

Strange Creatures III

Pulp Cryptids

Edited by
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Editor's Note

Many of the tales presented in this publication were first published as light entertainment in various magazines. Overall, they contain a number of elements involving cryptozoological investigation. Some stories include precursors copied by later (and sometimes more famous) authors. Technically, not all of the creatures are strictly cryptozoological, although all are strongly biological in theme even if they meander slightly into the paranormal or end up “mutants.” Some tales are of higher quality than others, but I feel that all will be of great interest to those who are gaining an interest and appreciation for the diversity in cryptofiction.

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The Air Serpent

Will A. Page

Gentlemen: The report which I now have the honor to submit to your honorable body is so extraordinary, and deals with facts so difficult to prove—beyond my own mere word and the records of my barograph which indicate the approximate height reached by my machine—that it is with much trepidation that I now appear before you. In presenting to you the results of my recent exploration of the upper ether, and the mysterious disappearance of my late mechanic, John Ald, of which cognizance has already been taken by the police, I realize that I am taxing the limit of credulity; yet before passing final judgment upon the extraordinary narrative I am about to place before you, let me call your attention to the fact that my record hitherto in the annals of aviation has been a story of unquestioned achievements, of daring which has often been characterized as reckless, and of an earnest and constant effort to discover new truths in that wonderful air world which has been opened up to exploration through the recent development of the aëroplane.

I cannot refrain, also, from reminding your learned body that pioneers in all fields of endeavor suffer martyrdom from the unthinking and the unbelieving. Half a century ago, a ribald rhymster mocked at Darius Green and his flying machine; yet within the brief space of half-a-dozen years, the perfect aëroplane expresses of to-day have been evolved before our very eyes. Even last year, when a new world's altitude record of 16,374 feet was established by the lamented Renegal, your sub-committee on altitude adopted a resolution that the limit of attainment in the upper ether had been reached; yet less than two months after, Santuza, the daring Spanish aviator, flying his 200-horse-power Mercadio tri-plane with the improved ailerons, reached the incredible height of 23,760 feet, when the ink in his barograph ran out and refused to register a greater height, although Santuza is of the belief that he climbed almost 1,000 feet higher.

To pause for a moment from the subject nearest our hearts, let me only speak for a moment of the derision and ridicule heaped upon Columbus when he planned his first voyage; of the insults and scorn directed at Galileo; or of the thousands of martyrs in the realm of science, invention and discovery who, at first denounced as fakers and preposterous humbugs, were proven after a lapse of time to have been honest, sincere and truthful in their claims.

Bearing these facts of history in mind, permit me to present herewith a brief, accurate and truthful account of all that happened during my recent ascent when, with the aid of John Ald, my invaluable and greatly mourned mechanic, I established an altitude record which I do not believe will ever be exceeded, if indeed it is reached by other aviators within our time. For not only are the difficulties such that our machines will have to be improved in some miraculous manner to go higher, but there are living, breathing obstacles to further exploration of the upper ether which will make all such experiments extremely hazardous, and probably fatal, to even the most venturesome aviator. For I have the important announcement to make, almost beyond your powers of belief, that I have discovered that the upper ether is inhabited. This astounding discovery was made simultaneously by me and my mechanic, John Ald, for whom the voyage of exploration brought death in an unprecedented and most deplorable manner. Had not the mysterious creature of the air claimed my poor mechanic as its first earthly victim, he would now be standing here beside me upon this platform, to corroborate my unsupported testimony with his own verbal report of the most extraordinary experience that ever befell mortal man.

As your honorable body well knows, I have secured patents from time to time for improvements in the Gesler engines with which my aëroplanes have been fitted the past two years. By enlarging the plane surface and fitting four blades to each propeller instead of two, I have been enabled to increase the speed record to 97.16 miles per hour, this having been officially accomplished at the July Palm Beach meeting. Having established a new speed record, which I confidently think will stand for some months, I determined to try for new altitude records, but in view of the numerous unfortunate accidents resulting from experiments in the upper ether, I determined to secure safety at all hazards. I therefore reconstructed my last imported Garnier tri-plane so that the improved ailerons invented by Santuza could be applied not only to the main planes, but to the forward controlling and lifting planes as well. This preserved the lateral balance to such a perfect degree that it was easily possible to make a turn in eight seconds in a 25-mile wind, without banking the machine more than 30 degrees. I found, also, that by fitting the new plane with three propellers, three Gesler engines, and three gasoline tanks of ample size, I could feel reasonably certain that my power would not be exhausted without warning, for a single turn of the lever would put any or all of the three engines in operation, singly or together, and if I wished to economize on power, I could climb with only one propeller, holding the others in reserve for possible accidents or in case I wished to combat any of the strong air currents sometimes

encountered above the 12,000 foot level.

It was a clear August day, late in the afternoon, when John and a couple of hangers-on wheeled the big tri-plane out of the *hangar* at Belmont Park, the beautiful Long Island aviation ground where aërial history has been made in the past two years. Both John and I were determined that before another sun should rise, we would bring back as a trophy from the air a record for altitude that would never be broken. How little we knew at what a price we would succeed, or through what dangers we would pass before I returned to that dear old *hangar* where we had chummed together and experimented so much.

I was determined to go after the record at nightfall, because so far above the clouds the sun's rays prove a trifle too glaring. It was undoubtedly the tremendous light from the sun which affected the sight of poor Renegal when his machine fell from a height of 14,800 feet when he tried to exceed his own altitude record at San Francisco. Therefore I determined to do my high flying at night, when the moon was at the quarter and gave just enough light for us to see clearly and distinctly after we had passed from the lower levels.

The gasoline tanks were carefully filled, the engines tested, a supply of light provisions placed in the basket between the two seats, and the oxygen tanks carefully strapped in place on both of us, with the connecting tubes and the helmets under the arms ready to be applied when we had passed the 15,000-foot level into the upper strata where the rarefied air made the oxygen tanks a necessity.

Egerton Brooks, the official secretary of the Montauk Aëro Club, personally adjusted the official barograph of the American Aëronautical Society, and sealed it with his own seal.

"I hope you will get the record above 25,000 feet," he cried, as the mechanics began to start the engines. "It is a new Angiers barograph, adjusted to register up to 50,000 feet, though of course no living thing could attain such an absurd height. You will notice that it is surrounded by cork, so that if you fall into the water, the record will not be injured or lost."

Giving Brooks a hearty hand-shake and a few words of farewell, I gave the signal and Ald started the middle engine, No. 2.

"You may expect me about midnight," I cried in farewell. "Keep the beacons

burning until then, and if I don't return you will know I have been blown out of my course."

The great whirring of the propellers drowned further speech. I rang the forward bell, the mechanics let go, and like an eagle the tri-plane sprang aloft.

Forward, upward, over the field, over the grandstand, and ever onward and upward the giant tri-plane mounted. I had tilted the lifting forward planes to 28 degrees, and now started engine No. 1. The added power sent us upward at nearly twice the speed first employed, and in a few seconds the earth below was but a dull, dark, blurred mass, with now and then a faint twinkling from an electric light far below.

The early twilight faded into darkness when we had reached the 3,000 level and I directed Ald, who was looking after the engines behind me, to turn on the electric search-light. The warning came none too soon, for almost as I spoke there was a little fluttering, crashing sound as the machine plunged headlong into a flock of sea gulls which had not noticed our approach.

"Better look at the compass," shouted Ald. "You are out at sea."

Brushing two of the dead gulls from the plane at my side, and turning on the pocket electric light which was placed at my left over the map and compass, I soon realized that we had indeed been following a straight course across Long Island and were now probably over the Fire Island light. Shifting the vertical planes in the rear a trifle I set them at 18 degrees, which would mean that the tri-plane would describe great circles approximately ten miles in diameter, as it gradually ploughed upward through the atmosphere.

The earth was now entirely out of sight. In daylight, as all experienced aviators know, the earth becomes practically invisible at the 7,000-foot level, even on a clear day. On cloudy days one is lost to the earth after ascending a few hundred feet. Just as the waiting crowds below at an aviation meeting find it impossible to distinguish even a speck on the horizon ten minutes after a swift machine leaves the earth, so the aviator aloft on his speedy career finds himself absolutely alone in a new world.

The sensation is indescribable. One feels that one has opened up a new territory, discovered a new realm, in which he alone is king. Preserving the balance when thus out of sight of the earth is not as difficult as one might

imagine, as the laws of gravitation operate through the unseen space, and one has only to watch the delicate mechanism of the anograph to ascertain whether one is losing the equilibrium of the machine.

Slowly the needle moved round and round on the barograph, steadily registering our ascent. Within the first hour, when darkness had completely shut us off from the rest of the universe, we had passed the 10,000-foot level, which for almost a year in the early days of aviation had been a prize goal for the amateur aviators before the business had been placed on the firm footing it now enjoys.

Then came the moon. It rose at 9:02 on the 75th meridian, but as we were nearly three miles above the horizon, we saw it much sooner. It seemed reflected in some faint, misty manner by the water which he knew must be far below us, but as we mounted higher and higher, even the faint reflection disappeared.

At 9:37 P.M. Ald leaned over my shoulder and grunted.

“Fifteen thousand feet,” he muttered. “We can do it faster if we use the other engine.”

“No,” I replied. “Hold engine No. 3 for emergencies.”

“Emergencies?” he repeated, with a laugh. “Good Lord, what emergencies can happen now? What? As if the tri-planes are not as safe as an express train or a submarine nowadays.”

I did not argue with him. Ald was noted for his fondness for a controversy. I merely signaled to him to get the oxygen helmets ready, for the increased difficulty of breathing showed me that the rarefied air was fast becoming too thin for us to breathe with comfort. I noticed, too, that our speed seemed to diminish slightly, as the planes found the supporting air becoming thinner and thinner. I fondly reflected, however, that the third engine would remedy this when it became necessary to get more speed to keep aloft on the last leg of our upward climb. However, we were soon inside the oxygen helmets, and once more I could take a long, full breath of life-giving ozone.

The helmets of course made further conversation impossible, but long experience in the higher altitudes had perfected a system of signals between

my mechanic and myself which enabled us to carry on a conversation fairly well.

John leaned over my shoulder at 10:38 and pointed to the needle of the barograph. It registered 22,380 feet. He nudged me.

I understood that nudge perfectly. It meant that in less than ten minutes more of climbing, we would have passed the best record of Santuza, officially 23,760 feet, and would have the world's altitude record within our grasp.

So absorbed were we in watching the barograph that we both neglected the engines, and it was only a miracle that something did not happen when engine No. 2 developed a hot bearing because of lack of oil. I sharply reprimanded John for not attending to such details, and bade him by signals to attend to his business, while I would watch the needle.

Up, around it moved. First it reached the 23,000 mark, then hundred by hundred, ten by ten, it moved on and on. I turned and gave a silent signal of joy when we passed Santuza's mark. Then I set forward determined to establish a world altitude record that would never be broken. And I succeeded.

It must have been shortly after 11 o'clock when the barograph registered 30,000 feet. This gigantic achievement, nearly six miles away from the earth, higher than the loftiest mountain peak, higher than any balloon had ever floated, should have satisfied us. I deeply regret that we were not content to rest upon these laurels, but with a foolhardiness for which I can never forgive myself, I tried to see how much higher we could go without using the reserve supply of gasoline contained in the tank of engine No. 3—which fortunately, we had not yet started. In fact, I venture the assertion that had it not been for the precaution of providing a third engine neither of us would have been saved from the catastrophe that followed.

Onward, upward, past the 33,000 foot level the sturdy tri-plane, steady as a ship in a calm, continued to forge. When 35,000 was reached I turned and signaled John for his advice. The poor fellow, who didn't realize how near he was to the end of all earthly things, answered to keep on going. So we went up past the 36,000 foot level.

And then we saw IT.

Never to my dying day, gentlemen, will I forget the horror of that moment. Never will I be able to efface from memory the dread picture of that gigantic monster of the air, lazily floating along on the ether, scarcely moving the great, finnish wings with which a wonderful creator had endowed it. Although the cold was almost unendurable, and I had thought myself as nearly frozen as possible, I felt a sudden stiffness permeate my veins and I shook with terror. I felt John grasp my shoulder, his hand shaking as with the palsy, and though neither of us could speak because of the oxygen helmets, we both felt a grim horror which would no doubt have stricken us dumb under any circumstances.

For there, almost in front of us, a trifle to the right, coming in an opposite direction, and gazing at us with mild curiosity and perhaps astonishment, was a gigantic monster, utterly unlike anything I have ever seen before. The light from the electric searchlight cast a weird reflection upon the great creature, and this light, I believe, was one instrument which proved our salvation temporarily, for it struck the giant monster fairly in the eyes, and seemed to blind him.

The monster—or air serpent, for so I must call it—seemed to be about ninety or a hundred feet in length. Its physical structure seemed a cross between a bat and a snake. There were undulating movements as it slowly drifted, together with flapping of the twenty or thirty batlike wings which projected from its sides. The head was enormous, and it was not the head of a bird. Two great eyes, approximately a foot in diameter each, glared and blinked over a cavernous maw which opened and closed spasmodically as the creature breathed. This much we saw, and then as the swift tri-plane shot by almost under the creature's startled eyes, I felt a sudden blast of hot air which made the tri-plane quiver and tremble for a moment. Then we had passed the creature and had sped forth into the darkness, for the moonlight was very faint.

I felt John grasp me for support. He was trembling. I turned, pointed toward engine No. 3, and at the same time deflected the forward controlling plane to an angle of 20 degrees, determined to make the quickest and yet safest descent on record. I had no desire to get a second look at the monster of the air.

The jarring of the third engine made a terrific noise, but we could not hear it. The stalwart tri-plane shook under the added pressure, and we sprang forward at a speed which I estimated at 80 miles an hour. The needle of the barograph began to settle quickly, as we dropped to the 35,000-foot level.

Suddenly I felt John's convulsive grasp upon my shoulder. I turned, and he pointed off to the left.

"It's there, sir," he cried, as plainly by his signals as though he had spoken out loud.

I looked as he indicated. There, two hundred feet away, following us almost without an effort while we were making 80 miles an hour, was the air serpent.

I shifted the vertical plane sharply to the right and veered off to escape. Almost before I had settled down to a straight course ahead, I felt again that hot, nauseous breath, which I knew came from the giant monster hovering so near us.

John was trembling all over. We were descending fast, for the barograph now registered 33,750, and our course ahead was being made at 80 miles an hour, yet that gigantic, wonderful, monstrous THING seemed able to keep up with us without an effort.

I determined to try strategy. Remembering how the eyes had blinked at the electric searchlight, I suddenly turned a trifle to the left, shifted the searchlight, and struck the creature with it squarely in the eyes.

The air serpent backed off instantly, I turned sharply to the right, extinguished the searchlight as I did so and lowered the forward planes to 25 degrees, a dangerous angle for a descent, as all aviators know, but I was determined to escape from the monster if possible.

But it was futile. Before the barograph showed 30,000 feet, I felt the hot breath again, and this time it came *from beneath*.

With incredible ingenuity, probably realizing from the changing air pressure that its prey was trying to escape into the lower ether, the monster had placed himself *under* the aëroplane, and I firmly believe that if I had not suddenly shifted the forward lateral planes to the horizontal, we would have struck the creature from above.

I turned to John, mutely asking advice. He was quivering with fear. And I too began to tremble anew when I realized how completely this mysterious monster of the air had us in his power.

I switched on the searchlight again and aimed it below us. There he was, the giant, undulating, fin-like creature, his sixty wings flapping noiselessly, his hulking, soft, snaky body moving forward without an effort, and the great head and the cavernous maw turned upward as if it had not yet determined what manner of bird or beast this was which had invaded the upper realms where this creature alone seemed able to exist.

I turned the plane sharply to the right, and keeping the searchlight pointing downward, shifted the forward planes again for a descent. It was our only chance and we had to take it.

But the enemy was vigilant and ever-watchful. It followed us curiously to the 25,000-foot level. Then it evidently became oppressed by the thickness of the atmosphere, and decided we had gone far enough. With a quick, sudden lashing of the fins, it dived under us, the hot breath again making the planes tremble, and loomed up straight ahead. In another moment we would have struck it had I not tilted the vertical planes sharply to the left. I turned completely around in less than three seconds, the quickest turn on record, I believe, but while the strain on the ailerons was terrific, the tri-plane held on its course.

But we could not escape the enemy. The giant monster merely gave about two jumps, and with incredible speed, repeated the maneuver. Once more I jammed the wheel sharply to the right, and once more the ailerons creaked as the strain of the sudden turn almost tore them loose.

Then came the catastrophe. The next time the monster leaped before us I flashed the searchlight into its great wicked eyes. It blinked and ducked, and in an instant we had passed over it.

I firmly believe that John Ald expected me to execute another sharp turn. Perhaps he leaned too far over in an effort to help maintain the balance. Perhaps fear and the terror took possession of his heart, and he thought the end was near anyhow. Whether he fell or jumped from his seat I know not, but when I turned my head the instant after we had passed the creature, I realized that I was alone.

I swung about instantly, and felt an ominous snap about the ailerons under the terrific strain of the turn, but fortunately all held. Then I directed the searchlight downward, and what I saw by the brilliant flashing rays I shall never forget.

There, three hundred feet below me, I saw the giant monster of the air, his great maw pointing upward. A dark object hurtled through the air, falling like a stone. It passed the startled gaze of the air serpent and fell into space below. Quicker than I can speak the words the monster darted downward after the falling object. Sick with horror, scarcely able to work the controlling levers, I saw by the faint, flickering rays of the searchlight, down below, the monster suddenly pause in its mad dash. It had caught the falling object and swallowed it in its maw.

How I reached the lower levels I know not. My arms worked the planes automatically, the terrific descent was made in thirty minutes, and sometime about midnight I landed on the sandy beach of the south shore of Long Island near Montauk Point. Too weak to remove the oxygen helmet, which fortunately was charged for twelve hours, I lay there in a daze. About five o'clock some fishermen found me and aided in removing the helmet. The tri-plane, slightly injured by its sudden contact with the beach, was taken apart and shipped back to New York, and I personally brought the barograph, still sealed as I thought, to the rooms of the Montauk Aëro Club. There a cruel disappointment awaited me, for it appears that the shock of landing broke the seal, and the record, while perfectly clear, could not be accepted as official without the official seal showing that it had not been tampered with.

I made a preliminary report on the extraordinary adventure to the newspaper reporters, and notified the police of the accident to my mechanic, but only to meet with such ridicule that I speedily decided to delay my report for careful reflection and consideration. The accepted version of the death of John Ald is that he dropped into the ocean, but gentlemen, I have made here my report, and in view of my hitherto unquestioned word, I believe I have the right to demand that it be accepted as authentic. Some day a venturesome air-man will penetrate to the upper levels, five miles from the earth, and discover new evidence to corroborate my unsupported word. And then, gentlemen, the world will realize that just as in the farthest depths of the sea, there are strange monsters we have never seen, so in the thin upper strata of air there are tenuous creatures living in a world of their own, which we have never seen.

The Monster of Lake LaMetrie

Wardon Allan Curtis

Being the narration of James McLennegan, M.D., Ph.D.

*Lake LaMetrie, Wyoming
April 1st, 1899*

Prof. William G. Breyfogle,
University of Taychobera.

Dear Friend—Inclosed you will find some portions of the diary it has been my life-long custom to keep, arranged in such a manner as to narrate connectedly the history of some remarkable occurrences that have taken place here during the last three years. Years and years ago, I heard vague accounts of a strange lake high up in an almost inaccessible part of the mountains of Wyoming. Various incredible tales were related of it, such as that it was inhabited by creatures which elsewhere on the globe are found only as fossils of a long vanished time.

The lake and its surroundings are of volcanic origin, and not the least strange thing about the lake is that it is subject to periodic disturbances, which take the form of a mighty boiling in the centre, as if a tremendous artesian well were rushing up there from the bowels of the earth. The lake rises for a time, almost filling the basin of black rocks in which it rests, and then recedes, leaving on the shores mollusks and trunks of strange trees and bits of strange ferns which no longer grow—on the earth, at least—and are to be seen elsewhere only in coal measures and beds of stone. And he who casts hook and line into the dusky waters, may haul forth ganoid fishes completely covered with bony plates.

All of this is described in the account written by Father LaMetrie years ago, and he there advances the theory that the earth is hollow, and that its interior is inhabited by the forms of plant and animal life which disappeared from its surface ages ago, and that the lake connects with this interior region. Symmes' theory of polar orifices is well known to you. It is amply corroborated. I know that it is true now. Through the great holes at the poles, the sun sends light and heat into the interior.

Three years ago this month, I found my way through the mountains here to

Lake LaMetrie accompanied by a single companion, our friend, young Edward Framingham. He was led to go with me not so much by scientific fervor, as by a faint hope that his health might be improved by a sojourn in the mountains, for he suffered from an acute form of dyspepsia that at times drove him frantic.

Beneath an overhanging scarp of the wall of rock surrounding the lake, we found a rudely-built stone-house left by the old cliff dwellers. Though somewhat draughty, it would keep out the infrequent rains of the region, and serve well enough as a shelter for the short time which we intended to stay.

The extracts from my diary follow:

April 29th, 1896.

I have been occupied during the past few days in gathering specimens of the various plants which are cast upon the shore by the waves of this remarkable lake. Framingham does nothing but fish, and claims that he has discovered the place where the lake communicates with the interior of the earth, if, indeed, it does, and there seems to be little doubt of that. While fishing at a point near the centre of the lake, he let down three pickerel lines tied together, in all nearly three hundred feet, without finding bottom. Coming ashore, he collected every bit of line, string, strap, and rope in our possession, and made a line five hundred feet long, and still he was unable to find the bottom.

May 2nd, Evening.

The past three days have been profitably spent in securing specimens, and mounting and pickling them for preservation. Framingham has had a bad attack of dyspepsia this morning and is not very well. Change of climate had a brief effect for the better upon his malady, but seems to have exhausted its force much sooner than one would have expected, and he lies on his couch of dry water-weeds, moaning piteously. I shall take him back to civilization as soon as he is able to be moved.

It is very annoying to have to leave when I have scarcely begun to probe the mysteries of the place. I wish Framingham had not come with me. The lake is roaring wildly without, which is strange, as it has been perfectly calm hitherto, and still more strange because I can neither feel nor hear the rushing of the wind, though perhaps that is because it is blowing from the south, and we are protected from it by the cliff. But in that case there ought to be no waves on this

shore. The roaring seems to grow louder momentarily. Framingham——

May 3rd, Morning.

Such a night of terror we have been through. Last evening, as I sat writing in my diary, I heard a sudden hiss, and, looking down, saw wriggling across the earthen floor what I at first took to be a serpent of some kind, and then discovered was a stream of water which, coming in contact with the fire, had caused the startling hiss. In a moment, other streams had darted in, and before I had collected my senses enough to move, the water was two inches deep everywhere and steadily rising.

Now I knew the cause of the roaring, and, rousing Framingham, I half dragged him, half carried him to the door, and digging our feet into the chinks of the wall of the house, we climbed up to its top. There was nothing else to do, for above us and behind us was the unscalable cliff, and on each side the ground sloped away rapidly, and it would have been impossible to reach the high ground at the entrance to the basin.

After a time we lighted matches, for with all this commotion there was little air stirring, and we could see the water, now half-way up the side of the house, rushing to the west with the force and velocity of the current of a mighty river, and every little while it hurled tree-trunks against the house-walls with a terrific shock that threatened to batter them down. After an hour or so, the roaring began to decrease, and finally there was an absolute silence. The water, which reached to within a foot of where we sat, was at rest, neither rising nor falling.

Presently a faint whispering began and became a stertorous breathing, and then a rushing like that of the wind and a roaring rapidly increasing in volume, and the lake was in motion again, but this time the water and its swirling freight of tree-trunks flowed by the house toward the east, and was constantly falling, and out in the centre of the lake the beams of the moon were darkly reflected by the sides of a huge whirlpool, streaking the surface of polished blackness down, down, down the vortex into the beginning of whose terrible depths we looked from our high perch.

This morning the lake is back at its usual level. Our mules are drowned, our boat destroyed, our food damaged, my specimens and some of my instruments injured, and Framingham is very ill. We shall have to depart soon, although I dislike exceedingly to do so, as the disturbance of last night, which is clearly

like the one described by Father LaMetrie, has undoubtedly brought up from the bowels of the earth some strange and interesting things. Indeed, out in the middle of the lake where the whirlpool subsided, I can see a large quantity of floating things; logs and branches, most of them probably, but who knows what else?

Through my glass I can see a tree-trunk, or rather stump, of enormous dimensions. From its width I judge that the whole tree must have been as large as some of the California big trees. The main part of it appears to be about ten feet wide and thirty feet long. Projecting from it and lying prone on the water is a limb, or root, some fifteen feet long, and perhaps two or three feet thick. Before we leave, which will be as soon as Framingham is able to go, I shall make a raft and visit the mass of driftwood, unless the wind providentially sends it ashore.

May 4th, Evening.

A day of most remarkable and wonderful occurrences. When I arose this morning and looked through my glass, I saw that the mass of driftwood still lay in the middle of the lake, motionless on the glassy surface, but the great black stump had disappeared. I was sure it was not hidden by the rest of the driftwood, for yesterday it lay some distance from the other logs, and there had been no disturbance of wind or water to change its position. I therefore concluded that it was some heavy wood that needed to become but slightly waterlogged to cause it to sink.

Framingham having fallen asleep at about ten, I sallied forth to look along the shores for specimens, carrying with me a botanical can, and a South American machete, which I have possessed since a visit to Brazil three years ago, where I learned the usefulness of this sabre-like thing. The shore was strewn with bits of strange plants and shells, and I was stooping to pick one up, when suddenly I felt my clothes plucked, and heard a snap behind me, and turning about I saw—but I won't describe it until I tell what I did, for I did not fairly see the terrible creature until I had swung my machete round and sliced off the top of its head, and then tumbled down into the shallow water where I lay almost fainting.

Here was the black log I had seen in the middle of the lake, a monstrous elasmosaurus, and high above me on the heap of rocks lay the thing's head with its long jaws crowded with sabre-like teeth, and its enormous eyes as big as saucers. I wondered that it did not move, for I expected a series of convulsions,

but no sound of a commotion was heard from the creature's body, which lay out of my sight on the other side of the rocks. I decided that my sudden cut had acted like a stunning blow and produced a sort of coma, and fearing lest the beast should recover the use of its muscles before death fully took place, and in its agony roll away into the deep water where I could not secure it, I hastily removed the brain entirely, performing the operation neatly, though with some trepidation, and restoring to the head the detached segment cut off by my machete, I proceeded to examine my prize.

In length of body, it is exactly twenty-eight feet. In the widest part it is eight feet through laterally, and is some six feet through from back to belly. Four great flippers, rudimentary arms and feet, and an immensely long, sinuous, swan-like neck, complete the creature's body. Its head is very small for the size of the body and is very round and a pair of long jaws project in front much like a duck's bill. Its skin is a leathery integument of a lustrous black, and its eyes are enormous hazel optics with a soft, melancholy stare in their liquid depths. It is an elasmosaurus, one of the largest of antediluvian animals. Whether of the same species as those whose bones have been discovered, I cannot say.

My examination finished, I hastened after Framingham, for I was certain that this waif from a long past age would arouse almost any invalid. I found him somewhat recovered from his attack of the morning, and he eagerly accompanied me to the elasmosaurus. In examining the animal afresh, I was astonished to find that its heart was still beating and that all the functions of the body except thought were being performed one hour after the thing had received its death blow, but I knew that the hearts of sharks have been known to beat hours after being removed from the body, and that decapitated frogs live, and have all the powers of motion, for weeks after their heads have been cut off.

I removed the top of the head to look into it and here another surprise awaited me, for the edges of the wound were granulating and preparing to heal. The colour of the interior of the skull was perfectly healthy and natural, there was no undue flow of blood, and there was every evidence that the animal intended to get well and live without a brain. Looking at the interior of the skull, I was struck by its resemblance to a human skull; in fact, it is, as nearly as I can judge, the size and shape of the brain-pan of an ordinary man who wears a seven-and-an-eighth hat. Examining the brain itself, I found it to be the size of an ordinary human brain, and singularly like it in general contour, though it is very inferior in fibre and has few convolutions.

May 5th, Morning.

Framingham is exceedingly ill and talks of dying, declaring that if a natural death does not put an end to his sufferings, he will commit suicide. I do not know what to do. All my attempts to encourage him are of no avail, and the few medicines I have no longer fit his case at all.

May 5th, Evening.

I have just buried Framingham's body in the sand of the lake shore. I performed no ceremonies over the grave, for perhaps the real Framingham is not dead, though such a speculation seems utterly wild. To-morrow I shall erect a cairn upon the mound, unless indeed there are signs that my experiment is successful, though it is foolish to hope that it will be.

At ten this morning, Framingham's qualms left him, and he set forth with me to see the elasmosaurus. The creature lay in the place where we left it yesterday, its position unaltered, still breathing, all the bodily functions performing themselves. The wound in its head had healed a great deal during the night, and I daresay will be completely healed within a week or so, such is the rapidity with which these reptilian organisms repair damages to themselves. Collecting three or four bushels of mussels, I shelled them and poured them down the elasmosaurus's throat. With a convulsive gasp, they passed down and the great mouth slowly closed.

"How long do you expect to keep the reptile alive?" asked Framingham.

"Until I have gotten word to a number of scientific friends, and they have come here to examine it. I shall take you to the nearest settlement and write letters from there. Returning, I shall feed the elasmosaurus regularly until my friends come, and we decide what final disposition to make of it. We shall probably stuff it."

"But you will have trouble in killing it, unless you hack it to pieces, and that won't do. Oh, if I only had the vitality of that animal. There is a monster whose vitality is so splendid that the removal of its brain does not disturb it. I should feel very happy if someone would remove my body. If I only had some of that beast's useless strength."

"In your case, the possession of a too active brain has injured the body,"

said I. "Too much brain exercise and too little bodily exercise are the causes of your trouble. It would be a pleasant thing if you had the robust health of the elasmosaurus, but what a wonderful thing it would be if that mighty engine had your intelligence."

I turned away to examine the reptile's wounds, for I had brought my surgical instruments with me, and intended to dress them. I was interrupted by a burst of groans from Framingham and turning, beheld him rolling on the sand in an agony. I hastened to him, but before I could reach him, he seized my case of instruments, and taking the largest and sharpest knife, cut his throat from ear to ear.

"Framingham, Framingham," I shouted and, to my astonishment, he looked at me intelligently. I recalled the case of the French doctor who, for some minutes after being guillotined, answered his friends by winking.

"If you hear me, wink," I cried. The right eye closed and opened with a snap. Ah, here the body was dead and the brain lived. I glanced at the elasmosaurus. Its mouth, half closed over its gleaming teeth, seemed to smile an invitation. The intelligence of the man and the strength of the beasts. The living body and the living brain. The curious resemblance of the reptile's brain-pan to that of a man flashed across my mind.

"Are you still alive, Framingham?"

The right eye winked. I seized my machete, for there was no time for delicate instruments. I might destroy all by haste and roughness, I was sure to destroy all by delay. I opened the skull and disclosed the brain. I had not injured it, and breaking the wound of the elasmosaurus's head, placed the brain within, I dressed the wound and, hurrying to the house, brought all my store of stimulants and administered them.

For years the medical fraternity has been predicting that brain-grafting will some time be successfully accomplished. Why has it never been successfully accomplished? Because it has not been tried. Obviously, a brain from a dead body cannot be used and what living man would submit to the horrible process of having his head opened, and portions of his brain taken for the use of others?

The brains of men are frequently examined when injured and parts of the brain removed, but parts of the brains of other men have never been substituted

for the parts removed. No injured man has even been found who would give any portion of his brain for the use of another. Until criminals under sentence of death are handed over to science for experimentation, we shall not know what can be done in the way of brain-grafting. But the public opinion would never allow it.

Conditions are favorable for a fair and thorough trial of my experiment. The weather is cool and even, and the wound in the head of the elasmosaurus has every chance for healing. The animal possesses a vitality superior to any of our later-day animals, and if any organism can successfully become the host of a foreign brain, nourishing and cherishing it, the elasmosaurus with its abundant vital forces can do it. It may be that a new era in the history of the world will begin here.

May 6th, Noon.

I think I will allow my experiment a little more time.

May 7th, Noon.

It cannot be imagination. I am sure that as I looked into the elasmosaurus's eyes this morning there was expression in them. Dim, it is true, a sort of mistiness that floats over them like the reflection of passing clouds.

May 8th, Noon.

I am more sure than yesterday that there is expression in the eyes, a look of troubled fear, such as is seen in the eyes of those who dream nightmares with unclosed lids.

May 11th, Evening.

I have been ill, and have not seen the elasmosaurus for three days, but I shall be better able to judge the progress of the experiment by remaining away a period of some duration.

May 12th, Noon.

I am overcome with awe as I realise the success that has so far crowned my experiment. As I approached the elasmosaurus this morning, I noticed a faint disturbance in the water near its flippers. I cautiously investigated expecting to

discover some fishes nibbling at the helpless monster, and saw that the commotion was not due to fishes, but to the flippers themselves, which were feebly moving.

“Framingham, Framingham,” I bawled at the top of my voice. The vast bulk stirred a little, a very little, but enough to notice. Is the brain, or Framingham, it would perhaps be better to say, asleep, or has he failed to establish connection with the body? Undoubtedly he has not yet established connection with the body, and this of itself would be equivalent to sleep, to unconsciousness. As a man born with none of the senses would be unconscious of himself, so Framingham, just beginning to establish connections with his new body, is only dimly conscious of himself and sleeps. I fed him, or it—which is the proper designation will be decided in a few days—with the usual allowance.

May 17th, Evening.

I have been ill for the past three days, and have not been out of doors until this morning. The elasmosaurus was still motionless when I arrived at the cove this morning. Dead, I thought; but I soon detected signs of breathing, and I began to prepare some mussels for it, and was intent upon my task, when I heard a slight, gasping sound, and looked up. A feeling of terror seized me. It was as if in response to some doubting incantations there had appeared the half-desired, yet wholly-feared and unexpected apparition of a fiend. I shrieked, I screamed, and the amphitheatre of rocks echoed and re-echoed my cries, and all the time the head of the elasmosaurus raised aloft to the full height of its neck, swayed about unsteadily, and its mouth silently struggled and twisted, as if in an attempt to form words, while its eyes looked at me now with wild fear and now with piteous intreaty.

“Framingham,” I said.

The monster’s mouth closed instantly, and it looked at me attentively, pathetically so, as a dog might look.

“Do you understand me?”

The mouth began struggling again, and little gasps and moans issued forth. “If you understand me, lay your head on the rock.”

Down came the head. He understood me. My experiment was a success. I

sat for a moment in silence, meditating upon the wonderful affair, striving to realise that I was awake and sane, and then began in a calm manner to relate to my friend what had taken place since his attempted suicide.

“You are at present something in the condition of a partial paralytic, I should judge,” said I, as I concluded my account. “Your mind has not yet learned to command your new body. I see you can move your head and neck, though with difficulty. Move your body if you can. Ah, you cannot, as I thought. But it will all come in time. Whether you will ever be able to talk or not, I cannot say, but I think so, however. And now if you cannot, we will arrange some means of communication. Anyhow, you are rid of your human body and possessed of the powerful vital apparatus you so much envied its former owner. When you gain control of yourself, I wish you to find the communication between this lake and the under-world, and conduct some explorations. Just think of the additions to geological knowledge you can make. I will write an account of your discovery, and the names of Framingham and McLennegan will be among those of the greatest geologists.”

I waved my hands in my enthusiasm, and the great eyes of my friend glowed with a kindred fire.

June 2nd, Night.

The process by which Framingham has passed from his first powerlessness to his present ability to speak, and command the use of his corporeal frame, has been so gradual that there has been nothing to note down from day to day. He seems to have all the command over his vast bulk that its former owner had, and in addition speaks and sings. He is singing now. The north wind has risen with the fall of night, and out there in the darkness I hear the mighty organ pipetones of his tremendous, magnificent voice, chanting the solemn notes of the Gregorian, the full-throated Latin words mingling with the roaring of the wind in a wild and weird harmony.

To-day he attempted to find the connection between the lake and the interior of the earth, but the great well that sinks down in the centre of the lake is choked with rocks and he has discovered nothing. He is tormented by the fear that I will leave him, and that he will perish of loneliness. But I shall not leave him. I feel too much pity for the loneliness he would endure, and besides, I wish to be on the spot should another of those mysterious convulsions open the connection between the lake and the lower world.

He is beset with the idea that should other men discover him, he may be captured and exhibited in a circus or museum, and declares that he will fight for his liberty even to the extent of taking the lives of those attempting to capture him. As a wild animal, he is the property of whomsoever captures him, though perhaps I can set up title to him on the ground of having tamed him.

July 6th.

One of Framingham's fears has been realised. I was at the pass leading into the basin, watching the clouds grow heavy and pendulous with their load of rain, when I saw a butterfly net appear over a knoll in the pass, followed by its bearer, a small man, unmistakably a scientist, but I did not note him well, for as he looked down into the valley, suddenly there burst forth with all the power and volume of a steam calliope, the tremendous voice of Framingham, singing a Greek song of Anacreon to the tune of "Where did you get that hat?" and the singer appeared in a little cove, the black column of his great neck raised aloft, his jagged jaws wide open.

That poor little scientist. He stood transfixed, his butterfly net dropped from his hand, and as Framingham ceased his singing, curvetted and leaped from the water and came down with a splash that set the whole cove swashing, and laughed a guffaw that echoed among the cliffs like the laughing of a dozen demons, he turned and sped through the pass at all speed.

I skip all entries for nearly a year. They are unimportant.

June 30th, 1897.

A change is certainly coming over my friend. I began to see it some time ago, but refused to believe it and set it down to imagination. A catastrophe threatens, the absorption of the human intellect by the brute body. There are precedents for believing it possible. The human body has more influence over the mind than the mind has over the body. The invalid, delicate Framingham with refined mind, is no more. In his stead is a roistering monster, whose boisterous and commonplace conversation betrays a constantly growing coarseness of mind.

No longer is he interested in my scientific investigations, but pronounces them all bosh. No longer is his conversation such as an educated man can enjoy, but slangy and diffuse iterations concerning the trivial happenings of our

uneventful life. Where will it end? In the absorption of the human mind by the brute body? In the final triumph of matter over mind and the degradation of the most mundane force and the extinction of the celestial spark? Then, indeed, will Edward Framingham be dead, and over the grave of his human body can I fittingly erect a headstone, and then will my vigil in this valley be over.

*Fort D. A. Russell, Wyoming,
April 15th, 1899.*

Prof. William G. Breyfogle.

Dear Sir—The inclosed intact manuscript and the fragments which accompany it, came into my possession in the manner I am about to relate and I inclose them to you, for whom they were intended by their late author. Two weeks ago, I was dispatched into the mountains after some Indians who had left their reservation, having under my command a company of infantry and two squads of cavalymen with mountain howitzers. On the seventh day of our pursuit, which led us into a wild and unknown part of the mountains, we were startled at hearing from somewhere in front of us a succession of bellowings of a very unusual nature, mingled with the cries of a human being apparently in the last extremity, and rushing over a rise before us, we looked down upon a lake and saw a colossal, indescribable thing engaged in rending the body of a man.

Observing us, it stretched its jaws and laughed, and in saying this, I wish to be taken literally. Part of my command cried out that it was the devil, and turned and ran. But I rallied them, and thoroughly enraged at what we had witnessed, we marched down to the shore, and I ordered the howitzers to be trained upon the murderous creature. While we were doing this, the thing kept up a constant blabbing that bore a distinct resemblance to human speech, sounding very much like the jabbering of an imbecile, or a drunken man trying to talk. I gave the command to fire and to fire again, and the beast tore out into the lake in its death-agony, and sank.

With the remains of Dr. McLennegan, I found the foregoing manuscript intact, and the torn fragments of the diary from which it was compiled, together with other papers on scientific subjects, all of which I forward. I think some attempts should be made to secure the body of the elasmosaurus. It would be a priceless addition to any museum.

Arthur W. Fairchild
Captain U.S.A.

The Lizard

Charles John Cutcliffe Hyne

It is not in the least expected that the general public will believe the statements which will be made in this paper. They are written to catch the eye of Mr. Wilfred Cecil Cording (or Cordy) if he still lives, or in the event of his death to carry some news of his last movements to any of his still existing friends and relations. Further details may be had from me (by any of these interested people) at Poste Restante, Kettlewell, Wharfedale, Yorkshire. My name is M'Cray, and I am sufficiently well known there for letters to be forwarded to wherever I may be at the moment.

The matters in question happened two years ago on the last day of August. I had a small high-ground shoot near Kettlewell, but that morning all the upper parts of the hill were thick with dense mist, and shooting was out of the question. However, I had been going it pretty hard since the twelfth, and was not sorry for an off day, the more so as there was a newly-found cave in the neighbourhood which I was anxious to explore thoroughly. Incidentally I may mention that cave-hunting and shooting were then my chief two amusements.

It was my keeper who brought me news to the inn about the impossibility of shooting, and I suggested to him that he should come with me to inspect the cave. He made some sort of excuse—I forget what—and I did not press the matter further. He was a Kettlewell native, and the dalesmen up there look upon the local caves with more awe than respect. They will not own up to believing in bogles, but I fancy their creed runs that way. I used to have a contempt for their qualms, but latterly I have somehow or other learned to respect them.

I had taken unwilling helpers cave-hunting with me before, and found them such a nuisance that I had made up my mind not to be bothered with them again; so, as I say, I did not press for the keeper's society; but took candles, matches in a bottle, some magnesium wire, a small coil of rope, and a large flask of whisky, and set off alone.

The clouds above were wet, and a fine rain fell persistently. I tramped off along one of the three main roads that lead from the village; but which road it was, had better remain hidden for the present. And in time I got off this road and cut over the moor.

What I was looking for was a fresh scar on the hill side, caused by a roof-fall in one of the countless caves which honeycomb this limestone district; and although I had got my bearings pretty accurately, the fog was so thick up there that I had to take a good dozen casts before I hit upon the place.

I had not seen it since the 8th of August, when I first stumbled across it by accident whilst I was going over the hill to see how the birds promised for the following twelfth; and I was a good deal annoyed to find by the boot marks that quite a lot of people had visited it in the interval. However, I hoped that the larger part of these were made by shepherds, and perhaps by my own keepers, and remembering their qualms, trusted that I might find the interior still untampered with.

The cave was easy enough to enter. There was a funnel-shaped slide of peat-earth and mud and clay to start with, well pitted with boot marks; and then there was a tumbled wall of boulders, slanting inwards, down which I crawled face uppermost till the light behind me dwindled. The way was getting pretty murky, so I lit up a candle to avoid accidents, stepped knee-deep into a lively stream of water, and went briskly ahead. It was an ordinary enough limestone cave so far, with inferior stalactites, and a good deal of wet everywhere. It did not appear to have been disturbed, and I stepped along cheerfully.

Presently I got a bit of a shock. The roof above began to droop downwards, slowly but relentlessly. It seemed as though my way was soon going to be blocked. However, the water beneath deepened, and so I waded along to inspect as far on as possible. It was a cold job, for the water was icy, but then I am a bit of an enthusiast about cave-hunting, and it takes more than a trifle of discomfort to stop me.

The roof came down and down till I was forced into the water up to my chin, and the air too was none of the best. I was beginning to get disappointed: it looked as if I had got wet through to the bone with freezing cold cave water for no adequate result.

However, there is no accounting for the freaks of caves. Just when I fancied I was at the end of my tether, up went the roof again; I was able to stand erect once more; and a dozen yards further on I came out on to dry rock, and was able to have a rest and a drop of whisky. The roof had quite disappeared to candle-light overhead, so I burned a foot of magnesium wire for a better inspection. It was really a magnificent cave.

But I did not stop to make any accurate measurements or drawings then, and for reasons which will appear, I have not been near to do so since. I was too cold to care for prolonged admiration, and I wanted to (so to speak) annex the whole of the cave's main contours before I took my departure. I was first man in, and wished to be able to describe the whole of my find. There is a certain keen emulation about these matters amongst cave-hunters.

So I walked on over the flat floor of rock, stepping over and through pools, and round boulders, and dodging round stalactites which hung from the unseen roof above, and slipping between slimy palings of stalagmite which sprouted from the floor. And then I came to a regular big subterranean tarn which stretched right across the cavern.

Spaces were big here and the candle did little to show them. It burned brightly enough and that pleased me: one has to be very careful in cave-hunting about foul air, because once overcome by that, it means certain death if one is alone. The air in this cave, however, did not altogether pass muster; there was something new about it, and anything new in cave smells is always suspicious. It wasn't the smell of peat, or iron, or sandstone, or limestone, or fungus, though all these are common enough in caves; it was a sort of faint musky smell; and I had got an idea that it was in flavour rather sickly. It is hard to define these things, but that smell, although it might very possibly lead to a new discovery, somehow did not cheer me. In fact at times, when I inhaled a deeper breath of it than usual, it came very near to making my flesh creep.

However, hesitations of this kind are not business. I nipped off another foot of magnesium wire, lit it at the candle, and held the flaming end high above my head. Before me the water of the tarn lay motionless as a mirror of black glass; the sides vignetted away into alleys and bays; the roof was a groined and fretted dome, far overhead; and at the further side was a beach of white tumbled limestone.

I pitched a stone into the black water, and the mirror woke (I was pleased to think) for the first time during a million years into ripples. Yes, it's worth even a year of hard cave-hunting to do a thing like that.

The stone sank with a luscious *plop*. The water was very deep. But I was wet to the neck already, and didn't mind a swim. So with a lump of clay I stuck one candle in my cap; set up a couple more on the dry rock as a lighthouse to guide my return; lowered myself into the black water, and struck out. The

smell of musk oppressed me, and I fancied it was growing more pronounced. So I didn't dawdle. Roughly, I guessed the pool to be some five-and-thirty yards across.

I landed amongst the white, broken limestone on the further side, with a shiver and a scramble, and there was no doubt about the smell of musk now; it was strong enough to make me cough. But when I had stood up, got the candle in my hand again, and peered about through the dark, a thrill came through me as I thought I guessed at the cause. A dozen yards further on amongst the tumbled stone was a broken "cast," where some monstrous uncouth animal had been entombed in the forgotten ages of the past, and mouldered away and left only the outer shell of its form and shape. For ages this too had endured; indeed it had only been violated by the eroding touch of the water and some earth tremor within the last few days: perhaps at the same time that the "slip" was made in the moor far above, which made an entrance to the caves.

The "cast" was half full of splintered rubbish, but even as it was I could see the contour of its sides in many places, and with care the debris could be scooped out, and a workman could with plaster of Paris make an exact model of this beast which had been lost to the world's knowledge for so many weary millions of years. It had been some sort of a lizard or a crocodile, and in fancy I was beginning to picture its restored shape posed in the National Museum with my name underneath as discoverer, when my eye fell on something amongst the rubble which brought me to earth with a jar. I stooped and picked it up. It was a common white-handled penknife, of the variety sold by stationers for a shilling. On one side of it was the name of Wilfred Cecil Cording (or Cordy), scratched apparently with a nail. The work was neat enough to start with, but the engraver had wearied with his job; and the "Cecil" was slipshod, and the surname too scratchy to be certain about.

On the hot impulse of the moment, I threw the knife far from me into the black water, and swore. It is more than a bit unpleasant for an explorer who has made a big discovery to find that he has been forestalled. But since then I have more than once regretted the hard things I said against Cording (if that is his name) in the heat of my first passion. If the man is alive, I apologise to him. If, as I strongly suspect, he came to a horrible end there in the cave, I tender my regrets to his relatives.

I looked upon the cast of the saurian now, with the warmth of discovery

quite gone. I was conscious of cold, and moreover the musky smell of the place was vastly unpleasant. And I think I should straightway have gone back to daylight and a change of clothes down in Kettlewell, but for one thing. I seemed somehow or other to trace on the rock beneath me the outline of another cast. It was hazy, as a thing of the kind would be if seen through the medium of sparsely transparent limestone, and by the light of a solitary paraffin-wax candle. I kicked at it petulantly.

Some flakes of stone shelled off, and I distinctly heard a more extensive crack.

I kicked again, harder; with all my might in fact. More flakes shelled away, and there was a little volley of cracks this time. It did not feel like kicking against stone. It was like kicking against something that gave. And I could have sworn that the musky smell increased. I felt a curious glow coming over me that was part fright, part excitement, part (I fancy) nausea; but plucked up my courage, and held my breath, and kicked again, and again, and again. The lamina, of limestone flew up in tinkling showers. There was no doubt about there being something springy underneath now, and that it was the dead carcass of another lizard, I hadn't a doubt. Here was luck; here was a find. Here was I, the discoverer of the body of a prehistoric beast preserved in the limestone down through all the ages, just as mammoths have been preserved in Siberian ice.

The quarrying of my boot-heel was too slow for me. I stuck my candle by its clay socket to a rock, and picked up a handy boulder and beat away the sheets of the stone with that; and all the time I toiled, the springiness of the carcass beneath distinctly helped me. The smell of musk nearly made me sick, but I stuck to the work. There was no doubt about it now. More than once I barked my knuckles against the harsh, scaly skin of the beast itself—against the skin of this anachronism which ought to have perished body and bones ten million years ago I remember wondering whether they would make me a baronet for the discovery. They do make scientific baronets nowadays for the bigger finds.

Then of a sudden I got a-start: I could have sworn the dead flesh moved beneath me.

But I shouted aloud at myself in contempt.

“Pah!” I said, “ten million years; the ghost is rather stale by this!” And I set to work afresh, beating away the stone which covered the beast from my sight.

But again I got a start, and this time it was a more solid one. After I had delivered my blow and whilst I was raising my weapon for another, a splinter of stone broke away as if pressed up from below, flipped up in the air, and tinkled back to a standstill. My blood chilled, and for a moment the loneliness of that unknown cave oppressed me. But I told myself that I was an old hand; that this was childishness; and, in fact, pulled myself together. I refused to accept the hint. I deliberately put the candle so as to throw a better light, swallowed back my tremors, and battered afresh at the laminated rock.

Twice more I was given warnings and disregarded them in the name of what I was pleased to call cold common reason; but the third time I dropped the battering stone as though it burnt me, and darted back with the most horrible shock of terror which (I make bold to say) any man could endure and still retain his senses.

There was no doubt about it, the beast was actually moving.

Yes, moving and alive. It was writhing, and straining, and struggling to leave its rocky bed, where it had lain quiet through all those countless cycles of time, and I watched it in a very petrification of terror. Its efforts threw up whole baskets full of splintered stone at a time. I could see the muscles of its back ripple at each effort. I could see the exposed part of its body grow in size every time it wrenched at the walls of that semi-eternal prison.

Then, as I looked, it doubled up its back like a bucking horse, and drew out its stumpy head and long feelers, giving out the while a thin, small scream like a hurt child; and then with another effort it pulled out its long tail and stood upon the débris of the limestone, panting with a new-found life.

I gazed upon it with a sickly fascination. Its body was about the bigness of two horses. Its head was curiously short, but the mouth opened back almost to the forearm; and sprouting from the nose were two enormous feelers, or antennae, each at least six feet long, and tipped with fleshy tendrils like fingers, which opened and shut tremulously. Its four legs were jointless, and ended in mere club feet, or callosities; its tail was long, supple, and fringed on the top with a saw-like row of scales. In colour it was a bright grass-green, all except the feelers, which were of a livid blue. But mere words go poorly for a description, and the beast was outside the vocabulary of to-day. It conveyed somehow or other a horrible sense of deformity, which made one physically ill to look upon it.

But worst of all was the musky smell. That increased till it became well-nigh unendurable, and though I half-strangled myself to suppress a sound, I had to yield at last and give my feelings vent.

The beast heard me. I could not see that it had any ears, but anyway it distinctly heard me. Worse, it hobbled round clumsily with its jointless legs, and waved its feelers in my direction. I could not make out that it had any eyes; anyway they did not show distinct from the rough skin of its head; its sensitiveness seemed to lie in those fathom-long feelers and in the fleshy fingers which twitched and grappled at the end of them.

Then it opened its great jaws, which hinged, as I said, down by the forearm, and yawned cavernously, and came towards me. It seemed to have no trace of fear or hesitation. It hobbled clumsily on, exhibiting its monstrous deformity in every movement, and preceded always by those hateful feelers, which seemed to be endued with an impish activity.

For a while I stayed in my place, too paralysed by horror by this awful thing I had dragged up from the forgotten dead to move or breathe. But then one of its livid blue feelers—a hard armoured thing like a lobster's—touched me, and the fleshy fingers at the end of it pawed my face and burned me like nettles. I leaped into movement again. The beast was hungry after its fast of ten million years; it was trying to make me its prey; those fearful jaws——

I turned and ran.

It followed me. In the feeble light of the one solitary candle I could see it following accurately in my track, with the waving feelers and their twitching fingers preceding it. It had pace, too. Its gait, with those clumsy, jointless legs, reminded one of a barrel-bellied sofa suddenly endowed with life, and careering over rough ground. But it distinctly had pace. And what was worse, the pace increased. At first it had the rust of those eternal ages to work out of its cankered joints; but this stiffness passed away; and presently it was following me with a speed equal to my own.

If this huge green beast had shown anger, or eagerness, or any of those things, it would have been less horrible; but it was absolutely unemotional in its hunt, and this helped to paralyse me; and in the end when it drove me into a *cul de sac* amongst the rocks, I was very near surrendering myself through sheer terror to what seemed the inevitable. I wondered dully whether there

had been another beast entombed beside it, and whether that had eaten the man who owned the penknife—Cordy, or Cording, his name was.

But the idea warmed me up. I had a stout knife in my own pocket, and after some fumbling got it out and opened the blade. The feelers with their fringe of fumbling fingers were close to me. I slashed at them viciously, and felt my knife grate against their armour. I might as well have hacked at an iron rail.

Still the attempt did me good. There is an animal love for fighting stowed away in the bottom of all of us somewhere, and mine woke then. I don't know that I expected to win; but I did intend to do the largest possible amount of damage before I was caught. I made a rush, stepped with one foot on the beast's creeping back, and leaped astern of him; and the beast gave its thin, small scream, and turned quickly in chase after me.

The pace was getting terrific. We doubled, and turned, and sprawled, and leapt amongst the slimy boulders, and every time we came to close quarters I stabbed at the beast with my knife, but without ever finding a joint in its armour. The tough skin gave to the weight of the blows, it is true, but it was like stabbing with a stick upon leather.

It was clear, though, that this could not go on. The beast grew in strength and activity, and probably in dumb anger, though actually it was unemotional as ever; but I was every moment growing more blown, and more bruised, and more exhausted.

At last I tripped and fell. The beast with its clumsy waddle shot past me before it could pull up, and in desperation I threw one arm and my knees around its grass-green tail, and with my spare hand drove the knife with the full of my force into the underneath of its body.

That woke it at last. It writhed, and it plunged, and it bucked with a frenzy that I had never seen before, and its scream grew in piercingness till it was strong as the whistle of a steam engine. But still I hung doggedly on to my place, and planted my vicious blows. The great beast doubled and tried to reach me; it dung its livid blue feelers backwards in vain efforts: I was beyond its clutch. And then, with my weight still on its back, it gave over dancing about the floor of the cavern, and set off at its hobbling gait directly for the water.

Not till it reached the brink did I slip off; but I saw it plunge in; I saw it swim

strongly with its tail; and then I saw it dive and disappear for good.

And what next? I took to the water too, and swam as I had never swam before—swam for dear life, to the opposite side. I knew that if I waited to cool my thoughts, I should never pluck up courage for the attempt. It was then or not at all. It was risk the horrors of that passage, or stay where I was and starve—and be eaten.

How I got across I do not know. How I landed I cannot tell. How I got down the windings of the cave and through that water alley is more than I can say. And whether the beast followed me I do not know either. I got to daylight again somehow, staggering like a drunken man. I struggled down off the moor, and on to the village, and noted how the people ran from me. At the inn the landlord cried out as though I had been the plague. It seemed that the musky smell that I brought with me was unendurable, though by this time the mere detail of a smell was far beneath my notice. But I was stripped from my stinking clothes and washed and put to bed, and a doctor came and gave me an opiate; and when twelve hours later wakefulness came to me again, I had the sense to hold my tongue. All the village wanted to know from whence came that hateful odour of musk, but I said stupidly I did not know. I said “I must have fallen into something.”

And there the matter ends for the present. I go no more cave-hunting, and I offer no help to those who do. But if the man who owned that white-handled penknife is alive, I should like to compare experiences with him; and if, as I strongly suspect, he is dead, these pages may be of interest to his relatives. He was not known in Kettlewell or any of the other villages where I inquired, but he could very well have come over the hills from Pateley Bridge way. Cording was the name scratched on the knife, or Cordy: I could not be sure which; and, as I have said, mine is M’Cray, and I can be heard of at the Kettlewell Post Office, though I have given up the shooting on the moor near there. Somehow the air of the district sickens me. There seems to be a taint in it.

The Tale of the Abu Laheeb

Lord Dunsany

When I met my friend Murcote in London he talked much of his Club. I had seldom heard of it, and the name of the street in which Murcote told me it stood was quite unknown to me, though I think I had driven through it in a taxi, and remembered the houses as being mean and small. And Murcote admitted that it was not very large, and had no billiard-table and very few rooms; and yet there seemed something about the place that entirely filled his mind and made that trivial street for him the center of London. And when he wanted me to come and see it, I suggested the following day; but he put me off, and again when I suggested the next one. There was evidently nothing much to see, no pictures, no particular wines, nothing that other Clubs boast of; but one heard tales there, he said; very odd ones sometimes; and if I cared to come and see the Club, it would be a good thing to come some evening when old Jorkens was there. I asked who Jorkens was; and he said he had seen a lot of the world. And then we parted, and I forgot about Jorkens, and saw nothing more of Murcote for some days. And then one day Murcote rang me up, and asked me if I'd come to the Club that evening.

I had agreed to come; but before I left my house Murcote surprised me by coming round to see me. There was something he wanted to tell me about Jorkens. He sat and talked to me for some time about Jorkens before we started, though all he said of him might be expressed by one word. Jorkens was a good-hearted fellow, he said, and would always tell a story in the evening to anyone who offered him a small drink; whisky and soda was what he preferred; and he really had seen a good deal of the world, and the Club relied on stories in the evening; it was quite a feature of it; and the Club wouldn't be the Club without them, and it helped the evening to pass, anyway; but one thing he must warn me, and that was never to believe a word he said. It wasn't Jorkens' fault; he didn't mean to be inaccurate; he merely wished to interest his fellow-members and to make the evening pass pleasantly; he had nothing to gain by any inaccuracies, and had no intention to deceive; he just did his best to entertain the Club, and all the members were grateful to him. But once more Murcote warned me never to believe one of his tales nor any part of them, not even the smallest detail of local color.

"I see," I said, "a bit of a liar."

“Oh, poor old Jorkens,” said Murcote, “that’s rather hard. But still, I’ve warned you, haven’t I?”

And, with that quite clearly understood, we went down and hailed a taxi.

It was after dinner that we arrived at the Club; and we went straight up into a small room, in which a group of members was sitting about near the fire, and I was introduced to Jorkens, who was sitting gazing into the glow, with a small table at his right hand. And then he turned to Murcote to pour out what he had probably already said to all the other members.

“A most unpleasant episode occurred here last evening,” he said, “a thing I have never known before, and shouldn’t have thought possible in any decent club, shouldn’t have thought possible.”

“Oh, really,” said Murcote. “What happened?”

“A young fellow came in yesterday,” said Jorkens. “They tell me he’s called Carter. He came in here after dinner, and I happened to be speaking about a curious experience I had once had in Africa, over the watershed of the Congo, somewhere about latitude six, a long time ago. Well, never mind the experience, but I had no sooner finished speaking about it when the young fellow, Carter or whatever he is, said simply he didn’t believe me, simply and unmistakably that he disbelieved my story; claimed to know something of geography or zoology which did not tally in his impudent mind with the actual experience that I had had on the Congo side of the watershed. Now, what are you to do when a young fellow has the effrontery, the brazen-faced audacity...”

“Oh, but we must have him turned out,” said Murcote. “A case like that should come before the Committee at once. Don’t you think so?”

And his eye turned to the other members, roving till it fell on a weary and weak individual who was evidently one of the Committee.

“Oh, er, yes,” said he unconvincingly.

“Well, Mr. Jorkens,” said Murcote, “we’ll get that done at once.”

And one or two more members muttered Yes, and Jorkens’ indignation sank now to minor mutterings, and to occasional ejaculations that shot out petulantly,

but in an undertone. The waters of his imagination were troubled still, though the storm was partly abated.

“It seems to me outrageous,” I said, but hardly liked to say any more, being a guest in the Club.

“Outrageous!” the old man replied, and we seemed no nearer to getting any story.

“I wonder if I might ask for a whisky and soda?” I said to Murcote, for a silence had fallen; and at the same time I nodded sideways towards Jorkens to suggest the destination of the whisky. I had waited for Murcote to do this without being asked, and now he ordered three whiskies and sodas listlessly, as though he thought there weren’t much good in it. And when the whisky drew near the lonely table that waited desolate at Jorkens’ right hand, Jorkens said, “Not for me.”

I thought I saw surprise for a moment pass like a ghost through that room, although no one said anything.

“No,” said old Jorkens, “I never drink whisky. Now and then I use it in order to stimulate my memory. It has a wonderful effect on the memory. But as a drink I never touch it. I dislike the taste of it.”

So his whisky went away. We seemed no nearer that story.

I took my glass with very little soda, sitting in a chair near Jorkens. I had nowhere to put it down.

“Might I put my glass on your table?” I said to Jorkens.

“Certainly,” he said, with the utmost indifference in his voice, but not entirely in his eye, which caught the deep yellow flavor as I put it close to his elbow.

We sat for a long time in silence; everyone wanted to hear him talk. And at last his right hand opened wide enough to take a glass, and then closed again. And a while later it opened once more, and moved a little along the table and then drew back, as though for a moment he had thought the drink was his and then had realized his mistake. It was a mere movement of the hand, and yet it

showed that here was a man who would not consciously take another man's drink. And, that being clearly established, a dreamy look came over his face as though he thought of far-off things, and his hand moved very absently. It reached the glass unguided by his eye and brought it to his lips, and he drained it, thinking of far other things.

"Dear me," he said suddenly, "I hope I haven't drunk your whisky."

"Not at all," I said.

"I was thinking of a very curious thing," he said, "and hardly noticed what I was doing."

"Might I ask what it was you were thinking of?" I said.

"I really hardly like to tell you," he said, "to tell anyone, after the most unpleasant incident that occurred yesterday."

As I looked at Murcote he seemed to divine my thoughts, and ordered three more whiskies.

It was wonderful how the whisky did brighten old Jorkens' memory, for he spoke with a vividness of little details that could only have been memory; imagination could not have done it. I leave out the details and give the main points of his story for its zoological interest; for it touches upon a gap in zoology which I believe is probably there, and if the story is true it bridges it.

Here then is the story: "One that you won't often hear in London," said Jorkens, "but in towns at the Empire's edge it's told of often. There's probably not a mess out there in which it's not been discussed, scarcely a bungalow where it's not been talked of, and always with derision. In places like Malakal there's not a white man that hasn't heard of it, and not one that believes it. But the last white man that you meet on lonely journeys, the last white man that there is before the swamps begin and you see nothing for weeks but papyrus, he believes in it.

"I have noticed that more than once. Where a lot of men get together, all knowing equally little, and this subject comes up, one will laugh, and they will all laugh at it, and none will trust his imagination to study the rumor; and it remains a rumor, no more. But when a man gets all alone by himself, somewhere

on the fringe of that country out of which the rumor arises, and there's no silly laughter to scare his imagination—why, then he can study the thing and develop it, and get much nearer to facts than mere incredulity will ever get him. I find a touch of fever helps in working out problems like that.

“Well, the problem is a very simple one; it is simply the question whether man with his wisdom and curiosity has discovered all the animals that there are in the world, or whether there's one, and a very curious one too, hidden amongst the papyrus, that white men have never seen. And that's not quite what I mean, for there are white men that have seen things that not every young whipper-snapper will believe. I should rather have said an animal that our civilization has not yet taken cognizance of. At Kosti, more than twenty years ago, I first heard two men definitely speak of it, the abu laheeb they called it, and I think they both believed in it too; but Khartoum was only a hundred and fifty miles off, and they had evening clothes with them, and used to wear them at dinner, and they had china plates and silver forks, and ornaments on their mantelpiece, and one thing and another; and all these things seemed to appall their imagination, and they wouldn't honestly let themselves believe it. 'Had three or four fires round his tent,' said one of them, telling of someone, 'and says that the abu laheeb came down about two A.M., and he saw it clear in the firelight.' 'Did it get what it wanted?' said the other. 'Yes, went away hugging it.'

“And one of them said in a rather wandering tone: 'The only animal that uses....' He was lowering his voice, and looking round, and he saw me, and said no more. They turned it all away at once with a laugh or two, as Columbus might have turned away from the long low line of land and refused to believe a new continent. I questioned them, but got no information that could be of any use; they seemed to like laughter more than imagination, so I got jokes instead of truth.

“It was weeks later and far southwards that I found a man who was ready to approach this most interesting point of zoology in the proper spirit of a scientist, a white man all alone in a hut that he had near the mouth of the Bahr el Zeraf. There are things in Africa that you couldn't believe, and the Bahr el Zeraf is one of them. It rises out of the marshes of the White Nile, and flows forty or fifty miles, and into the White Nile again. And one can't easily believe in a white man living all alone in such a place as that, but somebody has to be the last white man you see as you go through the final fringes of civilization, and it was him. He had had full opportunities of studying the whole question of the abu laheeb, he had had years of leisure to compare all the stories the natives brought

him, which they shyly told when he had won their confidence, though what he won it with he never told. He had sifted the evidence and knew all that was told about it; and in long malarial nights, with no one and nothing to care for him but quinine, he had pictured the beast so clearly that he could make me a very good drawing of it. I have that drawing to this very day, a beast on his hind legs something like a South American sloth that I once saw, stuffed, in a museum; built rather on the lines of a kangaroo, but much stouter and bigger, and with nothing pointed about his face; it was square and blunt, with great teeth. He had hand-like paws on shortish arms or forelegs.

“I must tell you that I was in a small dahabeeyah going up those great rivers, any great rivers I might meet, leaving civilization because I was tired of it, and looking for wonders in Africa. And I came to this lonely man, Lindon his name was, full of curiosity aroused by those words that I had heard in Malakal. And talking to Lindon like two old friends that have spent all their schooldays together, as white men will who meet in that part of Africa, I soon came to the abu laheeb, thinking he would know more of it than they knew in Malakal. And I found a man grown sensitive, as you only can grow in loneliness: he feared I would disbelieve him, and would scarcely say a word. Yes, the natives believed in some such animal, but his own opinion he would not expose to the possibility of my ridicule. The more questions I asked, the shorter the answers became. And then I drew him by saying, ‘Well, there’s one thing he uses that no other animal ever did,’ the one mysterious thing about this beast that had haunted my mind for weeks, though I did not know what on earth the mystery was. And that got him talking. He saw that I was committed to belief in the beast, and was no longer shy of his own. He told me that the upper reaches of the Bahr el Zeraf were a god-forsaken place: ‘And if God forsook the Zeraf,’ he said, ‘He certainly didn’t go to the Jebel,’ for the Bahr el Jebel was worse. And somewhere between those two rivers in the desolation of papyrus the abu laheeb certainly lived. He very reasonably said that there were beasts in the plains, beasts in the forests, and beasts in the sea; why not in the huge area of the papyrus into which no man had ever penetrated? If I chose to go to these god-forsaken places I could see the abu laheeb, he said. ‘But, of course,’ he added, ‘you must never go up wind on him.’ ‘Down wind?’ I said.

“‘No, nor down wind either,’ he answered. ‘He can smell as well as a rhino. That’s the difficulty; you have to go just between up wind and down wind; and you always find the north wind blowing there.’

“It was some while before I discovered why one can’t go up wind on him. I

didn't like to over-question Lindon, for questions are akin to criticism, and you cannot apply criticism and cross-examination to the patient work of imagination upon rumor; it is liable to destroy the whole fabric, and one loses valuable scientific data. Nor was Lindon in the mood for the superior belief of a traveler only just come from civilization; he had had malaria too recently to put up with that sort of thing. It was as he was giving me various clear proofs of the existence of some such animal that I suddenly realized what it all meant. He was telling me how more than once he had seen fires in the reeds, not only earlier in the year than the Dinkas light their fires, but in marshes where no Dinka would ever come, nor a Shillook either, or any kind of man, marshes utterly desolate and forever shut to humanity. It was then that the truth flashed on me; truth, sir, that I have since verified with my own eyes: that the abu laheeb plays with fire.

“Well, I needn't tell you how the idea flared up in my mind to be the first white man that had even seen the abu laheeb, and to shoot him and bring his huge skin home, and have something to show for all that lonely wandering. It was a fascinating idea. I asked Lindon if he thought my rifle was big enough, I only had a .350, and whether to use soft-nosed or solid bullets. ‘Soft,’ he said. I sat up late and asked him many questions. And he warned me about those marshes. I needn't tell you of all the things he warned me against, because you see me alive before you; but they were there all right, they were there. And I went down the little path he'd made from his house to the bank of the river, and went on board my sailing boat under huge white bands of stars, and lay down on board and looked up at them from under my blankets until I fell asleep, while the Arabs cast off and the north wind held good. And when the sun blazed on me at dawn I woke to the Bahr el Zeraf. Scarlet trees with green foliage at first; we were not yet come to those marshes.

“Well, for days we went up the Zeraf, past the white fish-eagles, haughty and silent and watchful on queer trees, with birds sailing over us that I daren't describe to you for fear you should think I exaggerate the brilliancy of their colors. And so we came to those marshes where anything might hide, and be utterly hidden by those miles of rushes, and be well enough protected from explorers by a region of monotony more dismal than any other desolate land I've seen. And all the while the sailors were talking a language I did not know, till my imagination, brooding in that monotony, seemed to hear clear English phrases now and then starting suddenly out of their talk, commonest phrases of our daily affairs, on the other side of the earth. I would swear that I heard one of them say one evening, ‘Stop the bus a moment.’ But it couldn't have

been, for they were talking Dinka talk, and not one of them knew a single word of English; I used to talk Arabic of a sort to the reis.

“Well, at last we came on fires in the reeds, burning at different points. Who lit them I couldn’t say, there were no men there, black, white, or gray (the Dinkas are gray, you know). But I wanted absolute proof; and then one day I found his tracks in the rushes. He bounds through the rushes, you know, often breaking several of them where he takes off, and sometimes scattering mud on the tips of them as he springs through; then alighting and taking off again, leaving another huge mark.

“I examined the rushes carefully, till I was sure that I had his tracks. And then I followed them, always watching the wind. It was a dreadful walk. I went alone so as to make less noise. I wanted to get quite close and make sure of my shot. I had a haversack tied close round my neck, and my cartridges were in that. Even then it got wet sometimes. The water was always up to my waist, and often it came higher. I had to hold up my rifle in one hand all the time. The reeds were far over my head.

“Sometimes one came to open spaces of water, with huge blue water-lilies floating on them. And it was always deeper there. Sometimes one walked upon the roots of the rushes, and all the rushes trembled round one for yards, and sometimes one found a bottom of good hard clay and knew one could sink no further. And all the while I was tracking the abu laheeb.

“The north wind blew as usual. I was too old a shikari to be walking down wind, but I was not always able to act strictly on Lindon’s advice about never going up wind on the abu laheeb, because his tracks sometimes led that way. At any rate, that was better than the other direction, for he would have been off at once. You wouldn’t believe how tired one can be of blue water-lilies. At any rate the water was not cold, but the weariness of lifting each foot was terrible. Each foot, as one lifted it for every step, one would rather have left just where it was forever. I don’t know how many hours I tracked the beast, I don’t know what time was doing while I walked in those marshes. But in all that weariness of spirit and utter fatigue of limb I suddenly saw a scrap of quite fresh mud on the tip of one of the reeds, and knew that I was getting near him at last. I put the safety catch of my rifle over, and suddenly saw in my mind what I was so nearly doing for Science. Of all the steps Science had taken from out of the early darkness toward that distant point of which we cannot guess, which shall be full of revelations to man, one of her footsteps would be due to me. I could,

as it were, write my name on that one footprint, and no one would question my right to.

“I got nearer and nearer, I was no longer weary now; and suddenly, closer than I had dared to hope, was a little puff of smoke above the rushes. I stopped for one moment to steady my breath, and got my rifle ready. In that moment I named him; yes, I called him Prometheus Jorkensi. There was a patch of dry land ahead, and the rushes still protected me. I moved with ten-inch paces so as to make no ripple, but I couldn’t keep the rushes quiet; perhaps the north wind blew stronger than I thought, for he never seemed to hear me. And then, oh so close that it couldn’t have been ten yards, I saw the little fire on a patch of earth; and the rushes still hid me completely. I saw a patch of brown fur and a huge body crouching. I could only guess what part of the body I saw, but a vital part I thought, and I raised my rifle. Still it had no idea I was anywhere near it. And then I saw its hands stretched out to the fire, warming themselves by the edge of those bleak marshes. I don’t cut much ice, you know; I didn’t then; no one had ever heard my name, or, if they had, it meant nothing; and here was I on the verge of this discovery, with the proof of it ten yards away just waiting for a rifle bullet. I’d shoot a monkey, I’d shoot an ape, I’d shoot a poor old hippo; I wouldn’t mind shooting a horse if it had to be killed, though lots of men can’t bear that; but those black hands stretched out over the fire were the one thing I couldn’t destroy. The idea that flashed on me standing amongst those reeds I have been turning over in my mind for years, and it always seemed sound to me, and it does even now. You see, of all the links in the world that there are between us, and of all the barriers against those that are not as us, it seems to me that there is one link, one barrier, more outstanding than any other you could possibly name. We talk of our human reason, that may or may not be superior to the dream of the dog or the elephant: we say it is; that is all. We say that we alone have belief in an after-life, and that the lion has not: we say so; that’s all. Some of them are stronger, some live longer than us, many may be more cunning. But there is one thing, gentlemen, one thing they haven’t got, and that is the knowledge of fire. That seems to me the great link, the great bond between all who have it and the barrier against all who have not. Look what we’ve done with it: look at those fire-irons, that fender, the bricks of which this house is made, and the steel structure of it; look at this whole city. That’s our one great possession, knowledge of fire. And, when I saw those dark hands stretched out to that fire on the edge of the marshes, that is what I thought of all at once, not at such length as I have told you of course; it flashed all through my mind in a moment; but during that moment I hesitated, and the abu laheeb saw the sun on the tip of my rifle or heard me breathing there, for he suddenly

craned his great neck over the rushes, then stooped again and scattered the fire with his forepaws with one swift jerk into the reeds all round me. They were alight at once, and through the flame and smoke I only dimly caught sight of him leaping away, but, above the crackle of the burning reeds and the thump of his hind legs leaping, I heard him uttering gusts of human-like laughter.”

He paused a moment. We were all quite silent, thinking what he had lost. He had lost a famous name. He shook his head, and seemed full of the same thoughts as the rest of us.

“I never went after him again,” he said. “I had seen him, but who’ll believe that? I have never quite been able to bring myself any more to try to shoot a creature that shared that great secret with us.”

There was silence again; we were wondering, I think, whether his scruples should have prevented him from doing so much for Science. I suppose that the too-sensitive and over-scrupulous seldom make famous names. A man leaning forward, and smoking a pipe, took his pipe out of his mouth and broke the silence at last.

“Mightn’t you have photographed him?” he said.

“Photographed him!” said Mr. Jorkens, straightening himself up in his chair. “Photographed him! Aren’t half the photographs fakes? Here, look at the *Evening Picture*; look at that, now. There’s a child handing a bouquet to someone with its left hand, so that both of them may expose as much of their surface as possible to the camera. And here’s a man welcoming his brother from abroad. Welcoming indeed! They are both of them being photographed, and that’s obviously all that they’re doing.”

We looked at the paper and it was so; they were almost turning their backs on one another in order to be photographed.

“No,” he said, and he looked me straight in the eyes, and flashed that glance of his from face to face. “If Truth cannot stand alone, she scorns the cheap aid of photography.”

So dominant was his voice as he said these words, so flashed his eyes in the dim light of the room, that none of us spoke any more. I think we felt that our voices would shock the silence. And we all went quietly away.

The Great Beast Of Kafue

Richard Dehan

It happened at our homestead on the border of Southeastern Rhodesia, seventy miles from Tuli Concession, some three years after the War.

A September storm raged, the green, broad-leaved tobacco-plants tossed like the waves of the ocean I had crossed and re-crossed, journeying to and coming back from my dead mother's wet, sad country of Ireland to this land of my father and his father's father.

The acacias and kameel thorns and the huge cactus-like euphorbia that fringed the water-courses and the irrigation channels had wrung their hands all day without ceasing, like Makalaka women at a native funeral. Night closed in: the wooden shutters were barred, the small-paned windows fastened, yet they shook and rattled as though human beings without were trying to force a way in. Whitewash fell in scales from the big tie-beams and cross-rafters of the farm kitchen, and lay in little powdery drifts of whiteness on the solid table of brown locust-tree wood, and my father's Dutch Bible that lay open there. Upon my father's great black head that was bent over the Book, were many streaks and patches of white that might not be shaken or brushed away.

It had fallen at the beginning of the War, that snow of sorrow streaking the heavy curling locks of coarse black hair. My pretty young mother—an Irishwoman of the North, had been killed in the Women's Laager at Gueldersdorp during the Siege. My father served as Staats gunner during the Investment—and now you know the dreadful doubt that heaped upon those mighty shoulders a bending load, and sprinkled the black hair with white.

You are to see me in my blue drill roundabout and little homespun breeches sitting on a cricket in the shadow of the table-ledge, over against the grim *sterk* figure in the big, thong-seated armchair.

There would be no going to bed that night. The dam was over-full already, and the next spate from the hill sluits might crack the great wall of mud-cemented saw-squared boulders, or overflow it, and lick away the work of years. The farm-house roof had been rebuilt since the shell from the English naval gun had wrecked it, but the work of men to-day is not like that of the men

of old. My father shook his head, contemplating the new masonry, and the whitewash fell as though in confirmation of his expressed doubts.

I had begged to stay up rather than lie alone in the big bed in my father's room. Nodding with sleepiness I should have denied, I carved with my two-bladed American knife at a little canoe I meant to swim in the shallower river-pools. And as I shaped the prow I dreamed of something I had heard on the previous night.

A traveller of the better middle-class, overseer of a coal-mine working "up Buluwayo" way, who had stayed with us the previous night and gone on to Tuli that morning, had told the story. What he had failed to tell I had haltingly spelled out of the three-weeks-old English newspaper he had left behind.

So I wrought, and remembered, and my little canoe swelled and grew in my hands. I was carrying it on my back through a forest of tall reeds and high grasses, forcing a painful way between the tough wrist-thick stems, with the salt sweat running down into my eyes... Then I was in the canoe, wielding the single paddle, working my frail crank craft through sluggish pools of black water, overgrown with broad spiny leaves of water-plants cradling dowers of marvellous hue. In the canoe bows leaned my grandfather's elephant-gun, the inlaid, browned-steel-barrelled weapon with the diamond-patterned stock and breech that had always seemed to my childish eyes the most utterly desirable, absolutely magnificent possession a grown-up man might call his own.

A *paauw* made a great commotion getting up amongst the reeds; but does a hunter go after *paauw* with his grandfather's elephant-gun? Duck were feeding in the open spaces of sluggish black water. I heard what seemed to be the plop! of a jumping fish, on the other side of a twenty-foot high barrier of reeds and grasses. I looked up then, and saw, glaring down upon me from inconceivable heights of sheer horror, the Thing of which I had heard and read.

* * * * *

At this juncture I dropped the little canoe and clutched my father round the leg.

"What is it, *mijn jongen*?"

He, too, seemed to rouse out of a waking dream. You are to see the wide, burnt-out-looking grey eyes that were staring sorrowfully out of their shadowy

caves under the shaggy eyebrows, lighten out of their deep abstraction and drop to the level of my childish face.

* * * * *

“You were thinking of the great beast of Kafue Valley, and you want to ask me if I will lend you my father’s elephant-rifle when you are big enough to carry it that you may go and hunt for the beast and kill it; is that so?”

My father grasped his great black beard in one huge knotted brown hand, and made a rope of it, as was his way. He looked from my chubby face to the old-fashioned black-powder 8-bore that hung upon the wall against a leopard kaross, and back again, and something like a smile curved the grim mouth under the shaggy black and white moustache.

“The gun you shall have, boy, when you are of age to use it, or a 450-Mannlicher or a 600-Mauser, the best that may be bought north of the Transvaal, to shoot explosive or conical bullets from cordite cartridges. But not unless you give me your promise never to kill that beast, shall money of mine go to the buying of such a gun for you. Come now, let me have your word!”

Even to my childish vanity the notion of my solemnly entering into a compact binding my hand against the slaying of the semi-fabulous beast-marvel of the Upper Rhodesian swamps, smacked of the fantastic if not of the absurd. But my father’s eyes had no twinkle in them, and I faltered out the promise they commanded.

“*Nooit—nooit* will I kill that beast! It should kill me, rather!”

“Your mother’s son will not be *valsch* to a vow. For so would you, son of my body, make of me, your father, a traitor to an oath that I have sworn!”

The great voice boomed in the rafters of the farm kitchen, vying with the baffled roaring of the wind that was trying to get in, as I had told myself, and lie down, folding wide quivering wings and panting still, upon the sheepskin that was spread before the hearth.

“But—but why did you swear?”

I faltered out the question, staring at the great bearded figure in homespun

jacket and tan-cord breeches and *veldschoens*, and thought again that it had the hairy skin of Esau and the haunted face of Saul.

Said my father, grimly—

“Had I questioned my father so at twice your age, he would have skinned my back and I should have deserved it. But I cannot beat your mother’s son, though the Lord punish me for my weakness.... And you have the spirit of the *jager* in you, even as I. What I saw you may one day see. What I might have killed, that shall you spare, because of me and my oath. Why did I take it upon me, do you ask? Even though I told you, how should a child understand? What is it you are saying? Did I really, really see the beast? Ay, by the Lord!” said my father thoughtfully, “I saw him. And never can a man who has seen, forget that sight. What are you saying?”

The words tumbled over one another as I stammered in my hurry—

“But—but the English traveller said only one white man besides the Mashona hunter has seen the beast, and the newspaper says so too.”

“*Natuurlijk*. And the white man is me,” thundered the deep voice.

I hesitated.

“But since the planting of the tobacco you have not left the *plaats*. And the newspaper is of only three weeks back.”

“*Dat spreekt*, but the story is older than that, *mijn jongen*. It is the third time it has been dished up in the *Buluwayo Courant* sauced up with lies to change the taste as belly-lovers have their meat. But I am the man who saw the beast of Kafue, and the story that is told is my story, nevertheless!”

I felt my cheeks beginning to burn. Wonderful as were the things I knew to be true of the man, my father, this promised to be the most wonderful of all.

“It was when I was hunting in the Zambezi Country,” said my father, “three months after the *Commandaants* of the Forces of the United Republics met at Klerksdorp to arrange conditions of peace—”

“With the English Generals,” I put in.

“With the English, as I have said. You had been sent to your—to *her* people in Ireland. I had not then thought of rebuilding the farm. For more than a house of stones had been thrown down for me, and more than so many thousand acres of land laid waste...

“Where did I go? *Ik wiet niet*. I wandered *op en neer* like the evil spirit in the Scriptures,” the great corded hand shut the Book and reached over and snuffed the tallow-dip that hung over at the top, smoking and smelling, and pitched the black wick-end angrily on the red hearth-embers. “I sought rest and found none, either for the sole of my foot or the soul in my body. There is bitterness in my mouth as though I have eaten the spotted lily-root of the swamps. I cannot taste the food I swallow, and when I lie down at night something lies down with me, and when I rise up, it rises too and goes by my side all day.”

I clung to the leg of the table, not daring to clutch my father’s. For his eyes did not seem to see me any more, and a blob of foam quivered on his beard that hung over his great breast in a shadowy cascade dappled with patches of white. He went on, I scarcely daring to breathe—

“For, after all, do I know it is not I who killed her? That accursed day, was I not on duty as ever since the beginning of the investment, and is it not a splinter from a Maxim Nordenfeld fired from an eastern gun-position, that—” Great drops stood on my father’s forehead. His huge frame shook. The clenched hand resting on the solid table of locust-beam, shook that also, shaking me, clinging to the table-leg with my heart thumping violently, and a cold, crawling sensation among the roots of my curls.

“At first, I seem to remember there was a man hunting with me. He had many Kaffir servants and four Mashona hunters and wagons drawn by salted tailless spans, fine guns and costly tents, plenty of stores and medicine in little sugar-pills, in bottles with silver tops. But he sickened in spite of all his quinine, and the salted oxen died, just like beasts with tails; and besides, he was afraid of the Makwakwa and the Mashengwa with their slender poisoned spears of reeds. He turned back at last. I pushed on.”

There was a pause. The strange, iron-grey, burnt-out eyes looked through me and beyond me, then the deep, trembling voice repeated, once more changing the past into the present tense—

“I push on west. My life is of value to none. The boy—is he not with her people? Shall I live to have him back under my roof and see in his face one day the knowledge that I have killed his mother? Nay, nay, I will push on!”

There was so long a silence after this that I ventured to move. Then my father looked at me, and spoke to me, not as though I were a child, but as if I had been another man.

“I pushed on, crossing the rivers on a blown-up goatskin and some calabashes, keeping my father’s elephant-gun and my cartridges dry by holding them above my head. Food! For food there were thorny orange cucumbers with green pulp, and the native women at the kraals gave me cakes of maize and milk. I hunted and killed rhino and elephant and hippo and lion until the head-men of the Mashengwa said the beast was a god of theirs and the slaying of it would bring a pestilence upon their tribe, and so I killed no more. And one day I shot a cow hippo with her calf, and she stood to suckle the ugly little thing while her life was bleeding out of her, and after that I ceased to kill. I needed little, and there were yet the green-fleshed cucumbers, and ground-nuts, and things like those.”

He made a rope his great beard, twisting it with a rasping sound.

“Thus I reached the Upper Kafue Valley where the great grass swamps are. No railway then, running like an iron snake up from Buluwayo to bring the ore down from the silver-mines that are there.

“Six days’ *trek* from the mines—I went on foot always, you will understand!—six days’ journey from the mines, above where L’uengwe River is wedded to Kafue, as the Badanga say is a big water.

“It is a lake, or rather, two lakes, not round, but shaped like the bowls of two wooden spoons. A shore of black, stone-like baked mud round them, and a bridge of the same stone is between them, so that they make the figure that is for 8.”

The big, hairy forefinger of my father’s right hand traced the numeral in the powdered whitewash that lay in drifts upon the table.

“That is the shape of the lakes, and the Badanga say that they have no bottom, and that fish taken from their waters remain raw and alive, even on the

red-hot embers of their cooking stove. They are a lazy, dirty people who live on snakes and frogs and grubs—tortoise and fish. And they gave me to eat and told me, partly in words of my own moder Taal they had picked up somehow, partly in sign language, about the Great Beast that lives in the double lake that is haunted by the spirits of their dead.”

I waited, my heart pumping at the bottom of my throat, my blood running horribly, delightfully chill, to hear the rest.

“The hunting spirit revives in a man, even at death’s door, to hear of an animal the like of which no living hunter has ever brought down. The Badanga tell me of this one, tales, tales, tales! They draw it for me with a pointed stick on a broad green leaf, or in the ashes of their cooking-fires. And I have seen many a great beast, but, *voor den donder!* never a beast such as that!”

I held on to my stool with both hands.

“I ask the Badanga to guide me to the lair of the beast for all the money I have upon me. They care not for gold, but for the old silver hunting-watch I carry they will risk offending the spirits of their dead. The old man who has drawn the creature for me, he will take me. And it is January, the time of year in which he has been before known to rise and bellow—*Maar!*—bellow like twenty buffalo bulls in spring-time, for his mate to rise from those bottomless deeps below and drink the air and sun.”

So there are two great beasts! Neither the traveller nor the newspaper nor my father, until this moment, had hinted at that!

“The she-beast is much the smaller and has no horns. This my old man makes clear to me, drawing her with the point of his fish-spear on smooth mud. She is very sick the last time my old man has seen her. Her great moon-eyes are dim, and the stinking spume dribbles from her jaws. She can only float in the trough of the wave that her mate makes with his wallowings, her long scaly neck lying like a dead python on the oily black water. My old man thinks she was then near death. I ask him how long ago that is? Twenty times have the blue lake-lilies blossomed, the lilies with the sweet seeds that the Badanga make bread of—since. And the great bull has twice been heard bellowing, but never has he been seen of man since then.”

My father folded his great arms upon the black-and-white cascade of beard

that swept down over his shirt of homespun and went on—

“Twenty years. Perhaps, think I, my old man has lied to me! But we are at the end of the last day’s journey. The sun has set and night has come. My old man makes me signs we are near the lakes and I climb a high mahogo, holding by the limbs of the wild fig that is hugging the tree to death.”

My father spat into the heart of the glowing wood ashes, and said—

“I see the twin lakes lying in the midst of the high grass-swamps, barely a mile away. The black, shining waters cradle the new moon of January in their bosom, and the blue star that hangs beneath her horn, and there is no ripple on the surface, or sign of a beast, big or little. And I despise myself, I, the son of honest Booren, who have been duped by the lies of a black man-ape. I am coming down the tree, when through the night comes a long, hollow, booming, bellowing roar that is not the cry of any beast I know. Thrice it comes, and my old man of the Badanga, squatting among the roots of the mahogo, nods his wrinkled bald skull, and says, squinting up at me, ‘Now you have heard, Baas, will you go back or go on?’

“I answer, *‘Al recht uit!’*

“For something of the hunting spirit has wakened in me. And I see to the cleaning of the elephant-gun and load it carefully before I sleep that night.”

I would have liked to ask a question but the words stuck in my throat.

“By dawn of day we have reached the lakes,” went on my father. “The high grass and the tall reeds march out into the black water as far as they may, then the black stone beach shelves off into depths unknown.

“He who has written up the story for the Buluwayo newspaper says that the lake was once a volcano and that the crumbly black stone is lava. It may be so. But volcanoes are holes in the tops of mountains, while the lakes lie in a valley-bottom, and he who wrote cannot have been there, or he would know there are two, and not one.

“All the next night we, camping on the belt of stony shore that divides lake from lake, heard nothing. We ate the parched grain and baked grubs that my old man carried in a little bag. We lighted no fire because of the spirits of the

dead Badanga that would come crowding about it to warm themselves, and poison us with their breath. My old man said so, and I humoured him. My dead needed no fire to bring her to me. She was there always...

“All the day and the night through we heard and saw nothing. But at windstill dawn of the next day I saw a great curving ripple cross the upper lake that may be a mile and a half wide; and the reeds upon the nearer shore were wetted to the knees as by the wave that is left in the wake of a steamer, and oily patches of scum, each as big as a barn floor, befouled the calm water, and there was a cold, strange smell upon the breeze, but nothing more.

“Until at sunset of the next day, when I stood upon the mid-most belt of shore between lake and lake, with my back to the blood-red wonder of the west and my eyes sheltered by my hand as I looked out to where I had seen the waters divided as a man furrows earth with the plough-share, and felt a shadow fall over me from behind, and turned... and saw... *Alamachtig!*”

I could not breathe. At last, at last, it was coming!

“I am no coward,” said my father, in his deep resounding bass, “but that was a sight of terror. My old man of the Badanga had bolted like a rock-rabbit. I could hear the dry reeds crashing as he broke through. And the horned head of the beast, that was as big as a wagon-trunk shaking about on the top of a python-neck that topped the tallest of the teak-trees or mahogons that grow in the grass-swamps, seemed as if it were looking for the little human creature that was trying to run away.

“*Voor den donder!* how the water rises up in columns of smoke-spray as the great beast lashes it with his crocodile-tail! His head is crocodile also, with horns of rhino, his body has the bulk of six hippo bulls together. He is covered with armour of scales, yellow-white as the scales of leprosy, he has paddles like a tortoise. God of my fathers, what a beast to see! I forget the gun I hold against my hip—I can only stand and look, while the cold, thick puffs of stinking musk are brought to my nostrils and my ear-drums are well-nigh split with the bellowing of the beast. Ay! and the wave of his wallowings that wets one to the neck is foul with clammy ooze and oily scum.

“Why did the thing not see me? I did not try to hide from those scaly-lidded great eyes, yellow with half-moon-shaped pupils, I stood like an idol of stone. Perhaps that saved me, or I was too little a thing to vent a wrath so great upon.

He Who in the beginning made herds of beasts like that to move upon the face of the waters, and let this one live to show the pigmy world of to-day what creatures were of old, knows. I do not. I was dazed with the noise of its roarings and the thundering blows of its huge tail upon the water; I was drenched with the spume of its snortings and sickened with the stench it gave forth. But I never took my eyes from it, as it spent its fury, and little by little I came to understand.

“Het is jammer to see anything suffer as that beast was suffering. Another man in my place would have thought as much, and when it lay still at last on the frothing black water, a bullet from the elephant-rifle would have lodged in the little stupid brain behind the great moon-eye, and there would have been an end..”

“But I did not shoot!”

* * * * *

It seemed an age before my father spoke again, though the cuckoo-clock had only ticked eight times.

“No! I would not shoot and spare the beast, dinosaur or brontosaurus, or whatever the wiseacres who have not seen him may name him, the anguish that none had spared me. ‘Let him go on!’ said I. ‘Let him go on seeking her in the abysses that no lead-line may ever fathom, without consolation, without hope! Let him rise to the sun and the breeze of spring through miles of the cold black water, and find her not, year after year until the ending of the world. Let him call her through the mateless nights until Day and Night rush together at the sound of the Trumpet of the Judgment, and Time shall be no more!”

Crash!

The great hand came down upon the solid locust-wood table, breaking the spell that had bound my tongue.

“I—do not understand,” I heard my own child-voice saying. “Why was the Great Beast so sorry? What was he looking for?”

“His mate who died. Ay, at the lower end of the second lake, where the

water shallows, her bones were sticking up like the bleached timbers of a wrecked ship. And He and She being the last of their kind upon the earth, therefore he knows desolation... and shall know it till death brings forgetfulness and rest. Boy, the wind is fallen, the rain has spent itself, it is time that you go to bed.”

A Tropical Horror

William Hope Hodgson

We are a hundred and thirty days out from Melbourne, and for three weeks we have lain in this sweltering calm.

It is midnight, and our watch on deck until four a.m. I go out and sit on the hatch. A minute later, Joky, our youngest 'prentice, joins me for a chatter. Many are the hours we have sat thus and talked in the night watches; though, to be sure, it is Joky who does the talking. I am content to smoke and listen, giving an occasional grunt at seasons to show that I am attentive.

Joky has been silent for some time, his head bent in meditation. Suddenly he looks up, evidently with the intention of making some remark. As he does so, I see his face stiffen with a nameless horror. He crouches back, his eyes staring past me at some unseen fear. Then his mouth opens. He gives forth a strangulated cry and topples backward off the hatch, striking his head against the deck. Fearing I know not what, I turn to look.

Great Heavens! Rising above the bulwarks, seen plainly in the bright moonlight, is a vast slobbering mouth a fathom across. From the huge dripping lips hang great tentacles. As I look the Thing comes further over the rail. It is rising, rising, higher and higher. There are no eyes visible; only that fearful slobbering mouth set on the tremendous trunk-like neck; which, even as I watch, is curling inboard with the stealthy celerity of an enormous eel. Over it comes in vast heaving folds. Will it never end? The ship gives a slow, sullen roll to starboard as she feels the weight. Then the tail, a broad, flat-shaped mass, slips over the teak rail and falls with a loud slump on to the deck.

For a few seconds the hideous creature lies heaped in writhing, slimy coils. Then, with quick, darting movements, the monstrous head travels along the deck. Close by the mainmast stand the harness casks, and alongside of these a freshly opened cask of salt beef with the top loosely replaced. The smell of the meat seems to attract the monster, and I can hear it sniffing with a vast indrawing breath. Then those lips open, displaying four huge fangs; there is a quick forward motion of the head, a sudden crashing, crunching sound, and beef and barrel have disappeared. The noise brings one of the ordinary seamen out of the fo'cas'le. Coming into the night, he can see nothing for a moment.

Then, as he gets further aft, he sees, and with horrified cries rushes forward. Too late! From the mouth of the Thing there flashes forth a long, broad blade of glistening white, set with fierce teeth. I avert my eyes, but cannot shut out the sickening “Glut! Glut!” that follows.

The man on the “look-out,” attracted by the disturbance, has witnessed the tragedy, and flies for refuge into the fo’cas’le, flinging to the heavy iron door after him.

The carpenter and sailmaker come running out from the half-deck in their drawers. Seeing the awful Thing, they rush aft to the cabin with shouts of fear. The second mate, after one glance over the break of the poop, runs down the companion-way with the helmsman after him. I can hear them barring the scuttle, and abruptly I realise that I am on the main deck alone.

So far I have forgotten my own danger. The past few minutes seem like a portion of an awful dream. Now, however, I comprehend my position and, shaking off the horror that has held me, turn to seek safety. As I do so my eyes fall upon Joky, lying huddled and senseless with fright where he has fallen. I cannot leave him there. Close by stands the empty half-deck—a little steel-built house with iron doors. The lee one is hooked open. Once inside I am safe.

Up to the present the Thing has seemed to be unconscious of my presence. Now, however, the huge barrel-like head sways in my direction; then comes a muffled bellow, and the great tongue flickers in and out as the brute turns and swirls aft to meet me. I know there is not a moment to lose, and, picking up the helpless lad, I make a run for the open door. It is only distant a few yards, but that awful shape is coming down the deck to me in great wreathing coils. I reach the house and tumble in with my burden; then out on deck again to unhook and close the door. Even as I do so something white curls round the end of the house. With a bound I am inside and the door is shut and bolted. Through the thick glass of the ports I see the Thing sweep round the house, in vain search for me.

Joky has not moved yet; so, kneeling down, I loosen his shirt collar and sprinkle some water from the breaker over his face. While I am doing this I hear Morgan shout something; then comes a great shriek of terror, and again that sickening “Glut! Glut!”

Joky stirs uneasily, rubs his eyes, and sits up suddenly.

“Was that Morgan shouting—?” He breaks off with a cry. “Where are we? I have had such awful dreams!”

At this instant there is a sound of running footsteps on the deck and I hear Morgan’s voice at the door.

“Tom, open—!”

He stops abruptly and gives an awful cry of despair. Then I hear him rush forward. Through the porthole, I see him spring into the fore rigging and scramble madly aloft. Something steals up after him. It shows white in the moonlight. It wraps itself around his right ankle. Morgan stops dead, plucks out his sheath-knife, and hacks fiercely at the fiendish thing. It lets go, and in a second he is over the top and running for dear life up the t’gallant rigging.

A time of quietness follows, and presently I see that the day is breaking. Not a sound can be heard save the heavy gasping breathing of the Thing. As the sun rises higher the creature stretches itself out along the deck and seems to enjoy the warmth. Still no sound, either from the men forward or the officers aft. I can only suppose that they are afraid of attracting its attention. Yet, a little later, I hear the report of a pistol away aft, and looking out I see the serpent raise its huge head as though listening. As it does so I get a good view of the fore part, and in the daylight see what the night has hidden.

There, right about the mouth, is a pair of little pig-eyes, that seem to twinkle with a diabolical intelligence. It is swaying its head slowly from side to side; then, without warning, it turns quickly and looks right in through the port. I dodge out of sight; but not soon enough. It has seen me, and brings its great mouth up against the glass.

I hold my breath. My God! If it breaks the glass! I cower, horrified. From the direction of the port there comes a loud, harsh, scraping sound. I shiver. Then I remember that there are little iron doors to shut over the ports in bad weather. Without a moment’s waste of time I rise to my feet and slam to the door over the port. Then I go round to the others and do the same. We are now in darkness, and I tell Joky in a whisper to light the lamp, which, after some fumbling, he does.

About an hour before midnight I fall asleep. I am awakened suddenly some hours later by a scream of agony and the rattle of a water-dipper. There is a

slight scuffling sound; then that soul-revolting “Glut! Glut!”

I guess what has happened. One of the men forrad has slipped out of the fo’cas’le to try and get a little water. Evidently he has trusted to the darkness to hide his movements. Poor beggar! He has paid for his attempt with his life!

After this I cannot sleep, though the rest of the night passes quietly enough. Towards morning I doze a bit, but wake every few minutes with a start. Joky is sleeping peacefully; indeed, he seems worn out with the terrible strain of the past twenty-four hours. About eight a.m. I call him, and we make a light breakfast off the dry ship’s biscuit and water. Of the latter happily we have a good supply. Joky seems more himself, and starts to talk a little—possibly somewhat louder than is safe; for, as he chatters on, wondering how it will end, there comes a tremendous blow against the side of the house, making it ring again. After this Joky is very silent. As we sit there I cannot but wonder what all the rest are doing, and how the poor beggars forrad are faring, cooped up without water, as the tragedy of the night has proved.

Towards noon, I hear a loud bang, followed by a terrific bellowing. Then comes a great smashing of woodwork, and the cries of men in pain. Vainly I ask myself what has happened. I begin to reason. By the sound of the report it was evidently something much heavier than a rifle or pistol, and judging from the mad roaring of the Thing, the shot must have done some execution. On thinking it over further, I become convinced that, by some means, those aft have got hold of the small signal cannon we carry, and though I know that some have been hurt, perhaps killed, yet a feeling of exultation seizes me as I listen to the roars of the Thing, and realise that it is badly wounded, perhaps mortally. After a while, however, the bellowing dies away, and only an occasional roar, denoting more of anger than aught else, is heard.

Presently I become aware, by the ship’s canting over to starboard, that the creature has gone over to that side, and a great hope springs up within me that possibly it has had enough of us and is going over the rail into the sea. For a time all is silent and my hope grows stronger. I lean across and nudge Joky, who is sleeping with his head on the table. He starts up sharply with a loud cry.

“Hush!” I whisper hoarsely. “I’m not certain, but I do believe it’s gone.”

Joky’s face brightens wonderfully, and he questions me eagerly. We wait another hour or so, with hope ever rising. Our confidence is returning fast. Not

a sound can we hear, not even the breathing of the Beast. I get out some biscuits, and Joky, after rummaging in the locker, produces a small piece of pork and a bottle of ship's vinegar. We fall to with a relish. After our long abstinence from food the meal acts on us like wine, and what must Joky do but insist on opening the door, to make sure the Thing has gone. This I will not allow, telling him that at least it will be safer to open the iron port-covers first and have a look out. Joky argues, but I am immovable. He becomes excited. I believe the youngster is lightheaded. Then, as I turn to unscrew one of the after-covers, Joky makes a dash at the door. Before he can undo the bolts I have him, and after a short struggle lead him back to the table. Even as I endeavour to quieten him there comes at the starboard door—the door that Joky has tried to open—a sharp, loud sniff, sniff, followed immediately by a thunderous grunting howl and a foul stench of putrid breath sweeps in under the door. A great trembling takes me, and were it not for the carpenter's tool-chest I should fall. Joky turns very white and is violently sick, after which he is seized by a hopeless fit of sobbing.

Hour after hour passes, and, weary to death, I lie down on the chest upon which I have been sitting, and try to rest.

It must be about half-past two in the morning, after a somewhat longer doze, that I am suddenly awakened by a most tremendous uproar away forrad—men's voices shrieking, cursing, praying; but in spite of the terror expressed, so weak and feeble; while in the midst, and at times broken off short with that hellishly suggestive "Glut! Glut!" is the unearthly bellowing of the Thing. Fear incarnate seizes me, and I can only fall on my knees and pray. Too well I know what is happening.

Joky has slept through it all, and I am thankful.

Presently, under the door there steals a narrow ribbon of light, and I know that the day has broken on the second morning of our imprisonment. I let Joky sleep on. I will let him have peace while he may. Time passes, but I take little notice. The Thing is quiet, probably sleeping. About midday I eat a little biscuit and drink some of the water. Joky still sleeps. It is best so.

A sound breaks the stillness. The ship gives a slight heave, and I know that once more the Thing is awake. Round the deck it moves, causing the ship to roll perceptibly. Once it goes forrad—I fancy to again explore the fo'cas'le. Evidently it finds nothing, for it returns almost immediately. It pauses a

moment at the house, then goes on further aft. Up aloft, somewhere in the fore-rigging, there rings out a peal of wild laughter, though sounding very faint and far away. The Horror stops suddenly. I listen intently, but hear nothing save a sharp creaking beyond the after end of the house, as though a strain had come upon the rigging.

A minute later I hear a cry aloft, followed almost instantly by a loud crash on deck that seems to shake the ship. I wait in anxious fear. What is happening? The minutes pass slowly. Then comes another frightened shout. It ceases suddenly. The suspense has become terrible, and I am no longer able to bear it. Very cautiously I open one of the after port-covers, and peep out to see a fearful sight. There, with its tail upon the deck and its vast body curled round the mainmast, is the monster, its head above the topsail yard, and its great claw-armed tentacle waving in the air. It is the first proper sight that I have had of the Thing. Good Heavens! It must weigh a hundred tons! Knowing that I shall have time, I open the port itself, then crane my head out and look up. There on the extreme end of the lower topsail yard I see one of the able seamen. Even down here I note the staring horror of his face. At this moment he sees me and gives a weak, hoarse cry for help. I can do nothing for him. As I look the great tongue shoots out and licks him off the yard, much as might a dog a fly off the window-pane.

Higher still, but happily out of reach, are two more of the men. As far as I can judge they are lashed to the mast above the royal yard. The Thing attempts to reach them, but after a futile effort it ceases, and starts to slide down, coil on coil, to the deck. While doing this I notice a great gaping wound on its body some twenty feet above the tail.

I drop my gaze from aloft and look aft. The cabin door is torn from its hinges, and the bulkhead—which, unlike the half-deck, is of teak wood—is partly broken down. With a shudder I realise the cause of those cries after the cannon-shot. Turning I screw my head round and try to see the foremast, but cannot. The sun, I notice, is low, and the night is near. Then I draw in my head and fasten up both port and cover.

How will it end? Oh! how will it end?

After a while Joky wakes up. He is very restless, yet though he has eaten nothing during the day I cannot get him to touch anything.

Night draws on. We are too weary—too dispirited to talk. I lie down, but not to sleep.... Time passes.

* * * * *

A ventilator rattles violently somewhere on the main deck, and there sounds constantly that slurring, gritty noise. Later I hear a cat's agonised howl, and then again all is quiet. Some time after comes a great splash alongside. Then, for some hours all is silent as the grave. Occasionally I sit up on the chest and listen, yet never a whisper of noise comes to me. There is an absolute silence, even the monotonous creak of the gear has died away entirely, and at last a real hope is springing up within me. That splash, this silence—surely I am justified in hoping. I do not wake Joky this time. I will prove first for myself that all is safe. Still I wait. I will run no unnecessary risks. After a time I creep to the after-port and will listen; but there is no sound. I put up my hand and feel at the screw, then again I hesitate, yet not for long. Noiselessly I begin to unscrew the fastening of the heavy shield. It swings loose on its hinge, and I pull it back and peer out. My heart is beating madly. Everything seems strangely dark outside. Perhaps the moon has gone behind a cloud. Suddenly a beam of moonlight enters through the port, and goes as quickly. I stare out. Something moves. Again the light streams in, and now I seem to be looking into a great cavern, at the bottom of which quivers and curls something palely white.

My heart seems to stand still! It is the Horror! I start back and seize the iron port-flap to slam it to. As I do so, something strikes the glass like a steam ram, shatters it to atoms, and flicks past me into the berth. I scream and spring away. The port is quite filled with it. The lamp shows it dimly. It is curling and twisting here and there. It is as thick as a tree, and covered with a smooth slimy skin. At the end is a great claw, like a lobster's, only a thousand times larger. I cower down into the farthest corner.... It has broken the tool-chest to pieces with one click of those frightful mandibles. Joky has crawled under a bunk. The Thing sweeps round in my direction. I feel a drop of sweat trickle slowly down my face—it tastes salty. Nearer comes that awful death.... Crash! I roll over backwards. It has crushed the water breaker against which I leant, and I am rolling in the water across the floor. The claw drives up, then down, with a quick uncertain movement, striking the deck a dull, heavy blow, a foot from my head. Joky gives a little gasp of horror. Slowly the Thing rises and starts feeling its way round the berth. It plunges into a bunk and pulls out a bolster, nips it in half and drops it, then moves on. It is feeling along the deck. As it does so it comes across a half of the bolster. It seems to toy with it, then

picks it up and takes it out through the port....

A wave of putrid air fills the berth. There is a grating sound, and something enters the port again—something white and tapering and set with teeth. Hither and thither it curls, rasping over the bunks, ceiling, and deck, with a noise like that of a great saw at work. Twice it flickers above my head, and I close my eyes. Then off it goes again. It sounds now on the opposite side of the berth and nearer to Joky. Suddenly the harsh, raspy noise becomes muffled, as though the teeth were passing across some soft substance. Joky gives a horrid little scream, that breaks off into a bubbling, whistling sound. I open my eyes. The tip of the vast tongue is curled tightly round something that drips, then is quickly withdrawn, allowing the moonbeams to steal again into the berth. I rise to my feet. Looking round, I note in a mechanical sort of way the wrecked state of the berth—the shattered chests, dismantled bunks, and something else—

“Joky!” I cry, and tingle all over.

There is that awful Thing again at the port. I glance round for a weapon. I will revenge Joky. Ah! there, right under the lamp, where the wreck of the carpenter’s chest strews the floor, lies a small hatchet. I spring forward and seize it. It is small, but so keen—so keen! I feel its razor edge lovingly. Then I am back at the port. I stand to one side and raise my weapon. The great tongue is feeling its way to those fearsome remains. It reaches them. As it does so, with a scream of “Joky! Joky!” I strike savagely again and again and again, gasping as I strike; once more, and the monstrous mass falls to the deck, writhing like a hideous eel. A vast, warm flood rushes in through the porthole. There is a sound of breaking steel and an enormous bellowing. A singing comes in my ears and grows louder—louder. Then the berth grows indistinct and suddenly dark.

* * * * *

Extract from the log of the steamship *Hispaniola*.

June 24.—Lat.—N. Long.—W. 11 a.m.—Sighted four-masted barque about four points on the port bow, flying signal of distress. Ran down to her and sent a boat aboard. She proved to be the *Glen Doon*, homeward bound from Melbourne to London. Found things in a terrible state. Decks covered with blood and slime. Steel deck-house stove in. Broke open door, and discovered youth of about nineteen in last stage of inanition, also part remains of boy about

fourteen years of age. There was a great quantity of blood in the place, and a huge curled-up mass of whitish flesh, weighing about half a ton, one end of which appeared to have been hacked through with a sharp instrument. Found fore-castle door open and hanging from one hinge. Doorway bulged, as though something had been forced through. Went inside. Terrible state of affairs, blood everywhere, broken chests, smashed bunks, but no men nor remains. Went aft again and found youth showing signs of recovery. When he came round, gave the name of Thompson. Said they had been attacked by a huge serpent—thought it must have been sea-serpent. He was too weak to say much, but told us there were some men up the mainmast. Sent a hand aloft, who reported them lashed to the royal mast, and quite dead. Went aft to the cabin. Here we found the bulkhead smashed to pieces, and the cabin-door lying on the deck near the after-hatch. Found body of captain down lazarette, but no officers. Noticed amongst the wreckage part of the carriage of a small cannon. Came aboard again.

Have sent the second mate with six men to work her into port. Thompson is with us. He has written out his version of the affair. We certainly consider that the state of the ship, as we found her, bears out in every respect his story. (Signed)

William Norton (Master).
Tom Briggs (1st Mate).

The Valley of the Spiders

H. G. Wells

Towards midday the three pursuers came abruptly round a bend in the torrent bed upon the sight of a very broad and spacious valley. The difficult and winding trench of pebbles along which they had tracked the fugitives for so long expanded to a broad slope, and with a common impulse the three men left the trail, and rode to a low eminence set with olive-dun trees, and there halted, the two others, as became them, a little behind the man with the silver-studded bridle.

For a space they scanned the great expanse below them with eager eyes. It spread remoter and remoter, with only a few clusters of sere thorn bushes here and there, and the dim suggestions of some now waterless ravine to break its desolation of yellow grass. Its purple distances melted at last into the bluish slopes of the further hills—hills it might be of a greener kind—and above them invisibly supported, and seeming indeed to hang in the blue, were the snow-clad summits of mountains—that grew larger and bolder to the north-westward as the sides of the valley drew together. And westward the valley opened until a distant darkness under the sky told where the forests began. But the three men looked neither east nor west, but only steadfastly across the valley.

The gaunt man with the scarred lip was the first to speak. “Nowhere,” he said, with a sigh of disappointment in his voice. “But after all, they had a full day’s start.”

“They don’t know we are after them,” said the little man on the white horse.

“*She* would know,” said the leader bitterly, as if speaking to himself.

“Even then they can’t go fast. They’ve got no beast but the mule, and all today the girl’s foot has been bleeding—”

The man with the silver bridle flashed a quick intensity of rage on him. “Do you think I haven’t seen that?” he snarled.

“It helps, anyhow,” whispered the little man to himself.

The gaunt man with the scarred lip stared impassively.

“They can’t be over the valley, “ he said. “If we ride hard—”

He glanced at the white horse and paused.

“Curse all white horses!” said the man with the silver bridle and turned to scan the beast his curse included.

The little man looked down between the melancholy ears of his steed.

“I did my best,” he said.

The two others stared again across the valley for a space. The gaunt man passed the back of his hand across the scarred lip.

“Come up!” said the man who owned the silver bridle, suddenly. The little man started and jerked his rein, and the horse hooves of the three made a multitudinous faint pattering upon the withered grass as they turned back towards the trail....

They rode cautiously down the long slope before them, and so came through a waste of prickly twisted bushes and strange dry shapes of horny branches that grew amongst the rocks, into the level below. And there the trail grew faint, for the soil was scanty, and the only herbage was this scorched dead straw that lay upon the ground. Still, by hard scanning, by leaning beside the horse’s neck and pausing ever and again, even these white men could contrive to follow after their prey.

There were trodden places, bent and broken blades of the coarse grass, and ever and again the sufficient intimation of a footmark. And once the leader saw a brown smear of blood where the half-caste girl may have trod. And at that under his breath he cursed her for a fool.

The gaunt man checked his leader’s tracking, and the little man on the white horse rode behind, a man lost in a dream. They rode one after another, the man with the silver bridle led the way, and they spoke never a word. After a time it came to the little man on the white horse that the world was very still. He started out of his dream. Besides the minute noises of their horses and equipment, the whole great valley kept the brooding quiet of a painted scene.

Before him went his master and his fellow, each intently leaning forward to the left, each impassively moving with the paces of his horse; their shadows went before them—still, noiseless, tapering attendants; and nearer a crouched cool shape was his own. He looked about him. What was it had gone? Then he remembered the reverberation from the banks of the gorge and the perpetual accompaniment of shifting, jostling pebbles. And, moreover—? There was no breeze. That was it! What a vast, still place it was, a monotonous afternoon slumber. And the sky open and blank, except for a somber veil of haze that had gathered in the upper valley.

He straightened his back, fretted with his bridle, puckered his lips to whistle, and simply sighed. He turned in his saddle for a time, and stared at the throat of the mountain gorge out of which they had come. Blank! Blank slopes on either side, with never a sign of a decent beast or tree—much less a man. What a land it was! What a wilderness! He dropped again into his former pose.

It filled him with a momentary pleasure to see a wry stick of purple black flash out into the form of a snake, and vanish amidst the brown. After all, the infernal valley was alive. And then, to rejoice him still more, came a breath across his face, a whisper that came and went, the faintest inclination of a stiff black-antlered bush upon a crest, the first intimations of a possible breeze. Idly he wetted his finger, and held it up.

He pulled up sharply to avoid a collision with the gaunt man, who had stopped at fault upon the trail. Just at that guilty moment he caught his master's eye looking towards him.

For a time he forced an interest in the tracking. Then, as they rode on again, he studied his master's shadow and hat and shoulder appearing and disappearing behind the gaunt man's nearer contours. They had ridden four days out of the very limits of the world into this desolate place, short of water, with nothing but a strip of dried meat under their saddles, over rocks and mountains, where surely none but these fugitives had ever been before—for *that!*

And all this was for a girl, a mere willful child! And the man had whole cityfuls of people to do his basest bidding—girls, women! Why in the name of passionate folly *this* one in particular? asked the little man, and scowled at the world, and licked his parched lips with a blackened tongue. It was the way of the master, and that was all he knew. Just because she sought to evade him....

His eye caught a whole row of high-plumed canes bending in unison, and then the tails of silk that hung before his neck flapped and fell.

The breeze was growing stronger. Somehow it took the stiff stillness out of things—and that was well.

“Hullo!” said the gaunt man. All three stopped abruptly.

“What?” asked the master. “What?”

“Over there,” said the gaunt man, pointing up the valley.

“What?”

“Something coming towards us.”

And as he spoke a yellow animal crested a rise and came bearing down upon them. It was a big wild dog, coming before the wind, tongue out, at a steady pace, and running with such an intensity of purpose that he did not seem to see the horsemen he approached. He ran with his nose up, following, it was plain, neither scent nor quarry. As he drew nearer the little man felt for his sword. “He’s mad,” said the gaunt rider.

“Shout!” said the little man and shouted.

The dog came on. Then when the little man’s blade was already out, swerved aside and went panting by them and past. The eyes of the little man followed its flight. “There was no foam,” he said. For a space the man with the silver-studded bridle stared up the valley. “Oh, come on!” he cried at last. “What does it matter?” and jerked his horse to movement again.

The little man left the insoluble mystery of a dog that fled from nothing but the wind, and lapsed into profound musings on human character. “Come on!” he whispered to himself. “Why should it be even to one man to say ‘Come on!’ with that stupendous violence of effect. Always, all his life, the man with the silver bridle has been saying that. If *I* said it—!” thought the little man. But people marvelled when the master was disobeyed even in the wildest things. This half-caste girl seemed to him, seemed to everyone, mad—blasphemous to most. The little man, by way of comparison, reflected on the gaunt rider with the scarred lip, as stalwart as his master, as brave and, indeed, perhaps

braver, and yet for him there was obedience, nothing but to give obedience duly and stoutly....

Certain sensations of the hands and knees called the little man back to more immediate things. He became aware of something. He rode up beside his gaunt fellow. "Do you notice the horses?" he said in an undertone.

The gaunt face looked interrogation.

"They don't like this wind," said the little man, and dropped behind as the man with the silver bridle turned upon him.

"It's all right," said the gaunt-faced man.

They rode on again for a space in silence. The foremost two rode downcast upon the trail, the hindmost man watched the haze that crept down the vastness of the valley, nearer and nearer, and noted how the wind grew in strength moment by moment. Far away on the left he saw a line of dark bulks—wild hog perhaps, galloping down the valley, but of that he said nothing, nor did he remark again upon the uneasiness of the horses.

And then he saw first one and then a second great white ball, a great shining white ball like a gigantic head of thistledown, that drove before the wind athwart the path. These balls soared high in the air, and dropped and rose again and caught for a moment, and hurried on and passed, but at the sight of them the restlessness of the horses increased.

Then presently he saw that more of these drifting globes—and then soon very many more—were hurrying towards him down the valley.

They became aware of a squealing. Athwart the path a huge boar rushed, turning his head but for one instant to glance at them, and then hurtling on down the valley again. And at that, all three stopped and sat in their saddles, staring into the thickening haze that was coming upon them.

"If it were not for this thistledown—" began the leader.

But now a big globe came drifting past within a score of yards of them. It was really not an even sphere at all, but a vast, soft, ragged, filmy thing, a sheet gathered by the corners, an aerial jellyfish, as it were, but rolling over and over

as it advanced, and trailing long, cobwebby threads and streamers that floated in its wake.

“It isn’t thistledown,” said the little man.

“I don’t like the stuff,” said the gaunt man.

And they looked at one another.

“Curse it!” cried the leader. “The air’s full of it up there. If it keeps on at this pace long, it will stop us altogether.”

An instinctive feeling, such as lines out a herd of deer at the approach of some ambiguous thing, prompted them to turn their horses to the wind, ride forwards for a few paces, and stare at that advancing multitude of floating masses. They came on before the wind with a sort of smooth swiftness, rising and falling noiselessly, sinking to earth, rebounding high, soaring—all with a perfect unanimity, with a still, deliberate assurance.

Right and left of the horsemen the pioneers of this strange army passed. At one that rolled along the ground, breaking shapelessly and trailing out reluctantly into long grappling ribbons and bands, all three horses began to shy and dance. The master was seized with a sudden, unreasonable impatience. He cursed the drifting globes roundly. “Get on!” he cried; “get on! What do these things matter? How can they matter? Back to the trail!” He fell swearing at his horse and sawed the bit across its mouth.

He shouted aloud with rage. “I will follow that trail, I tell you,” he cried. “Where is the trail!”

He gripped the bridle of his prancing horse and searched amidst the grass. A long and clinging thread fell across his face, a gray streamer dropped about his bridle arm, some big, active thing with many legs ran down the hack of his head. He looked up to discover one of those gray masses anchored as it were above him by these things and flapping out ends as a sail flaps when a boat comes about—but noiselessly.

He had an impression of many eyes, of a dense crew of squat bodies, of long, many-jointed limbs hauling at their mooring ropes to bring the thing down upon him. For a space he stared up, reining in his prancing horse with the

instinct born of years of horsemanship. Then the flat of a sword smote his back, and a blade flashed overhead and cut the drifting balloon of spider web free, and the whole mass lifted softly and drove clear and away.

“Spiders!” cried the voice of the gaunt man. “The things are full of big spiders! Look, my lord!”

The man with the silver bridle still followed the mass that drove away.

“Look, my lord!”

The master found himself staring down at a red smashed thing on the ground that, in spite of partial obliteration, could still wriggle unavailing legs. Then when the gaunt man pointed to another mass that bore down upon them, he drew his sword hastily. Up the valley now it was like a fog bank torn to rags. He tried to grasp the situation.

“Ride for it!” the little man was shouting. “Ride for it down the valley.”

What happened then was like the confusion of a battle. The man with the silver bridle saw the little man go past him slashing furiously at imaginary cobwebs, saw him cannon into the horse of the gaunt man and hurl it and its rider to earth. His own horse went a dozen paces before he could rein it in. Then he looked up to avoid imaginary dangers, and then back again to see a horse rolling on the ground, the gaunt man standing and slashing over it at a rent and fluttering mass of gray that streamed and wrapped about them both. And thick and fast as thistledown on waste land on a windy day in July, the cobweb masses were coming on.

The little man had dismounted, but he dared not release his horse. He was endeavoring to lug the struggling brute back with the strength of one arm, while with the other he slashed aimlessly. The tentacles of a second gray mass had entangled themselves with the struggle, and this second gray mass came to its moorings, and slowly sank.

The master set his teeth, gripped his bridle, lowered his head and spurred his horse forward. The horse on the ground rolled over, there was blood and moving shapes upon the flanks, and the gaunt man suddenly leaving it, ran forward towards his master, perhaps ten paces. His legs were swathed and encumbered with gray; he made ineffectual movements with his sword. Gray

streamers waved from him; there was a thin veil of gray across his face. With his left hand he beat at something on his body, and suddenly he stumbled and fell. He struggled to rise, and fell again, and suddenly, horribly, began to howl, “Oh—ohoo, ohoo!”

The master could see the great spiders upon him, and others upon the ground.

As he strove to force his horse nearer to this gesticulating screaming gray object that struggled up and down, there came a clatter of hooves, and the little man, in act of mounting, swordless, balanced on his belly athwart the white horse, and clutching its mane, whirled past. And again a clinging thread of gray gossamer swept across the master’s face. All about him and over him, it seemed this drifting, noiseless cobweb circled and drew nearer him....

To the day of his death he never knew just how the event of that moment happened. Did he, indeed, turn his horse, or did it really of its own accord stampede after its fellow? Suffice it that in another second he was galloping full tilt down the valley with his sword whirling furiously overhead. And all about him on the quickening breeze, the spiders’ airships, their air bundles and air sheets, seemed to him to hurry in a conscious pursuit.

Clatter, clatter, thud, thud—the man with the silver bridle rode, heedless of his direction, with his fearful face looking up now right, now left, and his sword arm ready to slash. And a few hundred yards ahead of him, with a tail of torn cobweb trailing behind him, rode the little man on the white horse, still but imperfectly in the saddle. The reeds bent before them, the wind blew fresh and strong, over his shoulder the master could see the webs hurrying to overtake....

He was so intent to escape the spiders’ webs that only as his horse gathered together for a leap did he realize the ravine ahead. And then realized it only to misunderstand and interfere. He was leaning forward on his horse’s neck and sat up and back all too late.

But if in his excitement he had failed to leap, at any rate he had not forgotten how to fall. He was horseman again in mid-air. He came off clear with a mere bruise upon his shoulder, and his horse rolled, kicking spasmodic legs, and lay still. But the master’s sword drove its point into the hard soil, and snapped clean across, as though Chance refused him any longer as her Knight, and the splintered end missed his face by an inch or so.

He was on his feet in a moment, breathlessly scanning the onrushing spider webs. For a moment he was minded to run, and then thought of the ravine, and turned back. He ran aside once to dodge one drifting terror, and then he was swiftly clambering down the precipitous sides, hid out of the touch of the gale.

There under the lee of the dry torrent's steeper banks he might crouch, and watch these strange, gray masses pass and pass in safety till the wind fell, and it became possible to escape. And there for a long time he crouched, watching the strange, gray, ragged masses trail their streamers across his narrowed sky.

Once a stray spider fell into the ravine close beside him—a full foot it measured from leg to leg, and its body was half a man's hand—and after he had watched its monstrous alacrity of search and escape for a little while, and tempted it to bite his broken sword, he lifted up his iron heeled boot and smashed it into a pulp. He swore as he did so, and for a time sought up and down for another.

Then presently, when he was surer these spider swarms could not drop into the ravine, he found a place where he could sit down, and sat and fell into deep thought and began after his manner to gnaw his knuckles and bite his nails. And from this he was moved by the coming of the man with the white horse.

He heard him long before he saw him, as a clattering of hooves, stumbling footsteps, and a reassuring voice. Then the little man appeared, a rueful figure, still with a tail of white cobweb trailing behind him. They approached each other without speaking, without salutation. The little man was fatigued and shamed to the pitch of hopeless bitterness, and came to a stop at last, face to face with his seated master. The latter winced a little under his dependent's eye. "Well?" he said at last, with no pretense of authority.

"You left him!"

"My horse bolted."

"I know. So did mine."

He laughed at his master mirthlessly.

"I say my horse bolted," said the man who once had a silver-studded bridle.

“Cowards both,” said the little man.

The other gnawed his knuckle through some meditative moments, with his eyes on his inferior.

“Don’t call me a coward,” he said at length.

“You are a coward like myself.”

“A coward possibly. There is a limit beyond which every man must fear. That I have learnt at last. But not like yourself. That is where the difference comes in.”

“I never could have dreamt you would have left him. He saved your life two minutes before.... Why are you our lord?”

The master gnawed his knuckles again, and his countenance was dark.

“No man calls me a coward,” he said. “No.... A broken sword is better than none.... One spavined white horse cannot be expected to carry two men a four days’ journey. I hate white horses, but this time it cannot be helped. You begin to understand me?... I perceive that you are minded, on the strength of what you have seen and fancy, to taint my reputation. It is men of your sort who unmake kings. Besides which—I never liked you.”

“My lord!” said the little man.

“No,” said the master. “*No!*”

He stood up sharply as the little man moved. For a minute perhaps they faced one another. Overhead the spiders’ balls went driving.

There was a quick movement among the pebbles; a running of feet a cry of despair, a gasp and a blow....

Towards nightfall the wind fell. The sun set in a calm serenity and the man who had once possessed the silver bridle came at last very cautiously and by an easy slope out of the ravine again; but now he led the white horse that once belonged to the little man. He would have gone back to his horse to get his

silver-mounted bridle again but he feared night and a quickening breeze might still find him in the valley, and besides he disliked greatly to think he might discover his horse all swathed in cobwebs and perhaps unpleasantly eaten.

And as he thought of those cobwebs and of all the dangers he had been through and the manner in which he had been preserved that day, his hand sought a little reliquary that hung about his neck and he clasped it for a moment with heartfelt gratitude. As he did so his eyes went across the valley.

“I was hot with passion,” he said, “and now she has met her reward. They also no doubt—”

And behold! Far away out of the wooded slopes across the valley, but in the clearness of the sunset distinct and unmistakable, he saw a little spire of smoke.

At that his expression of serene resignation changed to an amazed anger. Smoke? He turned the head of the white horse about and hesitated. And as he did so a little rustle of air went through the grass about him. Far away upon some reeds swayed a tattered sheet of gray. He looked at the cobwebs; he looked at the smoke.

“Perhaps after all it is not them he said at last.” But he knew better.

After he had stared at the smoke for some time, he mounted the white horse.

As he rode he picked his way amidst stranded masses of web. For some reason there were many dead spiders on the ground, and those that lived feasted guiltily on their fellow. At the sound of his horse’s hooves they fled.

Their time had passed. From the ground without either a wind to carry them or a winding sheet ready these things, for all their poison, could do him no evil.

He flicked with his belt at those he fancied came too near. Once where a number ran together over a bare place, he was minded to dismount and trample them with his boots, but this impulse he overcame. Ever and again he turned in his saddle, and looked back at the smoke.

“Spiders,” he muttered over and over again. “Spiders! Well, well.... The next time I must spin a web.”

What Was It?

Fitz James O'Brien

It is, I confess, with considerable diffidence that I approach the strange narrative which I am about to relate. The events which I purpose detailing are of so extraordinary and unheard-of a character that I am quite prepared to meet with an unusual amount of incredulity and scorn. I accept all such beforehand. I have, I trust, the literary courage to face unbelief. I have, after mature consideration, resolved to narrate, in as simple and straightforward a manner as I can compass, some facts that passed under my observation in the month of July last, and which, in the annals of the mysteries of physical science, are wholly unparalleled.

I live at No.—Twenty-sixth Street, in this city. The house is in some respects a curious one. It has enjoyed for the last two years the reputation of being haunted. It is a large and stately residence, surrounded by what was once a garden, but which is now only a green inclosure used for bleaching clothes. The dry basin of what has been a fountain, and a few fruit-trees, ragged and unpruned, indicate that this spot, in past days, was a pleasant, shady retreat, filled with fruits and flowers and the sweet murmur of waters.

The house is very spacious. A hall of noble size leads to a vast spiral staircase winding through its centre; while the various apartments are of imposing dimensions. It was built some fifteen or twenty years since by Mr. A—, the well-known New York merchant, who five years ago threw the commercial world into convulsions by a stupendous bank fraud. Mr. A—, as everyone knows, escaped to Europe, and died not long after of a broken heart. Almost immediately after the news of his decease reached this country, and was verified, the report spread in Twenty-sixth Street that No.—was haunted. Legal measures had dispossessed the widow of its former owner, and it was inhabited merely by a care-taker and his wife, placed there by the house-agent into whose hands it had passed for purposes of renting or sale. These people declared that they were troubled with unnatural noises. Doors were opened without any visible agency. The remnants of furniture scattered through the various rooms were, during the night, piled one upon the other by unknown hands. Invisible feet passed up and down the stairs in broad daylight, accompanied by the rustle of unseen silk dresses and the gliding of viewless hands along the massive balusters. The care-taker and his wife declared that they would live

there no longer. The house-agent laughed, dismissed them and put others in their place. The noises and supernatural manifestations continued. The neighborhood caught up the story, and the house remained untenanted for three years. Several parties negotiated for it; but somehow, always before the bargain was closed, they heard the unpleasant rumors, and declined to treat any further.

It was in this state of things that my landlady—who at that time kept a boarding-house in Bleecker Street, and who wished to move farther up town—conceived the bold idea of renting No.—Twenty sixth Street. Happening to have in her house rather a plucky and philosophical set of boarders, she laid her scheme before us, stating candidly everything she had heard respecting the ghostly qualities of the establishment to which she wished to remove us. With the exception of one or two timid persons—a sea-captain and a returned Californian, who immediately gave notice that they would leave—every one of Mrs. Moffat’s guests declared that they would accompany her in her chivalric incursion into the abode of spirits.

Our removal was effected in the month of May, and we were all charmed with our new residence. The portion of Twenty-sixth Street where our house is situated—between Seventh and Eighth Avenues—is one of the pleasantest localities in New York. The gardens back of the houses, running down nearly to the Hudson, form, in the summer time, a perfect avenue of verdure. The air is pure and invigorating, sweeping, as it does, straight across the river from the Weehawken heights, and even the ragged garden which surrounded the house on two sides, although displaying on washing-days rather too much clothes-line, still gave us a piece of green sward to look at, and a cool retreat in the summer evenings, where we smoked our cigars in the dusk, and watched the fire-flies flashing their dark-lanterns in the long grass.

Of course we had no sooner established ourselves at No.—than we began to expect the ghosts. We absolutely awaited their advent with eagerness. Our dinner conversation was supernatural. One of the boarders, who had purchased Mrs. Crowe’s “Night Side of Nature” for his own private delectation, was regarded as a public enemy by the entire household for not having bought twenty copies. The man led a life of supreme wretchedness while he was perusing the volume. A system of espionage was established, of which he was the victim. If he incautiously laid the book down for an instant and left the room, it was immediately seized and read aloud in secret places to a select few. I found myself a person of immense importance, it having leaked out that

I was tolerably well versed in the history of supernaturalism, and had once written a story, entitled "The Pot of Tulips," for *Harper's Monthly*, the foundation of which was a ghost. If a table or a wainscot panel happened to warp when we were assembled in the large drawing-room, there was an instant silence, and every one was prepared for an immediate clanking of chains and a spectral form.

After a month of psychological excitement, it was with the utmost dissatisfaction that we were forced to acknowledge that nothing in the remotest degree approaching the supernatural had manifested itself. Once the black butler asseverated that his candle had been blown out by some invisible agency while in the act of undressing himself for the night; but as I had more than once discovered this colored gentleman in a condition when one candle must have appeared to him like two, I thought it possible that, by going a step farther in his potations, he might have reversed this phenomenon, and seen no candle at all where he ought to have beheld one.

Things were in this state when an incident took place so awful and inexplicable in its character that my reason fairly reels at the bare memory of the occurrence. It was the tenth of July. After dinner was over I repaired, with my friend Dr. Hammond, to the garden to smoke my evening pipe. Independent of certain mental sympathies which existed between the Doctor and myself, we were linked together by a secret vice. We both smoked opium. We knew each other's secret, and respected it. We enjoyed together that wonderful expansion of thought; that marvelous intensifying of the perceptive faculties; that boundless feeling of existence when we seem to have points of contact with the whole universe; in short, that unimaginable spiritual bliss, which I would not surrender for a throne, and which I hope you, reader, will never—never taste.

Those hours of opium happiness which the Doctor and I spent together in secret were regulated with a scientific accuracy. We did not blindly smoke the drug of Paradise, and leave our dreams to chance. While smoking we carefully steered our conversation through the brightest and calmest channels of thought. We talked of the East, and endeavored to recall the magical panorama of its glowing scenery. We criticised the most sensuous poets, those who painted life ruddy with health, brimming with passion, happy in the possession of youth, and strength, and beauty. If we talked of Shakespeare's "Midsummer Night's Dream," we lingered over Ariel and avoided Caliban. Like the Gebbers, we turned our faces to the East, and saw only the sunny side of the world.

This skillful coloring of our train of thought produced in our subsequent visions a corresponding tone. The splendors of Arabian fairy-land dyed our dreams. We paced that narrow strip of grass with the tread and port of kings. The song of the *Rana arborea* while he clung to the bark of the ragged plum-tree sounded like the strains of divine orchestras. Houses, walls, and streets melted like rain-clouds, and vistas of unimaginable glory stretched away before us. It was a rapturous companionship. We each of us enjoyed the vast delight more perfectly because, even in our most ecstatic moments, we were ever conscious of each other's presence. Our pleasures, while individual, were still twin, vibrating and moving in musical accord.

On the evening in question, the tenth of July, the Doctor and myself found ourselves in an unusually metaphysical mood. We lit our large meerschaums, filled with fine Turkish tobacco, in the core of which burned a little black nut of opium, that, like the nut in the fairy tale, held within its narrow limits wonders beyond the reach of kings; we paced to and fro, conversing. A strange perversity dominated the currents of our thought. They would not flow through the sun-lit channels into which we strove to divert them. For some unaccountable reason they constantly diverged into dark and lonesome beds, where a continual gloom brooded. It was in vain that, after our old fashion, we flung ourselves on the shores of the East, and talked of its gay bazaars, of the splendors of the time of Haroun, of harems and golden palaces. Black afreets continually arose from the depths of our talk, and expanded, like the one the fisherman released from the copper vessel, until they blotted everything bright from our vision. Insensibly we yielded to the occult force that swayed us, and indulged in gloomy speculation. We had talked some time upon the proneness of the human mind to mysticism and the almost universal love of the Terrible, when Hammond suddenly said to me:

“What do you consider to be the greatest element of Terror?”

The question, I own, puzzled me. That many things were terrible, I knew. Stumbling over a corpse in the dark; beholding, as I once did, a woman floating down a deep and rapid river, with wildly-lifted arms and awful, upturned face, uttering, as she sank, shrieks that rent one's heart, while we, the spectators, stood frozen at a window which overhung the river at a height of sixty feet, unable to make the slightest effort to save her, but dumbly watching her last supreme agony and her disappearance. A shattered wreck, with no life visible, encountered floating listlessly on the ocean, is a terrible object, for it suggests a huge terror, the proportions of which are veiled. But it now struck me for the

first time that there must be one great and ruling embodiment of fear, a King of Terrors to which all others must succumb. What might it be? To what train of circumstances would it owe its existence?

“I confess, Hammond,” I replied to my friend, “I never considered the subject before. That there must be one Something more terrible than any other thing, I feel. I can not attempt, however, even the most vague definition.”

“I am somewhat like you, Harry,” he answered. “I feel my capacity to experience a terror greater than anything yet conceived by the human mind. Something combining in fearful and unnatural amalgamation hitherto supposed incompatible elements. The calling of the voices in Brockden Brown’s novel of ‘Wieland’ is awful; so is the picture of the Dweller of the Threshold in Bulwer’s ‘Zanoni;’ but,” he added, shaking his head gloomily, “there is something more horrible still than these.”

“Look here, Hammond,” I rejoined; “let us drop this kind of talk for Heaven’s sake. We shall suffer for it, depend on it.”

“I don’t know what’s the matter with me tonight,” he replied, “but my brain is running upon all sorts of weird and awful thoughts. I feel as if I could write a story like Hoffman tonight, if I were only master of a literary style.”

“Well, if we are going to be Hoffmanesque in our talk I’m off to bed. Opium and nightmares should never be brought together. How sultry it is! Good-night, Hammond.”

“Good-night, Harry. Pleasant dreams to you.”

“To you, gloomy wretch, afreets, ghouls, and enchanters.”

We parted, and each sought his respective chamber. I undressed quickly and got into bed, taking with me, according to my usual custom, a hook, over which I generally read myself to sleep. I opened the volume as soon as I had laid my head upon the pillow, and instantly flung it to the other side of the room. It was Goudon’s “History of Monsters”—a curious French work, which I had lately imported from Paris, but which, in the state of mind I was then in, was anything but an agreeable companion. I resolved to go to sleep at once; so, turning down my gas until nothing but a little blue point of light glimmered on the top of the tube, I composed myself to rest once more.

The room was in total darkness. The atom of gas that still-remained lighted did not illuminate a distance of three inches round the burner. I desperately drew my arm across my eyes, as if to shut out even the darkness, and tried to think of nothing. It was in vain. The confounded themes touched on by Hammond in the garden kept obtruding themselves on my brain. I battled against them. I erected ramparts of would-be blankness of intellect to keep them out. They still crowded upon me. While I was lying still as a corpse, hoping that by a perfect physical inaction I would hasten mental repose, an awful incident occurred. A Something dropped, as it seemed, from the ceiling, plumb upon my chest, and the next instant I felt two bony hands encircling my throat, endeavoring to choke me.

I am no coward, and am possessed of considerable physical strength. The suddenness of the attack instead of stunning me strung every nerve to its highest tension. My body acted from instinct, before my brain had time to realize the terrors of my position. In an instant I wound two muscular arms around the creature, and squeezed it, with all the strength of despair, against my chest. In a few seconds the bony hands that had fastened on my throat loosened their hold, and I was free to breathe once more. Then commenced a struggle of awful intensity. Immersed in the most profound darkness, totally ignorant of the nature of the Thing by which I was so suddenly attacked, finding my grasp slipping every moment by reason, it seemed to me, of the entire nakedness of my assailant, bitten with sharp teeth in the shoulder, neck, and chest, having every moment to protect my throat against a pair of sinewy, agile hands, which my utmost efforts could not confine these were a combination of circumstances to combat which required all the strength and skill and courage that I possessed.

At last, after a silent, deadly, exhausting struggle, I got my assailant under by a series of incredible efforts of strength. Once pinned, with my knee on what I made out to be its chest, I knew that I was victor. I rested for a moment to breathe. I heard the creature beneath me panting in the darkness, and felt the violent throbbing of a heart. It was apparently as exhausted as I was, that was one comfort. At this moment I remembered that I usually placed under my pillow, before going to bed, a large, yellow silk pocket-handkerchief, for use during the night. I felt for it instantly; it was there. In a few seconds more I had, after a fashion, pinioned the creature's arms.

I now felt tolerably secure. There was nothing more to be done but to turn on the gas, and, having first seen what my midnight assailant was like, arouse

the household. I will confess to being actuated by a certain pride in not giving the alarm before; I wished to make the capture alone and unaided.

Never loosing my hold for an instant, I slipped from the bed to the floor, dragging my captive with me. I had but a few steps to make to reach the gas-burner; these I made with the greatest caution, holding the creature in a grip like a vise. At last I got within arm's-length of the tiny speck of blue light, which told me where the gas-burner lay. Quick as lightning I released my grasp with one hand and let on the full flood of light. Then I turned to look at my captive.

I can not even attempt to give any definition of my sensations the instant after I turned on the gas. I suppose I must have shrieked with terror, for in less than a minute afterward my room was crowded with the inmates of the house. I shudder now as I think of that awful moment. *I saw nothing!*

Yes; I had one arm firmly clasped round a breathing, panting, corporeal shape, my other hand gripped with all its strength a throat as warm, and apparently fleshly, as my own; and yet, with this living substance in my grasp, with its body pressed against my own, and all in the bright glare of a large jet of gas, I absolutely beheld nothing! Not even an outline—a vapor!

I do not, even at this hour, realize the situation in which I found myself. I can not recall the astounding incident thoroughly. Imagination in vain tries to compass the awful paradox.

It breathed. I felt its warm breath upon my cheek. It struggled fiercely. It had hands. They clutched me. Its skin was smooth, just like my own. There it lay, pressed close up against me, solid as stone and yet utterly invisible!

I wonder that I did not faint or go mad on the instant. Some wonderful instinct must have sustained me; for, absolutely, in place of loosening my hold on the terrible Enigma, I seemed to gain an additional strength in my moment of horror, and tightened my grasp with such wonderful force that I felt the creature shivering with agony.

Just then Hammond entered my room at the head of the household. As soon as he beheld my face—which, I suppose, must have been an awful sight to look at—he hastened forward, crying,

“Great Heaven, Harry! what has happened?”

“Hammond! Hammond!” I cried, “come here. Oh! this is awful! I have been attacked in bed by something or other, which I have hold of; but I can’t see it—I can’t see it!”

Hammond, doubtless struck by the unfeigned horror expressed in my countenance, made one or two steps forward with an anxious yet puzzled expression. A very audible titter burst from the remainder of my visitors. This suppressed laughter made me furious. To laugh at a human being in my position! It was the worst species of cruelty. *Now*, I can understand why the appearance of a man struggling violently, as it would seem, with an airy nothing, and calling for assistance against a vision, should have appeared ludicrous. *Then*, so great was my rage against the mocking crowd that had I the power I would have stricken them dead where they stood.

“Hammond! Hammond!” I cried again, despairingly, “for God’s sake come to me. I can hold the—the Thing but a short while longer. It is overpowering me. Help me. Help me!”

“Harry,” whispered Hammond, approaching me, “you have been smoking too much opium.”

“I swear to you, Hammond, that this is no vision,” I answered, in the same low tone. “Don’t you see how it shakes my whole frame with its struggles? If you don’t believe me convince yourself. Feel it—touch it.”

Hammond advanced and laid his hand in the spot I indicated. A wild cry of horror burst from him. He had felt it!

In a moment he had discovered somewhere in my room a long piece of cord, and was the next instant winding it, and knotting it about the body of the unseen being that I clasped tightly in my arms.

“Harry,” he said, in a hoarse, agitated voice, for, though he preserved his presence of mind, he was deeply moved, “Harry, it’s all safe now. You may let go, old fellow, if you’re tired. The Thing can’t move.”

I was utterly exhausted, and I gladly loosed my hold.

Hammond stood holding the ends of the cord that bound the Invisible, twisted round his hand, while before him, self-supporting, as it were, he beheld a rope

laced and interlaced, and stretching tightly around a vacant space. I never saw a man look so thoroughly stricken with awe. Nevertheless his face expressed all the courage and determination which I knew him to possess. His lips, although white, were set firmly, and one could perceive at a glance that, although stricken with fear, he was not daunted.

The confusion that ensued among the guests of the house, who were witnesses of this extraordinary scene between Hammond and myself—who beheld the pantomime of binding this struggling Something—who beheld me almost sinking from physical exhaustion when my task of jailer was over—the confusion and terror that took possession of the by-standers, when they saw all this, was beyond description. Many of the weaker ones fled from the apartment. The few who remained behind clustered near the door, and could not be induced to approach Hammond and his Charge. Still incredulity broke out through their terror. They had not the courage to satisfy themselves, and yet they doubted. It was in vain that I begged of some of the men to come near and convince themselves by touch of the existence of a living being in that room which was invisible. They were incredulous, but did not dare to undeceive themselves. How could a solid, living, breathing body be invisible? they asked. My reply was this. I gave a sign to Hammond, and both of us—conquering our fearful repugnance to touching the invisible creature lifted it from the ground, manacled as it was, and took it to my bed. Its weight was about that of a boy of fourteen.

“Now my friends,” I said, as Hammond and myself held the creature suspended over the bed, “I can give you self-evident proof that here is a solid, ponderable body which, nevertheless, you can not see. Be good enough to watch the surface of the bed attentively.”

I was astonished at my own courage in treating this strange event so calmly; but I had recovered from my first terror, and felt a sort of scientific pride in the affair which dominated every other feeling.

The eyes of the by-standers were immediately fixed on my bed. At a given signal Hammond and I let the creature fall. There was the dull sound of a heavy body alighting on a soft mass. The timbers of the bed creaked. A deep impression marked itself distinctly on the pillow, and on the bed itself. The crowd who witnessed this gave a sort of low, universal cry, and rushed from the room. Hammond and I were left alone with our Mystery.

We remained silent for some time, listening to the low, irregular breathing

of the creature on the bed, and watching the rustle of the bedclothes as it impotently struggled to free itself from confinement. Then Hammond spoke.

“Harry, this is awful.”

“Ay, awful.”

“But not unaccountable.”

“Not unaccountable! What do you mean? Such a thing has never occurred since the birth of the world. I know not what to think, Hammond. God grant that I am not mad, and that this is not an insane fantasy!”

“Let us reason a little, Harry. Here is a solid body which we touch, but which we can not see. The fact is so unusual that it strikes us with terror. Is there no parallel, though, for such a phenomenon? Take a piece of pure glass. It is tangible and transparent. A certain chemical coarseness is all that prevents its being so entirely transparent as to be totally invisible. It is not *theoretically impossible*, mind you, to fabricate a glass which shall not reflect a single ray of light—a glass so pure and homogeneous in its atoms that the rays from the sun shall pass through it as they do through the air, refracted but not reflected. We do not see the air, and yet we feel it.”

“That’s all very well, Hammond, but these are inanimate substances. Glass does not breathe, air does not breathe. *This* thing has a heart that palpitates. A will that moves it. Lungs that play and inspire and respire.”

“You forget the strange phenomena of which we have so often heard of late,” answered the Doctor, gravely. “At the meetings called ‘spirit circles,’ invisible hands have been thrust into the hands of those persons round the table warm, fleshly hands that seemed to pulsate with mortal life.”

“What? Do you think, then, that this thing is—”

“I don’t know what it is,” was the solemn reply; “but please the gods I will, with your assistance, thoroughly investigate it.”

We watched together, smoking many pipes, all night long by the bedside of the unearthly being that tossed and panted until it was apparently wearied out. Then we learned by the low, regular breathing that it slept.

The next morning the house was all astir. The boarders congregated on the landing outside my room, and Hammond and myself were lions. We had to answer a thousand questions as to the state of our extraordinary prisoner, for as yet not one person in the house except ourselves could be induced to set foot in the apartment.

The creature was awake. This was evidenced by the convulsive manner in which the bedclothes were moved in its efforts to escape. There was something truly terrible in beholding, as it were, those second-hand indications of the terrible writhings and agonized struggles for liberty, which themselves were invisible.

Hammond and myself had racked our brains during the long night to discover some means by which we might realize the shape and general appearance of the Enigma. As well as we could make out by passing our hands over the creature's form, its outlines and lineaments were human. There was a mouth; a round, smooth head with. out hair; a nose, which, however, was little elevated above the cheeks; and its hands and feet felt like those of a boy. At first we thought of placing the being on a smooth surface and tracing its outline with chalk, as shoemakers trace the outline of the foot. This plan was given up as being of no value.

Such an outline would give not the slightest idea of its conformation.

A happy thought struck me. We would take a cast of it in plaster of Paris. This would give us the solid figure, and satisfy all our wishes. But how to do it? The movements of the creature would disturb the setting of the plastic covering and distort the mould. Another thought. Why not give it chloroform? It had respiratory organs—that was evident by its breathing. Once reduced to a state of insensibility, we could do with it what we would. Doctor X—was sent for; and after the worthy physician had recovered from the first shock of amazement, he proceeded to administer the chloroform. In three minutes afterward we were enabled to remove the fetters from the creature's body, and a well-known modeler of this city was busily engaged in covering the invisible form with the moist clay. In five minutes more we had a mould, and before evening a rough *fac-simile* of the Mystery. It was shaped like a man. Distorted, uncouth, and horrible, but still a man. It was small, not over four feet and some inches in height, and its limbs betrayed a muscular development that was unparalleled. Its face surpassed in hideousness anything I had ever seen. Gustave Doré, or Callot, or Tony Johannot never conceived anything so horrible. There is a face in one of the latter's illustrations to "*Un voyage ou il vous plaira*," which somewhat

approaches the countenance of this creature, but does not equal it. It was the physiognomy of what I should have fancied a ghoul to be. It looked as if it was capable of feeding on human flesh.

Having satisfied our curiosity, and bound every one in the house over to secrecy, it became a question what was to be done with our Enigma? It was impossible that we should keep such a horror in our house; it was equally impossible that such an awful being should be let loose upon the world. I confess that I would have gladly voted for the creature's destruction. But who would shoulder the responsibility? Who would undertake the execution of this horrible semblance of a human being? Day after day this question was deliberated gravely. The boarders all left the house. Mrs. Moffat was in despair, and threatened Hammond and myself with all sorts of legal penalties if we did not remove the Horror. Our answer was, "We will go if you like, but we decline taking this creature with us. Remove it yourself if you please. It appeared in your house. On you the responsibility rests." To this there was, of course, no answer. Mrs. Moffat could not obtain for love or money a person who would even approach the Mystery.

The most singular part of the transaction was, that we were entirely ignorant of what the creature habitually fed on. Everything in the way of nutriment that we could think of was placed before it, but was never touched. It was awful to stand by, day after day, and see the clothes toss and hear the hard breathing, and know that it was starving. Ten, twelve days, a fortnight passed, and it still lived. The pulsations of the heart, however, were daily growing fainter, and had now nearly ceased altogether. It was evident that the creature was dying for want of sustenance. While this terrible life-struggle was going on I felt miserable. I could not sleep of nights. Horrible as the creature was, it was pitiful to think of the pangs it was suffering.

At last it died. Hammond and I found it cold and stiff one morning in the bed. The heart had ceased to beat, the lungs to inspire. We hastened to bury it in the garden. It was a strange funeral, the dropping of that viewless corpse into the damp hole. The cast of its form I gave to Doctor X who keeps it in his museum in Tenth Street.

As I am on the eve of a long journey from which I may not return, I have drawn up this narrative of an event the most singular that has ever come to my knowledge.

The Fiend of the Cooperage

Arthur Conan Doyle

It was no easy matter to bring the *Gamecock* up to the island, for the river had swept down so much silt that the banks extended for many miles out into the Atlantic. The coast was hardly to be seen when the first white curl of the breakers warned us of our danger, and from there onwards we made our way very carefully under mainsail and jib, keeping the broken water well to the left, as is indicated on the chart. More than once her bottom touched the sand (we were drawing something under six feet at the time), but we had always way enough and luck enough to carry us through. Finally the water shoaled, very rapidly, but they had sent a canoe from the factory, and the Krooboy pilot brought us within two hundred yards of the island. Here we dropped our anchor, for the gestures of the negro indicated that we could not hope to get any farther. The blue of the sea had changed to the brown of the river, and, even under the shelter of the island, the current was singing and swirling round our bows. The stream appeared to be in spate, for it was over the roots of the palm trees, and everywhere upon its muddy greasy surface we could see logs of wood and debris of all sorts which had been carried down by the flood.

When I had assured myself that we swung securely at our moorings, I thought it best to begin watering at once, for the place looked as if it reeked with fever. The heavy river, the muddy, shining banks, the bright poisonous green of the jungle, the moist steam in the air, they were all so many danger signals to one who could read them. I sent the longboat off, therefore, with two large hogsheads, which should be sufficient to last us until we made St. Paul de Loanda. For my own part I took the dinghy and rowed for the island, for I could see the Union Jack fluttering above the palms to mark the position of Armitage and Wilson's trading station.

When I had cleared the grove, I could see the place, a long, low, whitewashed building, with a deep veranda in front, and an immense pile of palm-oil barrels heaped upon either flank of it. A row of surf boats and canoes lay along the beach, and a single small jetty projected into the river. Two men in white suits with red cummerbunds round their waists were waiting upon the end of it to receive me. One was a large portly fellow with a greyish beard. The other was slender and tall, with a pale pinched face, which was half-concealed by a great mushroom-shaped hat.

‘Very glad to see you,’ said the latter, cordially. ‘I am Walker, the agent of Armitage and Wilson. Let me introduce Dr. Severall of the same company. It is not often we see a private yacht in these parts.’

‘She’s the *Gamecock*,’ I explained. ‘I’m owner and captain—Meldrum is the name.’

‘Exploring?’ he asked.

‘I’m a lepidopterist—a butterfly-catcher. I’ve been doing the west coast from Senegal downwards.’

‘Good sport?’ asked the Doctor, turning a slow yellow-shot eye upon me.

‘I have forty cases full. We came in here to water, and also to see what you have in my line.’

These introductions and explanations had filled up the time whilst my two Krooboyes were making the dinghy fast. Then I walked down the jetty with one of my new acquaintances upon either side, each plying me with questions, for they had seen no white man for months.

‘What do we do?’ said the Doctor, when I had begun asking questions in my turn. ‘Our business keeps us pretty busy, and in our leisure time we talk politics.’

‘Yes, by the special mercy of Providence Severall is a rank Radical, and I am a good stiff Unionist, and we talk Home Rule for two solid hours every evening.’

‘And drink quinine cocktails,’ said the Doctor. ‘We’re both pretty well salted now, but our normal temperature was about 103 last year. I shouldn’t, as an impartial adviser, recommend you to stay here very long unless you are collecting bacilli as well as butterflies. The mouth of the Ogowai River will never develop into a health resort.’

There is nothing finer than the way in which these outlying pickets of civilization distil a grim humour out of their desolate situation, and turn not only a bold, but a laughing face upon the chances which their lives may bring. Everywhere from Sierra Leone downwards I had found the same reeking swamps, the same isolated fever-racked communities, and the same bad jokes. There is something approaching to the divine in that power of man to rise above

his conditions and to use his mind for the purpose of mocking at the memories of his body.

‘Dinner will be ready in about half an hour, Captain Meldrum,’ said the Doctor. ‘Walker has gone in to see about it; he’s the housekeeper this week. Meanwhile, if you like, we’ll stroll round and I’ll show you the sights of the island.’

The sun had already sunk beneath the line of palm trees, and the great arch of the heaven above our head was like the inside of a huge shell, shimmering with dainty pinks and delicate iridescence. No one who has not lived in a land where the weight and heat of a napkin become intolerable upon the knees can imagine the blessed relief which the coolness of evening brings along with it. In this sweeter and purer air the Doctor and I walked round the little island, he pointing out the stores, and explaining the routine of his work.

‘There’s a certain romance about the place,’ said he, in answer to some remark of mine about the dullness of their lives. ‘We are living here just upon the edge of the great unknown. Up there,’ he continued, pointing to the north-east, ‘Du Chaillu penetrated, and found the home of the gorilla. That is the Gaboon country—the land of the great apes. In this direction,’ pointing to the south-east, ‘no one has been very far. The land which is drained by this river is practically unknown to Europeans. Every log which is carried past us by the current has come from an undiscovered country. I’ve often wished that I was a better botanist when I have seen the singular orchids and curious-looking plants which have been cast up on the eastern end of the island.’

The place which the Doctor indicated was a sloping brown beach, freely littered with the flotsam of the stream. At each end was a curved point, like a little natural breakwater, so that a small shallow bay was left between. This was full of floating vegetation, with a single huge splintered tree lying stranded in the middle of it, the current rippling against its high black side.

‘These are all from up country,’ said the Doctor. ‘They get caught in our little bay, and then when some extra freshet comes they are washed out again and carried out to sea.’

‘What is the tree?’ I asked.

‘Oh, some kind of teak, I should imagine, but pretty rotten by the look of it.’

We get all sorts of big hardwood trees floating past here, to say nothing of the palms. Just come in here, will you?’

He led the way into a long building with an immense quantity of barrel staves and iron hoops littered about in it.

‘This is our cooperage,’ said he. ‘We have the staves sent out in bundles, and we put them together ourselves. Now, you don’t see anything particularly sinister about this building, do you?’

I looked round at the high corrugated iron roof, the white wooden walls, and the earthen floor. In one corner lay a mattress and a blanket.

‘I see nothing very alarming,’ said I.

‘And yet there’s something out of the common, too’, he remarked. ‘You see that bed? Well, I intend to sleep there tonight. I don’t want to buck, but I think it’s a bit of a test for nerve.’

‘Why?’

‘Oh, there have been some funny goings on. You were talking about the monotony of our lives, but I assure you that they are sometimes quite as exciting as we wish them to be. You’d better come back to the house now, for after sundown we begin to get the fever-fog up from the marshes. There, you can see it coming across the river.’

I looked and saw long tentacles of white vapour writhing out from among the thick green underwood and crawling at us over the broad swirling surface of the brown river. At the same time the air turned suddenly dank and cold.

‘There’s the dinner gong,’ said the Doctor. ‘If this matter interests you I’ll tell you about it afterwards.’

It did interest me very much, for there was something earnest and subdued in his manner as he stood in the empty cooperage, which appealed very forcibly to my imagination. He was a big, bluff, hearty man, this Doctor, and yet I had detected a curious expression in his eyes as he glanced about him—an expression which I would not describe as one of fear, but rather that of a man who is alert and on his guard.

‘By the way,’ said I, as we returned to the house, ‘you have shown me the huts of a good many of your native assistants, but I have not seen any of the natives themselves.’

‘They sleep in the hulk over yonder,’ the Doctor answered, pointing over to one of the banks.

‘Indeed. I should not have thought in that case they would need the huts.’

‘Oh, they used the huts until quite recently. We’ve put them on the hulk until they recover their confidence a little. They were all half mad with fright, so we let them go, and nobody sleeps on the island except Walker and myself.’

‘What frightened them?’ I asked.

‘Well, that brings us back to the same story. I suppose Walker has no objection to your hearing all about it. I don’t know why we should make any secret about it, though it is certainly a pretty bad business.’

He made no further allusion to it during the excellent dinner which had been prepared in my honour. It appeared that no sooner had the little white topsail of the *Gamecock* shown round Cape Lopez than these kind fellows had begun to prepare their famous pepper-pot—which is the pungent stew peculiar to the West Coast—and to boil their yams and sweet potatoes. We sat down to as good a native dinner as one could wish, served by a smart Sierra Leone waiting boy. I was just remarking to myself that he at least had not shared in the general flight, when, having laid the dessert and wine upon the table, he raised his hand to his turban.

‘Anything else I do, Massa Walker?’ he asked.

‘No, I think that is all right, Moussa,’ my host answered. ‘I am not feeling very well tonight, though, and I should much prefer if you would stay on the island.’

I saw a struggle between his fears and his duty upon the swarthy face of the African. His skin had turned of that livid purplish tint which stands for pallor in a negro, and his eyes looked furtively about him.

‘No, no, Massa Walker,’ he cried, at last, ‘you better come to the hulk with

me, sah. Look after you much better in the hulk, sah!’

‘That won’t do, Moussa. White men don’t run away from the posts where they are placed.’

Again I saw the passionate struggle in the negro’s face, and again his fears prevailed.

‘No use, Massa Walker, sah!’ he cried. ‘S’elp me, I can’t do it. If it was yesterday or if it was tomorrow, but this is the third night, sah, an’ it’s more than I can face.’

Walker shrugged his shoulders.

‘Off with you then!’ said he. ‘When the mail-boat comes you can get back to Sierra Leone, for I’ll have no servant who deserts me when I need him most. I suppose this is all mystery to you, or has the Doctor told you, Captain Meldrum?’

‘I showed Captain Meldrum the cooperage, but I did not tell him anything,’ said Dr. Sevall. ‘You’re looking bad, Walker,’ he added, glancing at his companion. ‘You have a strong touch coming on you.’

‘Yes, I’ve had the shivers all day, and now my head is like a cannon-ball. I took ten grains of quinine, and my ears are singing like a kettle. But I want to sleep with you in the cooperage tonight.’

‘No, no, my dear chap. I won’t hear of such a thing. You must get to bed at once, and I am sure Meldrum will excuse you. I shall sleep in the cooperage, and I promise you that I’ll be round with your medicine before breakfast.’

It was evident that Walker had been struck by one of those sudden and violent attacks of remittent fever which are the curse of the West Coast. His sallow cheeks were flushed and his eyes shining with fever, and suddenly as he sat there he began to croon out a song in the high-pitched voice of delirium.

‘Come, come, we must get you to bed, old chap,’ said the Doctor, and with my aid he led his friend into his bedroom. There we undressed him and presently, after taking a strong sedative, he settled down into a deep slumber.

‘He’s right for the night,’ said the Doctor, as we sat down and filled our glasses

once more. 'Sometimes it is my turn and sometimes his, but, fortunately, we have never been down together. I should have been sorry to be out of it tonight, for I have a little mystery to unravel. I told you that I intended to sleep in the cooperage.'

'Yes, you said so.'

'When I said sleep I meant watch, for there will be no sleep for me. We've had such a scare here that no native will stay after sundown, and I mean to find out tonight what the cause of it all may be. It has always been the custom for a native watchman to sleep in the cooperage, to prevent the barrel hoops being stolen. Well, six days ago the fellow who slept there disappeared, and we have never seen a trace of him since. It was certainly singular, for no canoe had been taken, and these waters are too full of crocodiles for any man to swim to shore. What became of the fellow, or how he could have left the island is a complete mystery. Walker and I were merely surprised, but the blacks were badly scared and queer Voodoo tales began to get about amongst them. But the real stampede broke out three nights ago, when the new watchman in the cooperage also disappeared.'

'What became of him?' I asked.

'Well, we not only don't know, but we can't even give a guess which would fit the facts. The [negros] swear there is a fiend in the cooperage who claims a man every third night. They wouldn't stay in the island—nothing could persuade them. Even Moussa, who is a faithful boy enough, would, as you have seen, leave his master in a fever rather than remain for the night. If we are to continue to run this place we must reassure our [negros], and I don't know any better way of doing it than by putting in a night there myself. This is the third night, you see, so I suppose the thing is due, whatever it may be.'

'Have you no clue?' I asked. 'Was there no mark of violence, no bloodstain, no footprints, nothing to give a hint as to what kind of danger you may have to meet?'

'Absolutely nothing. The man was gone and that was all. Last time it was old Ali, who has been wharf-tender here since the place was started. He was always as steady as a rock, and nothing but foul play would take him from his work.'

‘Well,’ said I, ‘I really don’t think that this is a one-man job. Your friend is full of laudanum, and come what might he can be of no assistance to you. You must let me stay and put in a night with you at the cooperage.’

‘Well, now, that’s very good of you, Meldrum,’ said he heartily, shaking my hand across the table. ‘It’s not a thing that I should have ventured to propose, for it is asking a good deal of a casual visitor, but if you really mean it ‘

‘Certainly I mean it. If you will excuse me a moment, I will hail the *Gamecock* and let them know that they need not expect me.’

As we came back from the other end of the little jetty we were both struck by the appearance of the night. A huge blue-black pile of clouds had built itself up upon the landward side, and the wind came from it in little hot pants, which beat upon our faces like the draught from a blast furnace. Under the jetty the river was swirling and hissing, tossing like white spurts of spray over the planking.

‘Confound it!’ said Dr. Severall. ‘We are likely to have a flood on the top of all our troubles. That rise in the river means heavy rain up-country, and when it once begins you never know how far it will go. We’ve had the island nearly covered before now. Well, we’ll just go and see that Walker is comfortable, and then if you like we’ll settle down in our quarters.’

The sick man was sunk in a profound slumber, and we left him with some crushed limes in a glass beside him in case he should awake with the thirst of fever upon him. Then we made our way through the unnatural gloom thrown by that menacing cloud. The river had risen so high that the little bay which I have described at the end of the island had become almost obliterated through the submerging of its flanking peninsula. The great raft of driftwood, with the huge black tree in the middle, was swaying up and down in the swollen current.

‘That’s one good thing a flood will do for us,’ said the Doctor. ‘It carries away all the vegetable stuff which is brought down on to the east end of the island. It came down with the freshet the other day, and here it will stay until a flood sweeps it out into the main stream. Well, here’s our room, and here are some books and here is my tobacco pouch, and we must try and put in the night as best we may.’

By the light of our single lantern the great lonely room looked very gaunt and dreary. Save for the piles of staves and heaps of hoops there was absolutely

nothing in it, with the exception of the mattress for the Doctor, which had been laid in the corner. We made a couple of seats and a table out of the staves, and settled down together for a long vigil. Severall had brought a revolver for me and was himself armed with a double-barrelled shotgun. We loaded our weapons and laid them cocked within reach of our hands. The little circle of light and the black shadows arching over us were so melancholy that he went off to the house, and returned with two candles. One side of the cooperage was pierced, however, by several open windows, and it was only by screening our lights behind staves that we could prevent them from being extinguished.

The Doctor, who appeared to be a man of iron nerves, had settled down to a book, but I observed that every now and then he laid it upon his knee, and took an earnest look all round him. For my part, although I tried once or twice to read, I found it impossible to concentrate my thoughts upon the book. They would always wander back to this great empty silent room, and to the sinister mystery which overshadowed it. I racked my brains for some possible theory which would explain the disappearance of these two men. There was the black fact that they were gone, and not the least tittle of evidence as to why or whither. And here we were waiting in the same place—waiting without an idea as to what we were waiting for. I was right in saying that it was not a one-man job. It was trying enough as it was, but no force upon earth would have kept me there without a comrade.

What an endless, tedious night it was! Outside we heard the lapping and gurgling of the great river, and the souging of the rising wind. Within, save for our breathing, the turning of the Doctor's pages, and the high, shrill ping of an occasional mosquito, there was a heavy silence. Once my heart sprang into my mouth as Severall's book suddenly fell to the ground and he sprang to his feet with his eyes on one of the windows.

'Did you see anything, Meldrum?'

'No, did you?'

'Well, I had a vague sense of movement outside that window.' He caught up his gun and approached it. 'No, there's nothing to be seen, and yet I could have sworn that something passed slowly across it.'

'A palm leaf, perhaps,' said I, for the wind was growing stronger every instant.

‘Very likely,’ said he, and settled down to his book again, but his eyes were for ever darting little suspicious glances up at the window. I watched it also, but all was quiet outside.

And then suddenly our thoughts were turned into a new direction by the bursting of the storm. A blinding flash was followed by a clap which shook the building. Again and again came the vivid white glare with thunder at the same instant, like the flash and roar of a monstrous piece of artillery. And then down came the tropical rain, crashing and rattling on the corrugated iron roofing of the cooperage. The big hollow room boomed like a drum. From the darkness arose a strange mixture of noises, a gurgling, splashing, tinkling, bubbling, washing, dripping—every liquid sound that nature can produce from the thrashing and swishing of the rain to the deep steady boom of the river. Hour after hour the uproar grew louder and more sustained.

‘My word,’ said Severall, ‘we are going to have the father of all the floods this time. Well, here’s the dawn coming at last and that is a blessing. We’ve about exploded the third night superstition, anyhow.’

A grey light was stealing through the room, and there was the day upon us in an instant. The rain had eased off, but the coffee-coloured river was roaring past like a waterfall. Its power made me fear for the anchor of the *Gamecock*.

‘I must get aboard,’ said I. ‘If she drags she’ll never be able to beat up the river again.’

‘The island is as good as a breakwater,’ the Doctor answered. ‘I can give you a cup of coffee if you will come up to the house.’

I was chilled and miserable, so the suggestion was a welcome one. We left the ill-omened cooperage with its mystery still unsolved, and we splashed our way up to the house.

‘There’s the spirit lamp,’ said Severall. ‘If you would just put a light to it, I will see how Walker feels this morning.’

He left me, but was back in an instant with a dreadful face.

‘He’s gone!’ he cried hoarsely.

The words sent a thrill of horror through me. I stood with the lamp in my hand, glaring at him.

‘Yes, he’s gone!’ he repeated. ‘Come and look!’

I followed him without a word, and the first thing that I saw as I entered the bedroom was Walker himself lying huddled on his bed in the grey flannel sleeping suit in which I had helped to dress him on the night before.

‘Not dead, surely!’ I gasped.

The Doctor was terribly agitated. His hands were shaking like leaves in the wind.

‘He’s been dead some hours.’

‘Was it fever?’

‘Fever? Look at his foot!’

I glanced down and a cry of horror burst from my lips. One foot was not merely dislocated, but was turned completely round in a most grotesque contortion.

‘Good God!’ I cried. ‘What can have done this?’

Severall had laid his hand upon the dead man’s chest.

‘Feel here,’ he whispered.

I placed my hand at the same spot. There was no resistance. The body was absolutely soft and limp. It was like pressing a sawdust doll.

‘The breast-bone is gone,’ said Severall in the same awed whisper. ‘He’s broken to bits. Thank God that he had the laudanum. You can see by his face that he died in his sleep.’

‘But who can have done this?’

‘I’ve had about as much as I can stand,’ said the Doctor, wiping his forehead. ‘I don’t know that I’m a greater coward than my neighbours, but this gets beyond

me. If you're going out to the *Gamecock*—'

'Come on!' said I, and off we started. If we did not run it was because each of us wished to keep up the last shadow of his self-respect before the other. It was dangerous in a light canoe on that swollen river, but we never paused to give the matter a thought. He bailing and I paddling we kept her above water, and gained the deck of the yacht. There, with two hundred yards of water between us and this cursed island we felt that we were our own men once more.

'We'll go back in an hour or so,' said he. 'But we need have a little time to steady ourselves. I wouldn't have had the [negros] see me as I was just now for a year's salary.'

'I've told the steward to prepare breakfast. Then we shall go back,' said I. 'But in God's name, Dr. Severall, what do you make of it all?'

'It beats me—beats me clean. I've heard of Voodoo devilry, and I've laughed at it with the others. But that poor old Walker, a decent, God-fearing, nineteenth-century, Primrose-League Englishman should go under like this without a whole bone in his body—it's given me a shake, I won't deny it. But look there, Meldrum, is that hand of yours mad or drunk, or what is it?'

Old Patterson, the oldest man of my crew, and as steady as the Pyramids, had been stationed in the bows with a boat-hook to fend off the drifting logs which came sweeping down with the current. Now he stood with crooked knees, glaring out in front of him, and one forefinger stabbing furiously at the air.

'Look at it!' he yelled. 'Look at it!'

And at the same instant we saw it.

A huge black tree-trunk was coming down the river, its broad glistening back just lapped by the water. And in front of it— about three feet in front— arching upwards like the figure-head of a ship, there hung a dreadful face, swaying slowly from side to side. It was flattened, malignant, as large as a small beer-barrel, of a faded fungoid colour, but the neck which supported it was mottled with a dull yellow and black. As it flew past the *Gamecock* in the swirl of the waters I saw two immense coils roll up out of some great hollow in the tree, and the villainous head rose suddenly to the height of eight or ten feet,

looking with dull, skin-covered eyes at the yacht. An instant later the tree had shot past us and was plunging with its horrible passenger towards the Atlantic.

‘What was it?’ I cried.

‘It is our fiend of the cooperage,’ said Dr. Severall, and he had become in an instant the same bluff, self-confident man that he had been before. ‘Yes, that is the devil who has been haunting our island. It is the great python of the Gaboon.’

I thought of the stories which I had heard all down the coast of the monstrous constrictors of the interior, of their periodical appetite, and of the murderous effects of their deadly squeeze. Then it all took shape in my mind. There had been a freshet the week before. It had brought down this huge hollow tree with its hideous occupant. Who knows from what far distant tropical forest it may have come! It had been stranded on the little east bay of the island. The cooperage had been the nearest house. Twice with the return of its appetite it had carried off the watchman. Last night it had doubtless come again, when Severall had thought he saw something move at the window, but our lights had driven it away. It had writhed onwards and had slain poor Walker in his sleep.

‘Why did it not carry him off?’ I asked.

‘The thunder and lightning must have scared the brute away. There’s your steward, Meldrum. The sooner we have breakfast and get back to the island the better, or some of those [negros] might think that we had been frightened.’

What Jorkens Has To Put Up With

Lord Dunsany

To say that amongst all those that have read any of the tales of Mr. Jorkens' travels that I have recorded, none has felt any doubts of any of them would be absurd: such doubts have been felt and even expressed. But what has impressed me very considerably is the fair-minded attitude taken up by the general public, an attitude that may be summarized as a firm determination not to disbelieve a man's story merely because it is unusual, but to await the final verdict of science when science shall have arrived at the point at which it is able to pronounce on such matters with certainty. Then, should the verdict be against Jorkens, and not till then, will a sporting public turn upon him that scornful disbelief that they are far too fair-minded to show without good and sufficient proofs. I myself meanwhile am careful to record nothing he tells me, against which anyone in the Billiards Club or elsewhere has been able to bring any proof that would definitely rule it out in a court of law. And it would be interesting to see for how long in such a court arguments that may be lightly advanced now, against the exact truth of any one of his tales, would stand up against the ridicule of counsel. But the sporting attitude that the public have adopted towards him is more to Jorkens than a verdict in any court of law. Curiously enough it is in the Billiards Club itself, the source of all these stories, that the most unsporting attitude is often shown to Jorkens. For instance only the other day one of our members was unnecessarily rude to him, though with only a single word. I need hardly say it was Terbut. The word was not in itself a rude one, but was somehow all the more insidious for that. Also it was really a single word, and not a short sentence, as is often the case when a writer says to you "I will tell it to you in one word." But I will tell the story.

We were discussing billiards, which is not a thing we often do in the Billiards Club. There is, I suppose, some sort of feeling that, if anyone talks of billiards there, his imagination or his experience can provide him with nothing better; billiards being, as it were, bed-rock in the Billiards Club. In just the same way at the Athenaeum, although the bird is inseparable from the Club's presiding goddess, one seldom, if ever, orders an owl for one's lunch. But we were discussing billiards today, and debating whether bonzoline balls or the old ivory kind were the better. I will not record the discussion, for it has nothing to do with Jorkens, but it may interest my readers to hear that it was held at the Billiards Club that the bonzoline ball was unique among modern substitutes, in

being better than the old genuine article. It was as we had decided that, that some young member who ought to have known better, seeing Jorkens near him as he looked up, suddenly blurted out: "Have you ever seen a unicorn, Jorkens?"

Of course it was not the way to speak to an elder man. Of course the implication was obvious. And Jorkens saw in a moment that the young fellow did not believe in the existence of unicorns at all. In any case he had not yet passed that time of life, in which one believes nothing that the ages have handed down to us until we have been able to test it for ourselves.

"I deprecate that hard and fast line between fabulous animals and those that you all chance to have seen," said Jorkens. "What does it amount to, practically, but a line drawn round Regent's Park? That's all it is really. Everything inside that line is an animal you readily believe in. Everything outside it is fabulous. It means you believe in an animal if you have seen it in the Zoo, otherwise not. However full history is of accounts of the unicorn, and the most detailed descriptions, still you go off to Regent's Park on a Sunday, and if there is not one there waiting for your bun you disbelieve in the unicorn. Oh well, I was like that myself till I saw one."

"You saw one?" said the young fellow who had started the topic.

"I'll tell you," said Jorkens.

"I was camped once by the Northern Guaso Nyero, or rather I was camped two hundred and fifty yards from it, a distance that just makes all the difference, for two hundred yards is all that the mosquito flies from his home. Of course he has a good many homes, that's the trouble; but, as he prefers a river frontage, it's a very good thing to camp that far from a river. Not that it amounts to much, for Africa can always get you some other way. But there it was. Well, I was collecting heads for a museum, and had been at it for some time, with a white hunter and eighty natives, trekking through Africa; and I was beginning to get pretty tired of it. I was sitting by one of our campfires after supper, with the white hunter beside me, and I was gazing into the glow of the smouldering logs and watching the fireflies gliding backwards and forwards, and thinking all the while of the lights of London. And the more the fireflies slowly grew into multitudes, and the more the fire glowed, the more I longed for London. In that mood I asked the hunter what we should do next day; and, whatever he suggested going after, I pointed out I had shot it already. Which was perfectly true.

“And winds came out of the forest, or over the plains, and softly played with the smoke going up from our logs of cedar, and the visions changed and changed in the glow of the fire, and every now and then the hunter would make some new suggestion, till I said petulantly: ‘Find me something I haven’t shot yet.’

“And he said: ‘Very well, I will.’

“‘What is it?’ I said.

“And he wouldn’t say.

“I kept on asking him, but he wouldn’t tell me. The man whose job it was, the askari we called him, came and put more logs on the fire, and we sat on long with little cold winds on our backs and the warmth on our hands and feet, but still he would not say. ‘Why not?’ I asked him at last. ‘Because you’d think me mad,’ he said. ‘Well, aren’t you?’ I asked. Partly my insinuation was true, and partly it was the product of some unreasonable irritation that had come over me, and Africa was responsible for both.

“Next day he moved our camp to the edge of the river, and we waited there a long time; I don’t remember how long, quite a fortnight; and all the while he stuck to his promise to find me this new beast that I had never shot.

“I began to get malaria, and so did he. And then one night as we were talking of remedies, for we were both tired of quinine, he told me what it was we were looking for. Yes, simply a unicorn. He had had natives out in the forest searching for it for weeks, and though they had not yet seen it they had at last found the spoor. And then he explained to me about how to get a unicorn. The animal, he explained to me, was always fairly cautious of men, and on the whole, in spite of exceptions, had tended to avoid them more than do other animals; but that of late centuries, probably since the invention of fire-arms, or since some other change in the ways of men, it had avoided men so assiduously that it had almost dropped out of history. Up to the time that a Pope gave the horn of one to King François one day in the fifteenth century, and for a while after, references to the unicorn are so frequent that its avoidance of man, however much wished by the unicorn, can only be called unsuccessful; after that time a cunning unknown before seems to have been added to its love of elusiveness, with the result that it is no longer classed among European mammals. And then the hunter explained to me how to get one. There was no way whatever to come at him, he explained, except one, and that was to drive

him. And then he drew out some paper and a bit of pencil, and showed me how it was done: he made a row of dots in a semi-circle to represent beaters, and put a cross in the middle to mark the unicorn, and showed me how the flanks came gradually in. His hand was rather shaky with malaria, and I couldn't see very well either, but the thing seemed simple enough, a perfectly ordinary beat.

“‘Yes, I see,’ I said, ‘and the gun stands here.’ And I pointed to a place ahead of the unicorn, to which the semicircle of beaters was moving.

“‘No,’ he said. ‘That would do for any other animal; but not for the unicorn. It’s been tried, and that’s why nobody ever gets one. With the unicorn avoidance of man amounts to a passion. Whatever it was in the past, that’s what it is now; and not to take account of that is an error as great as supposing a rhino can’t smell. The moment the unicorn sees the line of beaters, with the flanks coming quietly in on him he knows what’s up; he knows he’s being driven. By a glance at the line (and his sight is very acute) he knows to what direction. He immediately slips through the forest in exactly the opposite; straight through the line of beaters; and in these forests he usually gets through without even being seen by a native. Not that they haven’t seen them.’

“‘Then the place for a gun to stand,’ I said.

“‘Exactly,’ he interrupted. ‘Stand in front of the unicorn, wherever he is, and we’ll try to drive him away from you. He’s sure to come straight back.’

“‘Now this seemed to me perfectly sound. Unicorns do avoid men, there can be no doubt of that. They must have some method in doing it. Granting a considerable intelligence, without which no method is any good, what better than hiding in a dense forest, and, when driven, always going in the opposite direction to that which is obviously intended. And history is too full of the unicorn for us to suppose that they are merely not there.

“‘Well,’ said Rhino, for Rhino Parks was his name there, whatever it may have been in England once, ‘those Wakamba trackers have found him. What about trying tomorrow?’

“‘I’m not sure that I can hold a rifle just yet,’ I said.

“‘No use giving in to malaria here,’ he answered, ‘or no one would ever do anything.’

“Which is true, though the place is a good deal written up as a health-resort.

“All right. Tomorrow,’ I said.

“And tomorrow came, which was one thing to the good. You never know what’s coming, with malaria.

“Well I was up and ready by five, but Rhino wouldn’t start till I’d had a good breakfast. So I sat down to it. It had to be liquid, because I could have no more eaten bacon and eggs, as I was just then, than I could have eaten a live squirrel. But we made a breakfast of sorts on two bottles of vermuth that we had; and by about seven we started.

“And now comes the incredible part of my story: we crossed the river and pushed into the forest, and I took up my place where the Wakambas told me in whispers, and the beaters moved off away from me, and all the while I had forgotten to load my rifle. You may not believe me; and, if you don’t, I don’t wonder; but there it was, I did it. Malaria I suppose. As a matter of fact it is just one of those things that people do once in their lives, and very often of course it happens to be the last thing they ever do. Well, I stood there with my rifle empty, waiting for the unicorn, a .360 magazine: the magazine holds five cartridges, and there should be another one in the barrel: and the steps of the beaters sounded further and further away from me. And then there came a broken furtive sound, as of something heavy but sly coming down through the forest. And there I was, with my empty rifle ready. And all of a sudden I saw a great shoulder so graceful, so silken and gleaming white, close by in that denseness of greenery, that I knew that it must be the unicorn. Of course I’d seen hundreds of pictures of them, and the thing that I marvelled at most was that the beast, or all I could see of him, was so surprisingly like to the pictures. I put up my rifle and took a good enough aim, and then click, and I knew it was empty.

“Of course I hadn’t forgotten to bring any cartridges at all, I wasn’t so crazy as that, whatever my temperature was: my pocket was full of them. I put my hand to my pocket and slipped in a cartridge at once, and there I was loaded, with the unicorn still only twenty-five yards away. But he had heard the click, and, whether or not he knew what it was, he at any rate knew it for man, even if he hadn’t yet seen me; and he changed at once his slow slinking glide for a sharp trot through the forest. Again in a gap I saw a flash of his whiteness, and I fired and am sure I hit him, and then he came for me. Where I hit him I never

knew, my one good chance of a shot behind the shoulder was gone, and I had had to take whatever shot I could get; and now I was again unloaded, for there had been no time to put anything into the magazine, and the unicorn was practically on top of me. Even as I took another cartridge out of my pocket he made a lunge at me with his flashing horn, a deadly weapon of ivory. I parried it with my rifle, and only barely parried, for the strength of its neck was enormous. It wasn't a thing that you could waft aside as you can with the thrust of a sword, if only you are in time; it was so gigantic a thrust that it took all one's strength to turn it. And you had to be just as quick as when trying to parry a rapier; even quicker. At once he lunged again, and again I parried: no question of thinking of trying to load my rifle; there was only just time for the parry. And as I barely parried, and the horn slipped by under my left arm, through the brown shirt I was wearing, clean as a bullet, I knew that I should parry few more, if any, like that; and that with the next thrust, or the one after, all would be over; for the power I felt in that horn was clearly more than my match. So I stepped back to gain an instant; which I barely did, so swiftly the huge beast stepped forward; and then I swung my rifle over my back and before he thrust again I brought it down as hard as I could at his head. I knew it for my last chance, and put into it all the strength that malaria had left me. Now it was his turn to parry. He saw it coming and flicked at it with his horn, and the horn caught it and the two blows came together. Either of them was a good blow. And together they amounted to pretty much of a smash. Well, neither ivory nor steel is unbreakable; and as for the stock of my rifle I don't know where it went: the branches all round were full of flying splinters. And then I saw that long thin murderous horn lying white on the ground beside me. The unicorn saw it too: it put its forefeet out, and lowered its nose and sniffed at it. As the beast was doing nothing at the moment, I picked the horn up. And when it saw the horn in my hand it looked irresolutely at me. For a moment we stood like that. It might easily have overcome me by sheer weight, and trampled me under with its pointed hooves; and yet it stood there motionless, seeming to have an awe for its own horn, which it now saw turned against it. Then I moved the horn into the hand that was holding the rifle, with the intention of seeing if it was possible to get a cartridge into what was left of the breech; and at the movement of the horn in my hand the unicorn shied like a horse, then turned round and kicked out with his heels and sprang away, and was almost immediately lost to sight in the forest. And that was the last I ever saw of a unicorn."

"But the horn," said the young fellow who had asked at first about unicorns. "Why didn't you keep the horn?"

“Waiter,” said Jorkens without a word to his critic, “bring me that toasting fork that I gave to the Club.”

We most of us present something to the Club, and sure enough Jorkens had once given an ivory-handled toasting fork, that lay in a drawer in the pantry; for whoever wants to use a toasting fork in a Club? And now the waiter brought it, a fork with silver prongs, or electro-plate, and a long ivory handle, too narrow for the tusk of an elephant and too long for a tooth. “And bring me,” he said, “a small whiskey and soda.”

The whiskey was brought, and as he drank it the strange fork was handed round. Not all of us had seen it before; none of us had eyed it attentively.

“Well, what do you make of it?” said Jorkens when he had finished his whiskey.

It was then that Terbut leaned over to me and whispered, but only too audibly, the one word “Bonzoline.”

The ungenerous comment cast over the table something like, well, a miasma. And that’s the kind of thing that Jorkens has to put up with.

The Terror Of The Water-Tank

William Hope Hodgson

Crowning the heights on the outskirts of a certain town on the east coast is a large, iron water-tank from which an isolated row of small villas obtains its supply. The top of this tank has been cemented, and round it have been placed railings, thus making of it a splendid "look-out" for any of the townspeople who may choose to promenade upon it. And very popular it was until the strange and terrible happenings of which I have set out to tell.

Late one evening, a party of three ladies and two gentlemen had climbed the path leading to the tank. They had dined, and it had been suggested that a promenade upon the tank in the cool of the evening would be pleasant. Reaching the level, cemented surface, they were proceeding across it, when one of the ladies stumbled and almost fell over some object lying near the railings on the town-side.

A match having been struck by one of the men, they discovered that it was the body of a portly old gentleman lying in a contorted attitude and apparently quite dead. Horrified, the two men drew off their fair companions to the nearest of the afore-mentioned houses. Then, in company with a passing policeman, they returned with all haste to the spot.

By the aid of the officer's lantern, they ascertained the grewsome fact that the old gentleman had been strangled. In addition, he was without watch or purse. The policeman was able to identify him as an old, retired mill-owner, living some little distance away at a place named Revenge End.

At this point the little party was joined by a stranger, who introduced himself as Dr. Tointon, adding the information that he lived in one of the villas close at hand, and had run across as soon as he had heard there was something wrong.

Silently, the two men and the policeman gathered round, as with deft, skillful hands the doctor made his short examination.

"He's not been dead more than about half an hour," he said at its completion.

He turned towards the two men.

“Tell me how it happened—all you know?”

They told him the little they knew.

“Extraordinary,” said the doctor. “And you saw no one?”

“Not a soul, doctor!”

The medical man turned to the officer.

“We must get him home,” he said. “Have you sent for the ambulance?”

“Yes, sir,” said the policeman. “I whistled to my mate on the lower beat, and ‘e went straight off.”

The doctor chatted with the two men, and reminded them that they would have to appear at the inquest.

“It’s murder?” asked the younger of them in a low voice.

“Well,” said the doctor. “It certainly looks like it.”

And then came the ambulance.

At this point, I come into actual contact with the story; for old Mr. Marchmont, the retired mill-owner, was the father of my *fiancee*, and I was at the house when the ambulance arrived with its sad burden.

Dr. Tointon had accompanied it along with the policeman, and under his directions the body was taken upstairs, while I broke the news to my sweetheart.

Before he left, the doctor gave me a rough outline of the story as he knew it. I asked him if he had any theory as to how and why the crime had been committed.

“Well,” he said, “the watch and chain are missing, and the purse. And then he has undoubtedly been strangled; though with what, I have been unable to decide.”

And that was all he could tell me.

The following day there was a long account in the *Northern Daily Telephone* about the “shocking murder.” The column ended, I remember, by remarking that people would do well to beware, as there were evidently some very desperate characters about, and added that it was believed the police had a clew.

During the afternoon, I myself went up to the tank. There was a large crowd of people standing in the road that runs past at some little distance; but the tank itself was in the hands of the police officer being stationed at the top of the steps leading up to it. On learning my connection with the deceased, he allowed me up to have a look round.

I thanked him, and gave the whole of the tank a pretty thorough scrutiny, even to the extent of pushing my cane down through lock-holes in the iron manhole lids, to ascertain whether the tank was full or not, and whether there was room for someone to hide.

On pulling out my stick, I found that the water reached to within a few inches of the lid, and that the lids were securely locked. I at once dismissed a vague theory that had formed in my mind that there might be some possibility of hiding within the tank itself and springing out upon the unwary. It was evidently a common, brutal murder, done for the sake of my prospective father-in-law’s purse and gold watch.

One other thing I noticed before I quitted the tank top. It came to me as I was staring over the rail at the surrounding piece of waste land. Yet at the time, I thought little of it, and attached to it no importance whatever. It was that the encircling piece of ground was soft and muddy and quite smooth. Possibly there was a leakage from the tank that accounted for it. Anyhow, that is how it seemed to be.

“There ain’t nothin’ much to be seen, sir,” volunteered the policeman, as I prepared to descend the steps on my way back to the road.

“No,” I said. “There seems nothing of which to take hold.”

And so I left him, and went on to the doctor’s house. Fortunately, he was in, and I at once told him the result of my investigations. Then I asked him whether he thought that the police were really on the track of the criminal.

He shook his head.

“No,” he answered. “I was up there this morning having a look round, and since then, I’ve been thinking. There are one or two points that completely stump me—points that I believe the police have never even stumbled upon.”

Yet, though I pressed him, he would say nothing definite.

“Wait!” was all he could tell me.

Yet I had not long to wait before something further happened, something that gave an added note of mystery and terror to the affair.

On the two days following my visit to the doctor, I was kept busy arranging for the funeral of my *fiancee’s* father, and then on the very morning of the funeral came the news of the death of the policeman who had been doing duty on the tank.

From my place in the funeral procession, I caught sight of large local posters announcing the fact in great letters, while the newsboys constantly cried:

“Terror of the Tank—
Policeman Strangled.”

Yet, until the funeral was over, I could not buy a paper to gather any of the details. When at last I was able, I found that the doctor who had attended him was none other than Tointon, and straightway I went up to his place for such further particulars as he could give.

“You’ve read the newspaper account?” he asked when I met him.

“Yes,” I replied.

“Well, you see,” he said, “I was right in saying that the police were off the track. I’ve been up there this morning, and a lot of trouble I had to be allowed to make a few notes on my own account. Even then it was only through the influence of Inspector Slago with whom I have once or twice done a little investigating. They’ve two men and a sergeant now on duty to keep people away.”

“You’ve done a bit of detective-work, then?”

“At odd times,” he replied.

“And have you come to any conclusion?”

“Not yet.”

“Tell me what you know of the actual happening,” I said. “The newspaper was not very definite. I’m rather mixed up as to how long it was before they found that the policeman had been killed. Who found him?”

“Well, so far as I have been able to gather from Inspector Slago, it was like this. They had detailed one of their men for duty on the tank until two A.M., when he was to be relieved by the next man. At about a minute or so to two, the relief arrived simultaneously with the inspector, who was going his rounds. They met in the road below the tank, and were proceeding up the little side-lane towards the passage, when, from the top of the tank, they heard someone cry out suddenly. The cry ended in a sort of gurgle, and they distinctly heard something fall with a heavy thud.

“Instantly, the two of them rushed up the passage, which as you know is fenced in with tall, sharp, iron railings. Even as they ran, they could hear the beat of struggling heels on the cemented top of the tank, and just as the inspector reached the bottom of the steps there came a last groan. The following moment they were at the top. The policeman threw the light of his lantern around. It struck on a huddled heap near by the right-hand railings—something limp and inert. They ran to it, and found that it was the dead body of the officer who had been on duty. A hurried examination showed that he had been strangled.

“The inspector blew his whistle, and soon another of the force arrived on the scene. This man they at once dispatched for me, and in the meantime they conducted a rapid but thorough search, which, however, brought to light nothing. This was the more extraordinary in that the murderer must have been on the tank even as they went up the steps.”

“Jove!” I muttered. “He must have been quick.”

The doctor nodded.

“Wait a minute,” he went on, “I’ve not finished yet. When I arrived I found

that I could do nothing; the poor fellow's neck had been literally crushed. The power used must have been enormous.

“‘Have you found anything?’ I asked the inspector.

“‘No,’ he said, and proceeded to tell me as much as he knew, ending by saying that the murderer, whoever it was, had got clean away.

“‘But,’ I exclaimed, ‘he would have to pass you, or else jump the railings. There's no other way.’

“‘That's what he's done.’ replied Slago rather testily. ‘It's no height.’

“‘Then in that case, inspector.’ I answered, ‘he's left something by which we may be able to trace him. “

“‘You mean the mud round the tank, doctor?’ I interrupted.

“‘Yes,” said Doctor Tointon. “So you noticed that, did you? Well, we took the policeman's lamp, and made a thorough search all round the tank—but the whole of the flat surface of mud-covered ground stretched away smooth and unbroken by even a single footprint!”

The doctor stopped dramatically.

“‘Good God!” I exclaimed, excitedly. “Then how did the fellow get away?”

Doctor Tointon shook his head.

“‘That is a point, my dear sir, on which I am not yet prepared to speak. And yet I believe I hold a clew. “

“‘What?’ I almost shouted.

“‘Yes,” he replied, nodding his head thoughtfully. “To-morrow I may be able to tell you something.”

He rose from his chair.

“‘Why not now?’ I asked, madly curious.

“No,” he said, “the thing isn’t definite enough yet.”

He pulled out his watch.

“You must excuse me now. I have a patient waiting.”

I reached for my hat, and he went and opened the door.

“To-morrow,” he said, and nodded reassuringly as he shook hands. “You’ll not forget.”

“Is it likely,” I replied, and he closed the door after me.

The following morning I received a note from him asking me to defer my visit until night, as he would be away from home during the greater portion of the day. He mentioned 9:30 as a possible time at which I might call—any time between then and ten P.M. But I was not to be later than that.

Naturally, feeling as curious as I did, I was annoyed at having to wait the whole day. I had intended calling as early as decency would allow. Still, after that note, there was nothing but to wait.

During the morning, I paid a visit to the tank, but was refused permission by the sergeant in charge. There was a large crowd of people in the road below the tank, and in the little side lane that led up to the railed-in passage. These, like myself, had come up with the intention of seeing the exact spot where the tragedies had occurred; but they were not allowed to pass the men in blue.

Feeling somewhat cross at their persistent refusal to allow me upon the tank, I turned up the lane, which presently turns off to the right. Here, finding a gap in the wall, I clambered over, and disregarding a board threatening terrors to trespassers, I walked across the piece of waste land until I came to the wide belt of mud that surrounded the tank. Then, skirting the edge of the marshy ground, I made my way round until I was on the town-side of the tank. Below me was a large wall which hid me from those in the road below. Between me and the tank stretched some forty feet of smooth, mud-covered earth. This I proceeded now to examine carefully.

As the doctor had said, there was no sign of any footprint in any part of it. My previous puzzlement grew greater. I think I had been entertaining an idea

somewhere at the back of my head that the doctor and the police had made a mistake—perhaps missed seeing the obvious, as is more possible than many think. I turned to go back, and at the same moment, a little stream of water began to flow from a pipe just below the edge of the tank top. It was evidently the “overflow.” Undoubtedly the tank was brim full.

How, I asked myself, had the murderer got away without leaving a trace?

I made my way back to the gap, and so into the lane. And then, even as I sprang to the ground, an idea came to me—a possible solution of the mystery.

I hurried off to see Dufirst, the tank-keeper, who I knew lived in a little cottage a few hundred feet distant. I reached the cottage, and knocked. The man himself answered me, and nodded affably.

“What an ugly little beast!” I thought. Aloud, I said: “Look here, Dufirst, I want a few particulars about the tank. I know you can tell me what I want to know better than anyone else.”

The affability went out of the man’s face. “Wot do yer want to know?” he asked surlily.

“Well,” I replied. “I want to know if there is any place about the tank where a man could hide.”

The fellow looked at me darkly. “No,” he said shortly.

“Sure?” I asked.

“Course I am,” was his sullen reply.

“There’s another thing I want to know about,” I went on. “What’s the tank built upon?”

“Bed er cerment,” he answered.

“And the sides—how thick are they?”

“About ‘arf-inch iron.”

“One thing more,” I said, pulling half-a-crown from my pocket (where-at I saw his face light up). “What are the inside measurements of the tank?” I passed him over the coin.

He hesitated a moment; then slipped it into his waistcoat-pocket. “Come erlong a minnit. I ‘ave ther plan of ther thing upstairs, if yer’ll sit ‘ere an’ wait.”

“Right,” I replied, and sat down, while he disappeared through a door, and presently I heard him rummaging about overhead.

“What a sulky beast,” I thought to myself. Then, as the idea passed through my mind, I caught sight of an old bronze luster jug on the opposite side of the room. It stood on a shelf high up; but in a minute I was across the room and reaching up to it; for I have a craze for such things.

“What a beauty,” I muttered, as I seized hold of the handle. “I’ll offer him five dollars for it.”

I had the thing in my hands now. It was heavy. “The old fool!” thought I. “He’s been using it to stow odds and ends in.” And with that, I took it across to the window. There, in the light, I glanced inside—and nearly dropped it; for within a few inches of my eyes, reposed the old gold watch and chain that had belonged to my murdered friend. For a moment, I felt dazed. Then I knew.

“The little fiend!” I said. “The vile little murderer!”

I put the jug down on the table, and ran to the door. I opened it and glanced out. There, not thirty paces distant was Inspector Slago in company with a constable. They had just gone past the house, and were evidently going up on to the tank.

I did not shout; to do so would have been to warn the man in the room above. I ran after the inspector and caught him by the sleeve.

“Come here, inspector,” I gasped. “I’ve got the murderer.”

He twirled round on his heel. “What?” he almost shouted.

“He’s in there,” I said. “It’s the tank-keeper. He’s still got the watch and chain. I found it in a jug.”

At that the inspector began to run towards the cottage, followed by myself and the policeman. We ran in through the open door, and I pointed to the jug. The inspector picked it up, and glanced inside.

He turned to me. "Can you identify this?" he asked, speaking in a quick, excited voice.

"Certainly I can," I replied. "Mr. Marchmont was to have been my father-in-law. I can swear to the watch being his."

At that instant there came a sound of footsteps on the stairs and a few seconds later the black bearded little tank-keeper came in through an inner door. In his hand he held a roll of paper—evidently the plan of which he had spoken. Then, as his eyes fell on the inspector holding the watch of the murdered man, I saw the fellow's face suddenly pale.

He gave a sort of little gasp, and his eyes flickered round the room to where the jug had stood. Then he glanced at the three of us, took a step backwards, and jumped for the door through which he had entered. But we were too quick for him, and in a minute had him securely handcuffed.

The inspector warned him that whatever he said would be used as evidence; but there was no need, for he spoke not a word.

"How did you come to tumble across this?" asked the inspector, holding up the watch and guard. "What put you on to it?"

I explained and he nodded.

"It's wonderful," he said. "And I'd no more idea than a mouse that it was him;" nodding towards the prisoner.

Then they marched him off.

That night, I kept my appointment at the doctor's. He had said that he would be able to say something; but I rather fancied that the boot was going to prove on the other leg. It was I who would be able to tell him a great deal more than "something." I had solved the whole mystery in a single morning's work. I rubbed my hands, and wondered what the doctor would have to say in answer

to my news. Yet, though I waited until 10:30, he never turned up, so that I had at last to leave without seeing him.

The next morning, I went over to his house. There his housekeeper met me with a telegram that she had just received from a friend of his away down somewhere on the South coast. It was to say that the doctor had been taken seriously ill, and was at present confined to his bed, and was unconscious.

I returned the telegram and left the house. I was sorry for the doctor; but almost more so that I was not able personally to tell him the news of my success as an amateur detective.

It was many weeks before Dr. Tointon returned, and in the meantime the tank-keeper had stood his trial and been condemned for the murder of Mr. Marchmount. In court he had made an improbable statement that he had found the old gentleman dead, and that he had only removed the watch and purse from the body under a momentary impulse. This, of course, did him no good, and when I met the doctor on the day of his return, it wanted only three days to the hanging.

“By the way, doctor,” I said, after a few minutes’ conversation, “I suppose you know that I spotted the chap who murdered old Mr. Marchmount and the policeman?”

For answer the doctor turned and stared.

“Yes,” I said, nodding, “it was the little brute of a tank-keeper. He’s to be hanged in three days’ time.”

“What—” said the doctor, in a startled voice. “Little black Dufirst?”

“Yes,” I said, yet vaguely damped by his tone.

“Hanged!” returned the doctor. “Why the man’s as innocent as you are!”

I stared at him.

“What do you mean?” I asked. “The watch and chain were found in his possession. They proved him guilty in court.”

“Good heavens!” said the doctor. “What awful blindness!”

He turned on me “Why didn’t you write and tell me?”

“You were ill—afterwards I thought you’d be sure to have read about it in one of the papers.”

“Haven’t seen one since I’ve been ill,” he replied sharply. “By George! You’ve made a pretty muddle of it. Tell me how it happened.”

This I did, and he listened intently.

“And, in three days he’s to be hanged?” he questioned when I had made an end.

I nodded.

He took off his hat and mopped his face and brow.

“It’s going to be a job to save him,” he said slowly. “Only three days. My God!”

He looked at me, and then abruptly asked a foolish question.

“Have there been any more—murders up there while I’ve been ill?” He jerked his hand toward the tank.

“No,” I replied. “Of course not. How could there be when they’ve got the chap who did them!”

He shook his head.

“Besides,” I went on, “no one ever goes up there now, at least, not at night, and that’s when the murders were done.”

“Quite so, quite so,” he agreed, as if what I had said fell in with something that he had in his mind.

He turned to me. “Look here,” he said, “come up to my place to-night about ten o’clock, and I think I shall be able to prove to you that the thing which killed Marchmount and the policeman was not—well, it wasn’t little black Dufirst.”

I stared at him.

“Fact,” he said.

He turned and started to leave me.

“I’ll come,” I called out to him.

At the time mentioned, I called at Dr. Tointon’s. He opened the door himself and let me in, taking me into his study. Here, to my astonishment, I met Inspector Slago. The inspector wore rather a worried look, and once when Tointon had left the room for a minute, he bent over towards me.

“He seems to think,” he said in a hoarse whisper, and nodding towards the doorway through which the doctor had gone, “that we’ve made a silly blunder and hooked the wrong man.”

“He’ll find he’s mistaken,” I answered.

The inspector looked doubtful, and seemed on the point of saying something further, when the doctor returned.

“Now then,” Dr. Tointon remarked, “we’ll get ready. Here,” he tossed me a pair of rubbers, “shove those on.”

“You’ve got rubber heels, inspector?”

“Yes, sir,” replied Slago. “Always wear ‘em at night.”

The doctor went over to a corner and returned with a double-barreled shotgun which he proceeded to load. This accomplished, he turned to the inspector.

“Got your man outside?”

“Yes, sir,” replied Slago.

“Come along, then, the two of you.”

We rose and followed him into the dark hall and then out through the front doorway into the silent road. Here we found a plain-clothes policeman waiting,

leaning up against a wall. At a low whistle from the inspector, he came swiftly across and saluted. Then the doctor turned and led the way towards the tank.

Though the night was distinctly warm, I shuddered. There was a sense of danger in the air that got on one's nerves. I was quite in the dark as to what was going to happen. We reached the lower end of the railed passage. Here the doctor halted us, and began to give directions.

“You have your lantern, inspector?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And your man, has he?”

“Yes, sir,” replied the man for himself.

“Well, I want you to give yours to my friend for the present.”

The man in plain-clothes passed me his lantern, and waited further commands.

“Now,” said Dr. Tointon, facing me, “I want you and the inspector to take your stand in the left-hand corner of the tank top, and have your lanterns ready, and mind, there must not be a sound, or everything will be spoiled.”

He tapped the plain-clothes man on the shoulder. “Come along,” he said.

Reaching the tank top, we took up positions as he had directed, while he went over with the inspector's man to the far right-hand corner. After a moment, he left the officer, and I could just make out the figure of the latter leaning negligently against the railings.

The doctor came over to us, and sat down between us.

“You've put him just about where our man was when we found him,” said the inspector in a whisper.

“Yes,” replied Dr. Tointon. “Now, listen, and then there mustn't be another sound. It's a matter of life and death.”

His manner and voice were impressive. “When I call out ‘ready,’ throw the

light from your lanterns on the officer as smartly as you can. Understand?"

"Yes," we replied together, and after that no one spoke.

The doctor lay down between us on his stomach, the muzzle of his gun directed a little to the right of where the other man stood. Thus we waited. Half an hour passed—an hour, and a sound of distant bells chimed up to us from the valley; then the silence resumed sway. Twice more the far-off bells told of the passing hours, and I was getting dreadfully cramped from staying in one position.

Then abruptly, from somewhere across the tank there came a slight, very slight, slurring, crawling sort of noise. A cold shiver took me, and I peered vainly into the darkness till my eyes ached with the effort. Yet I could see nothing. Indistinctly, I could see the lounging figure of the constable. He seemed never to have stirred from his original position.

The strange rubbing, slurring sound continued. Then came a faint clink of iron, as if someone had kicked against the padlock that fastened down the iron trap over the manhole. Yet it could not be the policeman, for he was not near enough. I saw Dr. Tointon raise his head and peer keenly. Then he brought the butt of his gun up to his shoulder.

I got my lantern ready. I was all tingling with fear and expectation. What was going to happen? There came another slight clink, and then, suddenly, the rustling sound ceased.

I listened breathlessly. Across the tank, the hitherto silent policeman stirred almost, it seemed to me, as if someone or something had touched him. The same instant, I saw the muzzle of the doctor's gun go up some six inches. I grasped my lantern firmly, and drew in a deep breath.

"Ready!" shouted the doctor.

I flashed the light from my lantern across the tank simultaneously with the inspector. I have a confused notion of a twining brown thing about the rail a yard to the right of the constable. Then the doctor's gun spoke once—twice, and it dropped out of sight over the edge of the tank. In the same instant the constable slid down off the rail on to the tank top.

“My God!” shouted the inspector, “has it done for him?”

The doctor was already beside the fallen man, busy loosening his clothing.

“He’s all right,” he replied. “He’s only fainted. The strain was too much. He was a plucky devil to stay. That thing was near him for over a minute.”

From somewhere below us in the dark there came a thrashing, rustling sound. I went to the side and threw the light from my lantern downwards. It showed me a writhing yellow something, like an eel or a snake, only the thing was flat like a ribbon. It was twining itself into knots. It had no head. That portion of it seemed to have been blown clean away.

“He’ll do now,” I heard Dr. Tointon say, and the next instant he was standing beside me. He pointed downwards at the horrid thing. “There’s the murderer,” he said.

It was a few evenings later, and the inspector and I were sitting in the doctor’s study.

“Even now, doctor,” I said. “I don’t see how on earth you got at it.”

The inspector nodded a silent agreement.

“Well,” replied Dr. Tointon, “after all it was not so very difficult. Had I not been so unfortunately taken ill while away, I should have cleared the matter up a couple of months ago. You see, I had exceptional opportunities for observing things, and in both cases I was very soon on the spot. But all the same, it was not until the second death occurred that I knew that the deed was not due to a human hand. The fact that there were no footprints in the mud proved that conclusively, and having disposed of that hypothesis, my eyes were open to take in details that had hitherto seemed of no moment. For one thing, both men were found dead almost in the same spot, and that spot is just over the over-flow pipe.”

“It came out of the tank?” I questioned.

“Yes,” replied Dr. Tointon. “Then on the railings near where the thing had happened, I found traces of slime; and another matter that no one but myself

seems to have been aware of, the collar of the policeman's coat was wet, and so was Mr. Marchmount's. Lastly, the shape of the marks upon the necks, and the tremendous force applied, indicated to me the kind of thing for which I must look. The rest was all a matter of deduction.

"Naturally, all the same, my ideas were somewhat hazy; yet before I saw the brute, I could have told you that it was some form of snake or eel, and I could have made a very good guess at its size. In the course of reasoning the matter out, I had occasion to apply to little black Dufirst. From him, I learned that the tank was supposed to be cleaned out annually, but that in reality it had not been seen to for some years."

"What about Dufirst?" I asked.

"Well," said Dr. Tointon dryly, "I understand he is to be granted a free pardon. Of course the little beast stole those things; but I fancy he's had a fair punishment for his sins."

"And the snake, doctor?" I asked. "What was it?"

He shook his head. "I cannot say," he explained. "I have never seen anything just like it. It is one of those abnormalities that occasionally astonish the scientific world. It is a creature that has developed under abnormal conditions, and, unfortunately, it was so shattered by the heavy charges of shot, that the remains tell me but little—its head, as you saw, was entirely shot away."

I nodded. "It's queer—and frightening," I replied. "Makes a chap think a bit."

"Yes," agreed the doctor. "It certainly ought to prove a lesson in cleanliness."

“And No Bird Sings”

E. F. Benson

The red chimneys of the house for which I was bound were visible from just outside the station at which I had alighted, and, so the chauffeur told me, the distance was not more than a mile's walk if I took the path across the fields. It ran straight till it came to the edge of that wood yonder, which belonged to my host, and above which his chimneys were visible. I should find a gate in the paling of this wood, and a track traversing it, which debouched close to his garden. So, on this adorable afternoon of early May, it seemed a waste of time to do other than walk through meadows and woods, and I set off on foot, while the motor carried my traps.

It was one of those golden days which every now and again leak out of paradise and drip to earth. Spring had been late in coming, but now it was here with a burst, and the whole world was boiling with the sap of life. Never have I seen such a wealth of spring flowers, or such vividness of green, or heard such melodious business among the birds in the hedgerows; this walk through the meadows was a jubilee of festal ecstasy. And best of all, so I promised myself, would be the passage through the wood newly fledged with milky green that lay just ahead. There was the gate, just facing me, and I passed through it into the dappled lights and shadows of the grass-grown track.

Coming out of the brilliant sunshine was like entering a dim tunnel; one had the sense of being suddenly withdrawn from the brightness of the spring into some subaqueous cavern. The tree-tops formed a green roof overhead, excluding the light to a remarkable degree. I moved in a world of shifting obscurity. Presently, as the trees grew more scattered, their place was taken by a thick growth of hazels, which met over the path, and then, the ground sloping downwards, I came upon an open clearing, covered with bracken and heather, and studded with birches. But though now I walked once more beneath the luminous sky, with the sunlight pouring down, it seemed to have lost its effulgence. The brightness — was it some odd optical illusion? — was veiled as if it came from crape. Yet there was the sun still well above the tree-tops in an unclouded heaven, but for all that the light was that of a stormy winter's day, without warmth or brilliance. It was oddly silent too; I had thought that the bushes and trees would be ringing with the song of mating-birds, but listening, I could hear no note of any sort, neither the fluting of thrush or blackbird,

nor the cheerful whirr of the chaffinch, nor the cooing wood-pigeon, nor the strident clamour of the jay. I paused to verify this odd silence; there was no doubt about it. It was rather eerie, rather uncanny, but I supposed the birds knew their own business best, and if they were too busy to sing it was their affair.

As I went on it struck me also that since entering the wood I had not seen a bird of any kind; and now, as I crossed the clearing, I kept my eyes alert for them, but fruitlessly, and soon I entered the further belt of thick trees which surrounded it. Most of them I noticed were beeches, growing very close to each other, and the ground beneath them was bare but for the carpet of fallen leaves, and a few thin bramble-bushes. In this curious dimness and thickness of the trees, it was impossible to see far to right or left of the path, and now, for the first time since I had left the open, I heard some sound of life. There came the rustle of leaves from not far away and I thought to myself that a rabbit, anyhow, was moving. But somehow it lacked the staccato patter of a small animal; there was a certain stealthy heaviness about it, as if something much larger was stealing along and desirous of not being heard. I paused again to see what might emerge, but instantly the sound ceased. Simultaneously I was conscious of some faint but very foul odour reaching me, a smell choking and corrupt, yet somehow pungent, more like the odour of something alive rather than rotting. It was peculiarly sickening, and not wanting to get any closer to its source, I went on my way.

Before long I came to the edge of the wood; straight in front of me was a strip of meadow-land, and beyond an iron gate between two brick walls, through which I had a glimpse of lawn and flower-beds. To the left stood the house, and over house and garden there poured the amazing brightness of the declining afternoon.

Hugh Granger and his wife were sitting out on the lawn, with the usual pack of assorted dogs: a Welsh collie, a yellow retriever, a fox-terrier, and a Pekinese. Their protest at my intrusion gave way to the welcome of recognition, and I was admitted into the circle. There was much to say, for I had been out of England for the last three months, during which time Hugh had settled into this little estate left him by a recluse uncle, and he and Daisy had been busy during the Easter vacation with getting into the house. Certainly it was a most attractive legacy; the house, through which I was presently taken, was a delightful little Queen Anne manor, and its situation on the edge of this heather-clad Surrey ridge quite superb. We had tea in a small panelled parlour overlooking the

garden, and soon the wider topics narrowed down to those of the day and the hour. I had walked, had I, asked Daisy, from the station: did I go through the wood, or follow the path outside it?

The question she thus put to me was given trivially enough; there was no hint in her voice that it mattered a straw to her which way I had come. But it was quite dearly borne in upon me that not only she but Hugh also listened intently for my reply. He had just lit a match for his cigarette, but held it unapplied till he heard my answer. Yes, I had gone through the wood; but now, though I had received some odd impressions in the wood, it seemed quite ridiculous to mention what they were. I could not soberly say that the sunshine there was of very poor quality, and that at one point in my traverse I had smelt a most iniquitous odour. I had walked through the wood; that was all I had to tell them.

I had known both my host and hostess for a tale of many years, and now, when I felt that there was nothing except purely fanciful stuff that I could volunteer about my experiences there, I noticed that they exchanged a swift glance, and could easily interpret it. Each of them signalled to the other an expression of relief; they told each other (so I construed their glance) that I, at any rate, had found nothing unusual in the wood, and they were pleased at that. But then, before any real pause had succeeded to my answer that I had gone through the wood, I remembered that strange absence of bird-song and bird, and as that seemed an innocuous observation in natural history, I thought I might as well mention it.

“One odd thing struck me,” I began (and instantly I saw the attention of both riveted again), “I didn’t see a single bird or hear one from the time I entered the wood to when I left it.”

Hugh lit his cigarette.

“I’ve noticed that too,” he said, “and it’s rather puzzling. The wood is certainly a bit of primeval forest, and one would have thought that hosts of birds would have nested in it from time immemorial. But, like you, I’ve never heard or seen one in it. And I’ve never seen a rabbit there either.”

“I thought I heard one this afternoon,” said I. “Something was moving in the fallen beech leaves.”

“Did you see it?” he asked.

I recollected that I had decided that the noise was not quite the patter of a rabbit.

“No, I didn’t see it,” I said, “and perhaps it wasn’t one. It sounded, I remember, more like something larger.”

Once again and unmistakably a glance passed between Hugh and his wife, and she rose.

“I must be off,” she said. “Post goes out at seven, and I lazed all morning. What are you two going to do?”

“Something out of doors, please,” said I. “I want to see the domain.”

Hugh and I accordingly strolled out again with the cohort of dogs. The domain was certainly very charming; a small lake lay beyond the garden, with a reed bed vocal with warblers, and a tufted margin into which coots and moorhens scudded at our approach. Rising from the end of that was a high heathery knoll full of rabbit holes, which the dogs nosed at with joyful expectations, and there we sat for a while overlooking the wood which covered the rest of the estate. Even now, in the blaze of the sun near to its setting, it seemed to be in shadow, though like the rest of the view it should have basked in brilliance, for not a cloud flecked the sky and the level rays enveloped the world in a crimson splendour. But the wood was grey and darkling. Hugh, also, I was aware, had been looking at it, and now, with an air of breaking into a disagreeable topic, he turned to me.

“Tell me,” he said, “does anything strike you about that wood?”

“Yes: it seems to lie in shadow.”

He frowned.

“But it can’t, you know,” he said. “Where does the shadow come from? Not from outside, for sky and land are on fire.”

“From inside, then?” I asked.

He was silent a moment.

“There’s something queer about it,” he said at length. “There’s something there, and I don’t know what it is. Daisy feels it too; she won’t ever go into the wood, and it appears that birds won’t either. Is it just the fact that, for some unexplained reason, there are no birds in it that has set all our imaginations at work?”

I jumped up.

“Oh, it’s all rubbish,” I said. “Let’s go through it now and find a bird. I bet you I find a bird.”

“Sixpence for every bird you see,” said Hugh.

We went down the hillside and walked round the wood till we came to the gate where I had entered that afternoon. I held it open after I had gone in for the dogs to follow. But there they stood, a yard or so away, and none of them moved.

“Come on, dogs,” I said, and Fifi, the fox-terrier, came a step nearer and then, with a little whine, retreated again.

“They always do that,” said Hugh; “not one of them will set foot inside the wood. Look!”

He whistled and called, he cajoled and scolded, but it was no use. There the dogs remained, with little apologetic grins and signallings of tails, but quite determined not to come.

“But why?” I asked.

“Same reason as the birds, I suppose, whatever that happens to be. There’s Fifi, for instance, the sweetest-tempered little lady; once I tried to pick her up and carry her in, and she snapped at me. They’ll have nothing to do with the wood; they’ll trot round outside it and go home.

We left them there and, in the sunset light which was now beginning to fade, began the passage. Usually the sense of eeriness disappears if one has a companion, but now to me, even with Hugh walking by my side, the place

seemed even more uncanny than it had done that afternoon, and a sense of intolerable uneasiness, that grew into a sort of waking nightmare, obsessed me. I had thought before that the silence and loneliness of it had played tricks with my nerves; but with Hugh here it could not be that, and indeed I felt that it was not any such notion that lay at the root of this fear, but rather the conviction that there was some presence lurking there, invisible as yet, but permeating the gathered gloom. I could not form the slightest idea of what it might be, or whether it was material or ghostly; all I could diagnose of it from my own sensations was that it was evil and antique.

As we came to the open ground in the middle of the wood, Hugh stopped, and though the evening was cool I noticed that he mopped his forehead.

“Pretty nasty,” he said. “No wonder the dogs don’t like it. How do you feel about it?”

Before I could answer he shot out his hand, pointing to the belt of trees that lay beyond.

“What’s that?” he said in whisper.

I followed his finger, and for one half-second thought I saw against the black of the wood some vague flicker, grey or faintly luminous. It waved as if it had been the head and forepart of some huge snake rearing itself, but it instantly disappeared, and my glimpse had been so momentary that I could not trust my impression.

“It’s gone,” said Hugh, still looking in the direction he had pointed; and as we stood there I heard again what I had heard that afternoon, a rustle among the fallen beech-leaves. But there was no wind nor breath of breeze astir.

He turned to me.

“What on earth was it?” he said. “It looked like some enormous slug standing up. Did you see it?”

“I’m not sure whether I did or not,” I said. “I think I just caught sight of what you saw.”

“But what was it?” he said again. “Was it a real material creature, or was it—”

“Something ghostly, do you mean?” I asked.

“Something half-way between the two,” he said. “I’ll tell you what I mean afterwards, when we’ve got out of this place.”

The thing, whatever it was, had vanished among the trees to the left of where our path lay, and in silence we walked across the open till we came to where it entered tunnel-like among the trees. Frankly I hated and feared the thought of plunging into that darkness with the knowledge that not so far off there was something the nature of which I could not ever so faintly conjecture, but which, I now made no doubt, was that which filled the wood with some nameless terror. Was it material, was it ghostly, or was it (and now some inkling of what Hugh meant began to form itself into my mind) some being that lay on the borderland between the two? Of all the sinister possibilities that appeared the most terrifying.

As we entered the trees again I perceived that reek, alive and yet corrupt, which I had smelt before, but now it was far more potent, and we hurried on, choking with the odour that I now guessed to be not the putrescence of decay, but the living substance of that which crawled and reared itself in the darkness of the wood where no bird would shelter. Somewhere among those trees lurked the reptilian thing that defied and yet compelled credence.

It was a blessed relief to get out of that dim tunnel into the wholesome air of the open and the clear light of evening. Within doors, when we returned, windows were curtained and lamps lit. There was a hint of frost, and Hugh put a match to the fire in his room, where the dogs, still a little apologetic, hailed us with thumpings of drowsy tails.

“And now we’ve got to talk,” said he, “and lay our plans, for whatever it is that is in the wood we’ve got to make an end of it. And, if you want to know what I think it is, I’ll tell you.”

“Go ahead,” said I.

“You may laugh at me, if you like,” he said, “but I believe it’s an elemental. That’s what I meant when I said it was a being half-way between the material and the ghostly. I never caught a glimpse of it till this afternoon; I only felt there was something horrible there. But now I’ve seen it, and it’s like what spiritualists and that sort of folk describe as an elemental. A huge phosphorescent slug is

what they tell us of it, which at will can surround itself with darkness.”

Somehow, now safe within doors, in the cheerful light and warmth of the room, the suggestion appeared merely grotesque. Out there in the darkness of that uncomfortable wood something within me had quaked, and I was prepared to believe any horror, but now common sense revolted.

“But you don’t mean to tell me you believe in such rubbish?” I said. “You might as well say it was a unicorn. What *is* an elemental, anyway? Who has ever seen one except the people who listen to raps in the darkness and say they are made by their aunts?”

“What is it, then?” he asked.

“I should think it is chiefly our own nerves,” I said. “I frankly acknowledge I got the creeps when I went through the wood first, and I got them much worse when I went through it with you. But it was just nerves; we are frightening ourselves and each other.”

“And are the dogs frightening themselves and each other?” he asked. “And the birds?”

That was rather harder to answer; in fact, I gave it up.

Hugh continued.

“Well, just for the moment we’ll suppose that something else, not ourselves, frightened us and the dogs and the birds,” he said, “and that we did see something like a huge phosphorescent slug. I won’t call it an elemental, if you object to that; I’ll call it It. There’s another thing too, which the existence of It would explain.”

“What’s that?” I asked.

“Well, It is supposed to be some incarnation of evil; it is a corporeal form of the devil. It is not only spiritual, it is material to this extent— that it can be seen, bodily in form, and heard, and, as you noticed, smelt, and, God forbid, handled. It has to be kept alive by nourishment. And that explains perhaps why, every day since I have been here, I’ve found on that knoll we went up some half-dozen dead rabbits.”

“Stoats and weasels,” said I.

“No, not stoats and weasels. Stoats kill their prey and eat it. These rabbits have not been eaten; they’ve been drunk.”

“What on earth do you mean?” I asked.

“I examined several of them. There was just a small hole in their throats, and they were drained of blood. Just skin and bones, and a sort of grey mash of fibre, like — like the fibre of an orange which has been sucked. Also there was a horrible smell lingering on them. And was the thing you had a glimpse of like a stoat or a weasel?”

There came a rattle at the handle of the door.

“Not a word to Daisy,” said Hugh as she entered.

“I heard you come in,” she said. “Where did you go?”

“All round the place,” said I, “and came back through the wood. It is odd; not a bird did we see; but that is partly accounted for because it was dark.”

I saw her eyes search Hugh’s, but she found no communication there. I guessed that he was planning some attack on It next day, and he did not wish her to know that anything was afoot.

“The wood’s unpopular,” he said. “Birds won’t go there, dogs won’t go there, and Daisy won’t go there. I’m bound to say I share the feeling too, but having braved its terrors in the dark I’ve broken the spell.”

“All quiet, was it?” asked she.

“Quiet wasn’t the word for it. The smallest pin could have been heard dropping half a mile off.”

We talked over our plans that night after she had gone up to bed. Hugh’s story about the sucked rabbits was rather horrible, and though there was no certain connection between those empty rinds of animals and what we had seen, there seemed a certain reasonableness about it. But anything, as he pointed out, which could feed like that was clearly not without its material side

— ghosts did not have dinner, and if it was material it was vulnerable.

Our plans, therefore, were very simple; we were going to tramp through the wood, as one walks up partridges in a field of turnips, each with a shotgun and a supply of cartridges. I cannot say that I looked forward to the expedition, for I hated the thought of getting into closer quarters with that mysterious denizen of the woods; but there was a certain excitement about it, sufficient to keep me awake a long time, and when I got to sleep to cause very vivid and awful dreams.

The morning failed to fulfil the promise of the clear sunset; the sky was lowering and cloudy and a fine rain was falling. Daisy had shopping errands which took her into the little town, and as soon as she had set off we started on our business. The yellow retriever, mad with joy at the sight of guns, came bounding with us across the garden, but on our entering the wood he slunk back home again.

The wood was roughly circular in shape, with a diameter perhaps of half a mile. In the centre, as I have said, there was an open clearing about a quarter of a mile across, which was thus surrounded by a belt of thick trees and copse a couple of hundred yards in breadth. Our plan was first to walk together up the path which led through the wood, with all possible stealth, hoping to hear some movement on the part of what we had come to seek. Failing that, we had settled to tramp through the wood at the distance of some fifty yards from each other in a circular track; two or three of these circuits would cover the whole ground pretty thoroughly. Of the nature of our quarry, whether it would try to steal away from us, or possibly attack, we had no idea; it seemed, however, yesterday to have avoided us.

Rain had been falling steadily for an hour when we entered the wood; it hissed a little in the tree-tops overhead; but so thick was the cover that the ground below was still not more than damp. It was a dark morning outside; here you would say that the sun had already set and that night was falling. Very quietly we moved up the grassy path, where our footfalls were noiseless, and once we caught a whiff of that odour of live corruption; but though we stayed and listened not a sound of anything stirred except the sibilant rain over our heads. We went across the clearing and through to the far gate, and still there was no sign.

“We’ll be getting into the trees, then,” said Hugh. “We had better start where

we got that whiff of it.”

We went back to the place, which was towards the middle of the encompassing trees. The odour still lingered on the windless air.

“Go on about fifty yards,” he said, “and then we’ll go in. If either of us comes on the track of it we’ll shout to each other.”

I walked on down the path till I had gone the right distance, signalled to him, and we stepped in among the trees.

I have never known the sensation of such utter loneliness. I knew that Hugh was walking parallel with me, only fifty yards away, and if I hung on my step I could faintly hear his tread among the beechleaves. But I felt as if I was quite sundered in this dim place from all companionship of man; the only live thing that lurked here was that monstrous mysterious creature of evil. So thick were the trees that I could not see more than a dozen yards in any direction; all places outside the wood seemed infinitely remote, and infinitely remote also everything that had occurred to me in normal human life. I had been whisked out of all wholesome experiences into this antique and evil place. The rain had ceased, it whispered no longer in the tree-tops, testifying that there did exist a world and a sky outside, and only a few drops from above pattered on the beech-leaves.

Suddenly I heard the report of Hugh’s gun, followed by his shouting voice.

“I’ve missed it,” he shouted; “it’s coming in your direction.”

I heard him running towards me, the beech-leaves rustling, and no doubt his footsteps drowned a stealthier noise that was close to me. All that happened now, until once more I heard the report of Hugh’s gun, happened, I suppose, in less than a minute. If it had taken much longer I do not imagine I should be telling it to-day.

I stood there then, having heard Hugh’s shout, with my gun cocked, and ready to put to my shoulder, and I listened to his running footsteps. But still I saw nothing to shoot at and heard nothing. Then between two beech trees, quite close to me, I saw what I can only describe as a ball of darkness. It rolled very swiftly towards me over the few yards that separated me from it, and then, too late, I heard the dead beech-leaves rustling below it. Just before it reached

me, my brain realized what it was, or what it might be, but before I could raise my gun to shoot at that nothingness it was upon me. My gun was twitched out of my hand, and I was enveloped in this blackness, which was the very essence of corruption. It knocked me off my feet, and I sprawled flat on my back, and upon me, as I lay there, I felt the weight of this invisible assailant.

I groped wildly with my hands and they clutched something cold and slimy and hairy. They slipped off it, and next moment there was laid across my shoulder and neck something which felt like an india-rubber tube. The end of it fastened on to my neck like a snake, and I felt the skin rise beneath it. Again, with clutching hands, I tried to tear that obscene strength away from me, and as I struggled with it I heard Hugh's footsteps dose to me through this layer of darkness that hid everything.

My mouth was free, and I shouted at him.

"Here, here!" I yelled. "Close to you, where it is darkest."

I felt his hands on mine, and that added strength detached from my neck that sucker that pulled at it. The coil that lay heavy on my legs and chest writhed and struggled and relaxed. Whatever it was that our four hands held, slipped out of them, and I saw Hugh standing close to me. A yard or two off, vanishing among the beech trunks, was that blackness which had poured over me. Hugh put up his gun, and with his second barrel fired at it.

The blackness dispersed, and there, wriggling and twisting like a huge worm lay what we had come to find. It was alive still, and I picked up my gun which lay by my side and fired two more barrels into it. The writhings dwindled into mere shudderings and shakings, and then it lay still.

With Hugh's help I got to my feet, and we both reloaded before going nearer. On the ground there lay a monstrous thing, half slug, half worm. There was no head to it; it ended in a blunt point with an orifice. In colour it was grey, covered with sparse black hairs; its length, I suppose, was some four feet, its thickness at the broadest part was that of a man's thigh, tapering towards each end. It was shattered by shot at its middle. There were stray pellets which had hit it elsewhere, and from the holes they had made there oozed not blood, but some grey viscous matter.

As we stood there some swift process of disintegration and decay began. It

lost outline, it melted, it liquefied, and in a minute more we were looking at a mass of stained and coagulated beech leaves. Again and quickly that liquor of corruption faded, and there lay at our feet no trace of what had been there. The overpowering odour passed away, and there came from the ground just the sweet savour of wet earth in springtime, and from above the glint of a sunbeam piercing the clouds. Then a sudden pattering among the dead leaves sent my heart into my mouth again, and I cocked my gun. But it was only Hugh's yellow retriever who had joined us.

We looked at each other.

"You're not hurt?" he said.

I held my chin up.

"Not a bit," I said. "The skin's not broken, is it?"

"No; only a round red mark. My God, what was it? What happened?"

"Your turn first," said I. "Begin at the beginning."

I came upon it quite suddenly," he said. "It was lying coiled like a sleeping dog behind a big beech. Before I could fire, it slithered off in the direction where I knew you were. I got a snapshot at it among the trees, but I must have missed, for I heard it rustling away. I shouted to you and ran after it. There was a circle of absolute darkness on the ground, and your voice came from the middle of it. I couldn't see you at all, but I clutched at the blackness and my hands met yours. They met something else too."

We got back to the house and had put the guns away before Daisy came home from her shopping. We had also scrubbed and brushed and washed. She came into the smoking-room.

"You lazy folk," she said. "It has cleared up, and why are you still indoors? Let's go out at once."

I got up.

"Hugh has told me you've got a dislike of the wood," I said, "and it's a lovely wood. Come and see; he and I will walk on each side of you and hold your

hands. The dogs shall protect you as well.”

“But not one of them will go a yard into the wood,” said she.

“Oh yes, they will. At least, we’ll try them. You must promise to come if they do.”

Hugh whistled them up, and down we went to the gate. They sat panting for it to be opened, and scuttled into the thickets in pursuit of interesting smells.

“And who says there are no birds in it?” said Daisy. “Look at that robin! Why, there are two of them. Evidently house-hunting.”