to be informed."

"Yeh?" Lem barked. "And as soon as they get the news they'll make a big thing out of it, and all the movie people'll be out here and me and my wife won't get a thing done!"

"I'll have my assistant take some pictures," the man said quickly.

Lem watched the photographers run back and forth across the lawn.

"How about this thing?" shouted another newspaperman. "Any scientists been down here yet?"

"Course not!" Lem waved his hand in the air. "They got better things to do than come trailin' down here and botherin' me!"
The guest didn't take the hint. "Now you said that the bubble was forty feet long and . . ."

"No such thing. You can see for yourself it ain't that big!" said Lem. "That's the trouble! You damn newspaper fellas stretch everything all outa kilter!"

"We're just trying to give the public what it wants, Pop!" "Oh, hell," Lem hissed. He leaned against the fence around the chicken coop. The bubble was still floating in the air above the crowded yard. It was transparent again.

"When do you remember first seeing it?" came a question.

Lem started chewing tobacco as fast as he could. "I don't remember," he said. "I just woke up one morning and my wife says to me, 'There's a bubble in the back,' so I went out to look and there it was."

"Then what did you do?"

"What I always do after I wake up. I went to the privy!" Lem answered, proud of his sarcasm.

The bubble interrupted any further questions by suddenly swaying from side to side. Within three minutes it had turned a horrible shade of orange, then red, then orange again. Lem breathed a sigh and rubbed his forehead. The bubble was still once again. As soon as the reporter could gain control of his speech, he fell into the routine of questions. "Does it . . . does it always do that?"

"Yeh, it's about noon," replied the farmer. "Has a little trouble making up its mind about this time. Changes colors right at feeding time for the pigs."

"Whew!" sighed the reporter. "This is too much!" He wrote furiously on the small pad he took from his coat pocket. "Does it always change to orange at noon?"

"Never misses. At five in the morning it changes to blue. Then at night around six it gets green. My wife likes green."

"What else does it do?"

"Just settles, that's all," Lem answered with a bored expression. "Comes down to the ground at night, right near the chicken coop."

"Did you try puncturing it?"

"Huh?"
“Poking it or breaking it with a pin or a knife or something?”

Lem just shook his head. “You know, now that’s a thought. But I don’t think my wife would like that. Women’re funny about things sometimes.”

“I’d like to talk to your wife.”

“She’s in the kitchen.” Lem pointed.

The reporter entered the kitchen, and a host of television and radio trucks entered Lem’s back yard and driveway. Lem had all he could do to keep from choking on his wad. Before he could utter a sound, a fat, burly individual was shouting orders. “Okay, you guys, unload right about here. Get Hansen on the phone and tell him we’re ready to set up the remote!”

“Now just a damn minute!” Lem blasted, tramping across the lawn toward the first truck. “Who in blazes are you with all this . . .”

The fat man didn’t wait for further orders; he shouted to the rest of the men, and the entire unit retreated to the road. The Life reporter carefully made his way out of the kitchen and when he saw Lem standing ready with a shotgun, he made a clumsy getaway down the cinder-splashed road.

Martha was standing on the porch looking at the torn-up yard. The bubble still hung in mid-air above the chicken coop.

“They’re all alike,” Lem spat. “That damned bubble’s made more trouble for us in the last few days than a season of drought. There’s just one thing for us to do, Martha.” Lem started for the bubble.

A horrible thought entered Martha’s mind. She caught Lem’s arm. “Wait!” she cried.

“Wait nothin’!” Lem argued. He finished loading the second chamber in the shotgun.

“But Lem, maybe you shouldn’t! Maybe it’s wrong to shoot at it!”

“I’m through worryin’ about the blasted thing!”

Martha was clinging to her husband’s arm. Her voice was high and excited. “No, Lem! Don’t!”
“Leave me be!” cried Lem, pushing her out of the way. He aimed at the bubble. Martha covered her face with her hands and waited. The noise of the blast scattered all the chickens over the yard and the air was filled with smoke. Lem lowered the shotgun. Martha was afraid to look at first. She opened one eye and then the other. The shock was too much for Lem. Martha’s mouth remained open, but she couldn’t talk.

Above them now were seven smaller, lop-sided bubbles, each a different color. Lem looked at the array of objects and just sighed in disgust.

“It ain’t right,” he moaned. “It just ain’t right to invade a man’s peace!” Then the first bubble changed from red to yellow.

*Bruce Butterfield, Sc. & H. Soph.*

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**Flamenco**

A gentle stroke of fingers swift and sure
Across responsive strings,
A wisp of sound, afloat upon the sea
Of eager silence, sings.
The master’s skill sets free the rushing surge
Of melody.

The wail of violins from gypsy caves,
The pulsing throb of drums,
The click of heels, the stamp of dancing feet . . .
A world of dreams becomes
Reality encased within the heart’s
Tympanic beat.

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