

Strange Creatures VIII

Green Enigmas

Edited by
Chad Arment

Arment Biological Press

This Electronic Publication includes short stories from a number of sources. The current publisher has attempted to retain all pertinent text, but format changes were necessary. Internal links have been created for the table of contents.

This electronic reprint is ©2002 by Arment Biological Press.

The original text is in the public domain, however all changes, formatting and presentation of this publication are copyrighted by the current publisher.

Arment Biological Press
Landisville, PA

www.herper.com/ebooks/

Editor's Note

This volume is composed of short stories that deal with the possible existence of significant and as yet undescribed plants. Folklore is filled with strange and often dangerous plants, man-eating trees, and the like. Cryptobotany, however, has not quite taken off as a scientific discipline to the extent of cryptozoology. Given that a tree is much less likely to run away at the sight of an intrepid explorer, the continued existence of such myths is contingent primarily on difficult terrain limiting the fieldwork of botanists.

Literary allusions to strange plants are not uncommon in gothic or Victorian stories, as the thought of living organisms so completely “alien” yet so familiar to us can give rise to uneasiness when we are surrounded by a dark silent forest.

Orchids are especially common in these tales, due to their exotic appeal. Carnivorous plants are another favorite, though magnified in their size and hunger for flesh. As you can imagine, carnivorous orchids seem to make a happy coupling for many authors.

So, enjoy. And don't forget to stop and smell the flowers. Or just look at them from a safe distance...

Chad Arment

Contents

The American's Tale	Sir Arthur Conan Doyle
Professor Jonkin's Cannibal Plant	Howard R. Garis
The Purple Terror	Fred M. White
The Strange Orchid	H. G. Wells
The Treasure in the Forest	H. G. Wells
The Orchid Horror	John Blunt
The Man-Eating Tree	Phil Robinson

The American's Tale

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

“It air strange, it air,” he was saying as I opened the door of the room where our social little semiliterary society met; “but I could tell you queerer things than that ‘ere—almighty queer things. You can’t learn everything out of books, sirs, nohow. You see it ain’t the men as can string English together and as has had good eddications as finds themselves in the queer places I’ve been in. They’re mostly rough men, sirs, as can scarce speak aright, far less tell with pen and ink the things they’ve seen; but if they could they’d make some of your European’s har riz with astonishment. They would, sirs, you bet!”

His name was Jefferson Adams, I believe; I know his initials were J. A., for you may see them yet deeply whittled on the right-hand upper panel of our smoking-room door. He left us this legacy, and also some artistic patterns done in tobacco juice upon our Turkey carpet; but beyond these reminiscences our American storyteller has vanished from our ken. He gleamed across our ordinary quiet conviviality like some brilliant meteor, and then was lost in the outer darkness. That night, however, our Nevada friend was in full swing; and I quietly lit my pipe and dropped into the nearest chair, anxious not to interrupt his story.

“Mind you,” he continued, “I hain’t got no grudge against your men of science. I likes and respects a chap as can match every beast and plant, from a huckleberry to a grizzly with a jaw-breakin’ name; but if you wants real interestin’ facts, something a bit juicy, you go to your whalers and your frontiersmen, and your scouts and Hudson Bay men, chaps who mostly can scarce sign their names.”

There was a pause here, as Mr. Jefferson Adams produced a long cheroot and lit it. We preserved a strict silence in the room, for we had already learned that on the slightest interruption our Yankee drew himself into his shell again. He glanced round with a self-satisfied smile as he remarked our expectant looks, and continued through a halo of smoke.

“Now which of you gentlemen has ever been in Arizona? None, I’ll warrant. And of all English or Americans as can put pen to paper, how many has been in Arizona? Precious few, I calc’late. I’ve been there, sirs, lived there for years;

and when I think of what I've seen there, why, I can scarce get myself to believe it now.

“Ah, there's a country! I was one of Walker's filibusters, as they chose to call us; and after we'd busted up, and the chief was shot, some of us made tracks and located down there. A reg'lar English and American colony, we was, with our wives and children, and all complete. I reckon there's some of the old folk there yet, and that they hain't forgotten what I'm agoing to tell you. No, I warrant they hain't, never on this side of the grave, sirs.

“I was talking about the country, though; and I guess I could astonish you considerable if I spoke of nothing else. To think of such a land being built for a few 'Greasers' and half-breeds! It's a misusing of the gifts of Providence, that's what I calls it. Grass as hung over a chap's head as he rode through it, and trees so thick that you couldn't catch a glimpse of blue sky for leagues and leagues, and orchids like umbrellas! Maybe one of you has seen a plant as they calls the 'fly-catcher,' in some parts of the States?”

“*Dionaea muscipula*,” murmured Dawson, our scientific man par excellence.

“Ah, 'Die near a municipal,' that's him! You'll see a fly stand on that 'ere plant, and then you'll see the two sides of a leaf snap up together and catch it between them, and grind it up and mash it to bits, for all the world like some great sea squid with its beak; and hours after, if you open the leaf, you'll see the body lying half-digested, and in bits. Well, I've seen those flytraps in Arizona with leaves eight and ten feet long, and thorns or teeth a foot or more; why, they could—But darn it, I'm going too fast!

“It's about the death of Joe Hawkins I was going to tell you; 'bout as queer a thing, I reckon, as ever you heard tell on. There wasn't nobody in Montana as didn't know of Joe Hawkins—'Alabama' Joe, as he was called there. A reg'lar out and outer, he was, 'bout the darndest skunk as ever man clapt eyes on. He was a good chap enough, mind ye, as long as you stroked him the right way; but rile him anyhow, and he were worse nor a wildcat. I've seen him empty his six-shooter into a crowd as chanced to jostle him agoing into Simpson's bar when there was a dance on; and he bowied Tom Hooper 'cause he spilt his liquor over his weskit by mistake. No, he didn't stick at murder, Joe didn't; and he weren't a man to be trusted further nor you could see him.

“Now at the time I tell on, when Joe Hawkins was swaggerin' about the

town and layin' down the law with his shootin'-irons, there was an Englishman there of the name of Scott—Tom Scott, if I rec'lects aright. This chap Scott was a thorough Britisher (beggin' the present company's pardon), and yet he didn't freeze much to the British set there, or they didn't freeze much to him. He was a quiet simple man, Scott was—rather too quiet for a rough set like that; sneakin' they called him, but he weren't that. He kept hisself mostly apart, an' didn't interfere with nobody so long as he were left alone. Some said as how he'd been kinder ill-treated at home—been a Chartist, or something of that sort, and had to up stick and run; but he never spoke of it hisself, an' never complained. Bad luck or good, that chap kept a stiff lip on him.

“This chap Scott was a sort o' butt among the men about Montana for he was so quiet an' simple-like. There was no party either to take up his grievances; for, as I've been saying, the Britishers hardly counted him one of them, and many a rough joke they played on him. He never cut up rough, but was polite to all hisself. I think the boys got to think he hadn't much grit in him till he showed 'em their mistake.

“It was in Simpson's bar as the row got up, an' that led to the queer thing I was going to tell you of. Alabama Joe and one or two other rowdies were dead on the Britishers in those days, and they spoke their opinions pretty free, though I warned them as there'd be an almighty muss. That partic'lar night Joe was nigh half drunk, an' he swaggered about the town with his six-shooter, lookin' out for a quarrel. Then he turned into the bar where he know'd he'd find some o' the English as ready for one as he was hisself. Sure enough, there was half a dozen lounging about, an' Tom Scott standin' alone before the stove. Joe sat down by the table, and put his revolver and bowie down in front of him. ‘Them's my arguments, Jeff,’ he says to me, ‘if any white-livered Britisher dares give me the lie.’ I tried to stop him, sirs; but he weren't a man as you could easily turn, an' he began to speak in a way as no chap could stand. Why, even a ‘Greaser’ would flare up if you said as much of Greaserland! There was a commotion at the bar, an' every man laid his hands on his wepin's; but afore they could draw we heard a quiet voice from the stove: ‘Say your prayers, Joe Hawkins; for, by Heaven, you're a dead man!’ Joe turned round and looked like grabbin' at his iron; but it weren't no manner of use. Tom Scott was standing up, covering him with his Derringer; a smile on his white face, but the very devil shining in his eye. ‘It ain't that the old country has used me overwell,’ he says, ‘but no man shall speak agin it afore me, and live.’ For a second or two I could see his finger tighten round the trigger, an' then he gave a laugh, an' threw the pistol on the floor. ‘No,’ he says, ‘I can't shoot a half-drunk man. Take your dirty life, Joe,

an' use it better nor you have done. You've been nearer the grave this night than you will be agin until your time comes. You'd best make tracks now, I guess. Nay, never look black at me, man; I'm not afeard at your shootin'-iron. A bully's nigh always a coward.' And he swung contemptuously round, and relit his half-smoked pipe from the stove; while Alabama slunk out o' the bar, with the laughs of the Britishers ringing in his ears. I saw his face as he passed me, and on it I saw murder, sirs—murder, as plain as ever I seed anything in my life.

“I stayed in the bar after the row, and watched Tom Scott as he shook hands with the men about. It seemed kinder queer to me to see him smilin' and cheerful-like; for I knew Joe's bloodthirsty mind, and that the Englishman had small chance of ever seeing the morning. He lived in an out-of-the-way sort of place, you see, clean off the trail, and had to pass through the Flytrap Gulch to get to it. This here gulch was a marshy gloomy place, lonely enough during the day even; for it were always a creepy sort o' thing to see the great eight- and ten-foot leaves snapping up if aught touched them; but at night there were never a soul near. Some parts of the marsh, too, were soft and deep, and a body thrown in would be gone by the morning. I could see Alabama Joe crouchin' under the leaves of the great Flytrap in the darkest part of the gulch, with a scowl on his face and a revolver in his hand; I could see it sirs, as plain as with my two eyes.

“‘Bout midnight Simpson shuts up his bar, so out we had to go. Tom Scott started off for his three-mile walk at a slashing pace. I just dropped him a hint as he passed me, for I kinder liked the chap. ‘Keep your Derringer loose in your belt, sir,’ I says, ‘for you might chance to need it.’ He looked round at me with his quiet smile, and then I lost sight of him in the gloom. I never thought to see him again. He'd hardly gone afore Simpson comes up to me and says, ‘There'll be a nice job in the Flytrap Gulch tonight, Jeff; the boys say that Hawkins started half an hour ago to wait for Scott and shoot him on sight. I calc'late the coroner'll be wanted tomorrow.’

“What passed in the gulch that night? It were a question as were asked pretty free next morning. A half-breed was in Ferguson's store after daybreak, and he said as he'd chanced to be near the gulch 'bout one in the morning. It warn't easy to get at his story, he seemed so uncommon scared; but he told us, at last, as he'd heard the fearfulest screams in the stillness of the night. There weren't no shots, he said, but scream after scream, kinder muffled, like a man with a serape over his head, an' in mortal pain. Abner Brandon and me, and a

few more, was in the store at the time; so we mounted and rode out to Scott's house, passing through the gulch on the way. There weren't nothing partic'lar to be seen there—no blood nor marks of a fight, nor nothing; and when we gets up to Scott's house, out he comes to meet us as fresh as a lark. 'Hullo, Jeff!' says he, 'no need for the pistols after all. Come in an' have a cocktail, boys.' 'Did ye see or hear nothing as ye came home last night?' says I. 'No,' says he; 'all was quiet enough. An owl kinder moaning in the Flytrap Gulch—that was all. Come, jump off and have a glass.' 'Thank ye,' said Abner. So off we gets, and Tom Scott rode into the settlement with us when we went back.

"An all-fired commotion was on in Main Street as we rode into it. The 'Merican party seemed to have gone clean crazed. Alabama Joe was gone, not a darned particle of him left. Since he went out to the gulch nary eye had seen him. As we got off our horses there was a considerable crowd in front of Simpson's, and some ugly looks at Tom Scott, I can tell you. There was a clickin' of pistols, and I saw as Scott had his hand in his bosom too. There weren't a single English face about. 'Stand aside, Jeff Adams,' says Zebb Humphrey, as great a scoundrel as ever lived, 'you hain't got no hand in this game. Say, boys, are we, free Americans, to be murdered by any darned Britisher?' It was the quickest thing as ever I seed. There was a rush an' a crack; Zebb was down, with Scott's ball in his thigh, and Scott hisself was on the ground with a dozen men holding him. It weren't no use struggling, so he lay quiet. They seemed a bit uncertain what to do with him at first, but then one of Alabama's special chums put them up to it. 'Joe's gone,' he said; 'nothing ain't surer nor that, an' there lies the man as killed him. Some on you knows as Joe went on business to the gulch last night; he never came back. That 'ere Britisher passed through after he'd gone; they'd had a row, screams is heard 'mong the great flytraps. I say agin he has played poor Joe some o' his sneakin' tricks, an' thrown him into the swamp. It ain't no wonder as the body is gone. But air we to stan' by and see English murderin' our own chums? I guess not. Let Judge Lynch try him, that's what I say.' 'Lynch him!' shouted a hundred angry voices—for all the rag-tag an' bobtail o' the settlement was round us by this time. "Here, boys, fetch a rope, and swing him up. Up with him over Simpson's door!" 'See here though,' says another, coming forrards; 'let's hang him by the great flytrap in the gulch. Let Joe see as he's revenged, if so be as he's buried 'bout theer.' There was a shout for this, an' away they went, with Scott tied on his mustang in the middle, and a mounted guard, with cocked revolvers, round him; for we knew as there was a score or so Britishers about, as didn't seem to recognise Judge Lynch, and was dead on a free fight.

“I went out with them, my heart bleedin’ for Scott, though he didn’t seem a cent put out, he didn’t. He were game to the backbone. Seems kinder queer, sirs, hangin’ a man to a flytrap; but our’n were a reg’lar tree, and the leaves like a brace of boats with a hinge between ‘em and thorns at the bottom.

“We passed down the gulch to the place where the great one grows, and there we seed it with the leaves, some open, some shut. But we seed something worse nor that. Standin’ round the tree was some thirty men, Britishers all, an’ armed to the teeth. They was waitin’ for us evidently, an’ had a businesslike look about ‘em, as if they’d come for something and meant to have it. There was the raw material there for about as warm a scrimmidge as ever I seed. As we rode up, a great red-bearded Scotch-man—Cameron were his name—stood out afore the rest, his revolver cocked in his hand. ‘See here, boys,’ he says, ‘you’ve got no call to hurt a hair of that man’s head. You hain’t proved as Joe is dead yet; and if you had, you hain’t proved as Scott killed him. Anyhow, it were in self-defence; for you all know as he was lying in wait for Scott, to shoot him on sight; so I say agin, you hain’t got no call to hurt that man; and what’s more, I’ve got thirty six-barrelled arguments against your doin’ it.’ ‘It’s an interestin’ pint, and worth arguin’ out,’ said the man as was Alabama Joe’s special chum. There was a clickin’ of pistols, and a loosenin’ of knives, and the two parties began to draw up to one another, an’ it looked like a rise in the mortality of Montana. Scott was standing behind with a pistol at his ear if he stirred, lookin’ quiet and composed as having no money on the table, when sudden he gives a start an’ a shout as rang in our ears like a trumpet. ‘Joe!’ he cried, ‘Joe! Look at him! In the flytrap!’ We all turned an’ looked where he was pointin’. Jerusalem! I think we won’t get that picter out of our minds agin. One of the great leaves of the flytrap, that had been shut and touchin’ the ground as it lay, was slowly rolling back upon its hinges. There, lying like a child in its cradle, was Alabama Joe in the hollow of the leaf. The great thorns had been slowly driven through his heart as it shut upon him. We could see as he’d tried to cut his way out, for there was a slit in the thick fleshy leaf, an’ his bowie was in his hand; but it had smothered him first. He’d lain down on it likely to keep the damp off while he were awaitin’ for Scott, and it had closed on him as you’ve seen your little hothouse ones do on a fly; an’ there he were as we found him, torn and crushed into pulp by the great jagged teeth of the man-eatin’ plant. There, sirs, I think you’ll own as that’s a curious story.”

“And what became of Scott?” asked Jack Sinclair.

“Why, we carried him back on our shoulders, we did, to Simpson’s bar, and

he stood us liquors round. Made a speech too—a darned fine speech—from the counter. Somethin’ about the British lion an’ the ‘Merican eagle walkin’ arm in arm for ever an’ a day. And now, sirs, that yarn was long, and my cheroot’s out, so I reckon I’ll make tracks afore it’s later”; and with a “Good-night!” he left the room.

“A most extraordinary narrative!” said Dawson. “Who would have thought a *Dionaea* had such power!”

“Deuced rum yarn!” said young Sinclair.

“Evidently a matter-of-fact truthful man,” said the doctor.

“Or the most original liar that ever lived,” said I.

I wonder which he was.

Professor Jonkin's Cannibal Plant

Howard R. Garis

After Professor Jephtha Jonkin had, by skillful grafting and care, succeeded in raising a single tree that produced, at different seasons, apples, oranges, pineapples, figs, coconuts, and peaches, it might have been supposed he would rest from his scientific labors. But Professor Jonkin was not that kind of a man.

He was continually striving to grow something new in the plant world. So it was no surprise to Bradley Adams, when calling on his friend the professor one afternoon, to find that scientist busy in his large conservatory.

"What are you up to now?" asked Adams. "Trying to make a rosebush produce violets, or a honeysuckle vine bring forth pumpkins?"

"Neither," replied Professor Jonkin a little stiffly, for he resented Adams' playful tone. "Not that either of those things would be difficult. But look at that."

He pointed to a small plant with bright, glossy green leaves mottled with red spots. The thing was growing in a large earthen pot.

It bore three flowers, about the size of morning glories, and not unlike that blossom in shape, save, near the top, there was a sort of lid similar to the flap observed on a jack-in-the-pulpit plant.

"Look down one of those flowers," went on the professor, and Adams, wondering what was to come, did so.

He saw within a small tube, lined with fine, hairlike filaments, which seemed to be in motion. And the shaft or tube went down to the bottom of the morning-glory-shaped part of the flower. At the lower extremity was a little clear liquid.

"Kind of a queer blossom. What is it?" asked Adams.

"That," said the professor with a note of pride in his voice, "is a specimen of the *Sarracenia nepenthis*."

“What’s that? French for sunflower, or Latin for sweet pea?” asked Adams irreverently.

“It is Latin for pitcher plant,” responded the professor, drawing him self up to his full height of five-feet-three. “One of the most interesting of the South American flora.”

“The name fits it pretty well,” observed Adams. “I see there’s water at the bottom. I suppose this isn’t the pitcher that went to the well too often.’

“The *Sarracenia nepenthis* is a most wonderful plant,” went on the professor in his lecture voice, not heeding Adams’s joking remarks. “It belongs to what Darwin calls the carnivorous family of flowers, and other varieties of the same species are the *Dionaea muscipula*, or Venus Flytrap, the *Darlingtonia*, the *Pinguicula*, and *Aldrovandra*, as well as—”

“Hold on, professor,” pleaded Adams. “I’ll take the rest on faith. Tell me about this pitcher plant, sounds interesting.”

“It is interesting,” said Professor Jonkin. “It eats insects.”

“Eats insects?”

“Certainly. Watch.”

The professor opened a small wire cage lying on a shelf and took from it several flies. These he liberated close to the queer plant.

The insects buzzed about a few seconds, dazed with their sudden liberty.

Then they began slowly to circle in the vicinity of the strange flowers. Nearer and nearer the blossoms they came, attracted by some subtle perfume, as well as by a sweet syrup that was on the edge of the petals, put there by nature for the very purpose of drawing hapless insects into the trap.

The flies settled down, some on the petals of all three blooms. Then a curious thing happened.

The little hairlike filaments in the tube within the petals suddenly reached out and wound themselves about the insects feeding on the sweet stuff, which

seemed to intoxicate them. In an instant the flies were pulled to the top of the flower shaft by a contraction of the hairs, and then they went tumbling down the tube into the miniature pond below, where they were drowned after a brief struggle. Their crawling back was prevented by spines growing with points down, as the wires in some rat traps are fastened.

Meanwhile the cover of the plant closed down.

“Why, it’s a regular flytrap, isn’t it?” remarked Adams, much surprised.

“It is,” replied the professor. “The plant lives off the insects it captures. It absorbs them, digests them, and, when it is hungry again, catches more.

“Where’d you get such an uncanny thing?” asked Adams, moving away from the plant as if he feared it might take a sample bite out of him.

“A friend sent it to me from Brazil.”

“But you’re not going to keep it, I hope.”

“I certainly am,” rejoined Professor Jonkin.

“Maybe you’re going to train it to come to the table and eat like a human being,” suggested Adams, with a laugh that nettled the professor.

“I wouldn’t have to train it much to induce it to be polite,” snapped back the owner of the pitcher plant.

And then, seeing that his jokes were not relished, Adams assumed an interest he did not feel, and listened to a long dissertation on botany in general and carnivorous plants in particular.

He would much rather have been eating some of the queer hybrid fruits the professor raised. He pleaded an engagement when he saw an opening in the talk, and went away.

It was some months after that before he saw the professor again. The botanist was busy in his conservatory in the meantime, and the gardener he hired to do rough work noticed that his master spent much time in that part of the glass house where the pitcher plant was growing.

For Professor Jonkin had become so much interested in his latest acquisition that he seemed to think of nothing else. His plan for increasing strawberries to the size of peaches was abandoned for a time, as was his pet scheme of raising apples without any core.

The gardener wondered what there was about the South American blossoms to require such close attention.

One day he thought he would find out, and he started to enter that part of the conservatory where the pitcher plant was growing. Professor Jonkin halted him before he had stepped inside and sternly bade him never to appear there again.

As the gardener, crestfallen, moved away after a glimpse into the forbidden region he muttered:

“My, that plant has certainly grown! And I wonder what the professor was doing so close to it. Looked as if he was feeding the thing.”

As the days went by the conduct of Professor Jonkin became more and more curious. He scarcely left the southern end of the conservatory, save at night, when he entered his house to sleep.

He was a bachelor, and had no family cares to trouble him, so he could spend all his time among his plants. But hitherto he had divided his attention among his many experiments in the floral kingdom.

Now he was always with his mysterious pitcher plant. He even had his meals sent into the greenhouse.

“Be you keepin’ boarders?” asked the butcher boy of the gardener one day, passing on his return to the store, his empty basket on his arm.

“No. Why?”

“The professor is orderin’ so much meat lately. I thought you had company.”

“No, there’s only us two. Mr. Adams used to come to dinner once in a while, but not lately.”

“Then you an’ the professor must have big appetites.”

“What makes you think so?”

“The number of beefsteaks you eat.”

“Number of beefsteaks? Why, my lad, the professor and I are both vegetarians.”

“What’s them?”

“We neither of us eat a bit of meat. We don’t believe it’s healthy.”

“Then what becomes of the three big porterhouse steaks I deliver to the professor in the greenhouse every day?”

“Porterhouse steaks?” questioned the gardener, amazed.

“Do you feed ‘em to the dog?”

“We don’t keep a dog.”

But the butcher boy questioned no further, for he saw a chum and hastened off to join him.

“Three porterhouse steaks a day!” mused the gardener, shaking his head. “I do hope the professor has not ceased to be a vegetarian. Yet it looks mighty suspicious. And he’s doing it on the sly, too, for there’s been no meat cooked in the house, of that I’m sure.”

And the gardener, sorely puzzled over the mystery, went off, shaking his head more solemnly than before.

He resolved to have a look in the place the professor guarded so carefully. He tried the door when he was sure his master was in another part of the Conservatory, but it was locked, and no key the gardener had would unfasten it.

A month after the gardener had heard of the porterhouse steaks, Adams happened to drop in to see the professor again.

“He’s in with the *Sarracenia nepenthis*, “ said the gardener in answer to the visitor’s inquiry. “But I doubt if he will let you enter.”

“Why won’t he?”

“Because he’s become mighty close-mouthed of late over that pitcher plant.”

“Oh, I guess he’ll see me,” remarked Adams confidently, and he knocked on the door that shut off the locked section of the greenhouse from the main portion.

“Who’s there?” called the professor.

“Adams.”

“Oh,” in a more conciliatory tone. “I was just wishing you’d come along. I have something to show you.”

Professor Jonkin opened the door, and the sight that met Adams’ gaze startled him.

The only plant in that part of the conservatory was a single specimen of the *Sarracenia nepenthis*. Yet it had attained such enormous proportions that at first Adams thought he must be dreaming.

“What do you think of that for an achievement in science?” asked the professor proudly.

“Do you mean to say that is the small, fly-catching plant your friend sent you from Brazil?”

“The same.”

“But—but—”

“But how it’s grown. That’s what you want to say, isn’t it?”

“It is. How did you do it?”

“By dieting the blossoms.”

“You mean—?”

“I mean feeding them. Listen. I reasoned that if a small blossom of the plant would thrive on a few insects, by giving it larger meals I might get a bigger plant. So I made my plans.

“First I cut off all but one blossom, so that the strength of the plant would nourish that alone. Then I made out a bill of fare. I began feeding it on chopped beef. The plant took to it like a puppy. It seemed to beg for more. From chopped meat I went to small pieces, cut up. I could fairly see the blossom increase in size. From that I went to choice mutton chops, and, after a week of them, with the plant becoming more gigantic all the while, I increased its meals to a porterhouse steak a day. And now—”

The professor paused to contemplate his botanical work.

“Well, now?” questioned Adams.

“Now,” went on the professor proudly, “my pitcher plant takes three big beefsteaks every day—one for breakfast, one for dinner, and one for supper. And see the result.”

Adams gazed at the immense plant. From a growth about as big as an Easter lily it had increased until the top was near the roof of the greenhouse, twenty-five feet above.

About fifteen feet up, or ten feet from the top, there branched out a great flower, about eight feet long and three feet across the bell-shaped mouth, which except for the cap or cover, was not unlike the opening of an immense morning glory.

The flower was heavy, and the stalk on which it grew was not strong enough to support it upright. So a rude scaffolding had been constructed of wood and boards, and on a frame the flower was held upright.

In order to see it to better advantage, and also that he might feed it, the professor had a ladder by which he could ascend to a small platform in front of the bell-shaped mouth of the blossom.

“It is time to give my pet its meal,” he announced, as if he were speaking of some favorite horse. “Want to come up and watch it eat?”

“No, thank you,” responded Adams. “It’s too uncanny.”

The professor took a large steak, one of the three the butcher boy had left that day. Holding it in his hand, he climbed up the ladder and was soon on the platform in front of the plant.

Adams watched him curiously. The professor leaned over to toss the steak into the yawning mouth of the flower.

Suddenly Adams saw him totter, throw his arms wildly in the air, and then, as if drawn by some overpowering force, he fell forward, lost his balance, and toppled into the maw of the pitcher plant!

There was a jar to the stalk and blossom as the professor fell within. He went head first into the tube, or eating apparatus of the strange plant, his legs sticking out for an instant, kicking wildly. Then he disappeared entirely.

Adams didn’t know whether to laugh or be alarmed.

He mounted the ladder, and stood in amazement before the result of the professor’s work as he looked down into the depth of the gigantic flower, increased a hundred times in size.

He was aware of a strange, sickish-sweet odor that seemed to steal over his senses. It was lulling him to sleep, and he fought against it. Then he looked down and saw that the huge hairs or filaments with which the tube was lined were in violent motion.

He could just discern the professor’s feet about three feet below the rim of the flower. They were kicking, but with a force growing less very second. The filaments seemed to be winding about the professor’s legs, holding him in a deadly embrace.

Then the top cover, or flap of the plant, closed down suddenly. The professor was a prisoner inside.

The plant had turned cannibal and eaten the man who had grown it!

For an instant, fear deprived Adams of reason. He did not know what to do. Then the awful plight of his friend brought back his senses.

“Professor!” he shouted. “Are you alive? Can you hear me?”

“Yes,” came back in faint and muffled tones. “This beast has me, all right.”

Then followed a series of violent struggles that shook the plant.

“I’ll get you out. Where’s an ax? I’ll chop the cursed plant to pieces!” cried Adams.

“Don’t! Don’t” came in almost pleading tones from the imprisoned professor.

“Don’t what?”

“Don’t hurt my pet!”

“Your pet!” snorted Adams angrily. “Nice kind of a pet you have! One that tries to eat you alive! But I’ve got to do something if I want to save you. Where’s the ax?”

“No! No!” begged the professor, his voice becoming more and more muffled. “Use chloroform.”

“Use what?”

“Chloroform! You’ll find some in the closet.”

Then Adams saw what the professor’s idea was. The plant could be made insensible, and the imprisoned man released with no harm to the blossom.

He raced down the ladder, ran to a closet where he had seen the professor’s stock of drugs and chemicals stowed away on the occasion of former visits, and grabbed a big bottle of chloroform. He caught up a towel and ran back up the ladder.

Not a sign of the professor could be seen. The plant had swallowed him up, but by the motion and swaying of the flower Adams knew his friend was yet alive.

He was in some doubt as to the success of this method, and would rather have taken an ax and chopped a hole in the side of the blossom, thus releasing the captive. But he decided to obey the professor.

Saturating the towel well with the chloroform, and holding his nose away from it, he pressed the wet cloth over the top of the blossom where the lid touched the edge of the bloom.

There was a slight opening at one point, and Adams poured some of the chloroform down this. He feared lest the fumes of the anesthetic might overpower the professor also, but he knew they would soon pass away if this happened.

For several minutes he waited anxiously. Would the plan succeed? Would the plant be overcome before it had killed the professor inside?

Adams was in a fever of terror. Again and again he saturated the towel with the powerful drug. Then he had the satisfaction of seeing the lid of the pitcher plant relax.

It slowly lifted and fell over to one side, making a good-sized opening. The strong filaments, not unlike the arms of a devil fish, Adams thought, were no longer in uneasy motion. They had released their grip on the professor's legs and body.

The spines that had pointed downward, holding the plant's prey, now became limber.

Adams leaned over. He reached down, grasped the professor by the feet, and, being a strong man, while his friend was small and light, he pulled him from the tube of the flower, a little dazed from the fumes of the chloroform the plant had breathed in, but otherwise not much the worse for his adventure.

He had not reached the water at the bottom of the tube, which fact saved him from drowning.

"Well, you certainly had a narrow squeak," observed Adams as he helped the professor down the ladder.

"I did," admitted the botanist. "If you had not been on hand I don't know what would have happened. I suppose I would have been eaten alive."

"Unless you could have cut yourself out of the side of the flower with your knife," observed Adams.

“What! And killed the plant I raised with such pains?” ejaculated the professor. “Spoil the largest *Sarracenia nepenthis* in the world? I guess not. I would rather have let it eat me.”

“I think you ought to call it the cannibal plant instead of the pitcher plant,” suggested Adams.

“Oh, no,” responded the professor dreamily, examining the flower from a distance to see if any harm had come to it. “But to punish it, I will not give it any supper or breakfast. That’s what it gets for being naughty,” he added as if the plant were a child.

“And I suggest that when you feed it hereafter,” said Adams, “you pass the beefsteaks in on a pitch fork. You won’t run so much danger then.”

“That’s a good idea. I’ll do it,” answered the professor heartily.

And he has followed that plan ever since.

The Purple Terror

Fred M. White

Lieutenant Will Scarlett's instructions were devoid of problems, physical or otherwise. To convey a letter from Captain Driver of the *Yankee Doodle*, in Porto Rico Bay, to Admiral Lake on the other side of the isthmus, was an apparently simple matter.

"All you have to do," the captain remarked, "is to take three or four men with you in case of accidents, cross the isthmus on foot, and simply give this letter into the hands of Admiral Lake. By so doing we shall save at least four days, and the aborigines are presumedly friendly."

The aborigines aforesaid were Cuban insurgents. Little or no strife had taken place along the neck lying between Porto Rico and the north bay where Lake's flagship lay, though the belt was known to be given over to the disaffected Cubans.

"It is a matter of fifty miles through practically unexplored country," Scarlett replied; "and there's a good deal of the family quarrel in this business, sir. If the Spaniards hate us, the Cubans are not exactly enamoured of our flag."

Captain Driver roundly denounced the whole pack of them.

"Treacherous thieves to a man," he said. "I don't suppose your progress will have any brass bands and floral arches to it. And they tell me the forest is pretty thick. But you'll get there all the same. There is the letter, and you can start as soon as you like."

"I may pick my own men, sir?"

"My dear fellow, take whom you please. Take the mastiff, if you like."

"I'd like the mastiff," Scarlett replied; "as he is practically my own, I thought you would not object."

Will Scarlett began to glow as the prospect of adventure stimulated his imagination. He was rather a good specimen of West Point naval dandyism.

He had brains at the back of his smartness, and his geological and botanical knowledge were going to prove of considerable service to a grateful country when said grateful country should have passed beyond the rudimentary stages of colonization. And there was some disposition to envy Scarlett on the part of others floating for the past month on the liquid prison of the sapphire sea.

A warrant officer, Tarrer by name, *plus* two A.B.'s of thews and sinews, to say nothing of the dog, completed the exploring party. By the time that the sun kissed the tip of the feathery hills they had covered some six miles of their journey. From the first Scarlett had been struck by the absolute absence of the desolation and horror of civil strife. Evidently the fiery cross had not been carried here; huts and houses were intact; the villagers stood under sloping eaves, and regarded the Americans with a certain sullen curiosity.

“We’d better stop for the night here,” said Scarlett.

They had come at length to a village that boasted some pretensions. An adobe chapel at one end of the straggling street was faced by a wine-house at the other. A padre, with hands folded over a bulbous, greasy gabardine, bowed gravely to Scarlett’s salutation. The latter had what Tarrer called “considerable Spanish.”

“We seek quarters for the night,” said Scarlett. “Of course, we are prepared to pay for them.”

The sleepy padre nodded towards the wine-house.

“You will find fair accommodations there,” he said. “We are friends of the Americanos.”

Scarlett doubted the fact, and passed on with florid thanks. So far, little signs of friendliness had been encountered on the march. Coldness, suspicion, a suggestion of fear, but no friendliness to be embarrassing.

The keeper of the wine-shop had his doubts. He feared his poor accommodation for guests so distinguished. A score or more of picturesque, cut-throat-looking rascals with cigarettes in their mouths lounged sullenly in the bar. The display of a brace of gold dollars enlarged mine host’s opinion of his household capacity.

“I will do my best, señors,” he said. “Come this way.”

So it came to pass that an hour after twilight Tarrer and Scarlett were seated in the open amongst the oleanders and the trailing gleam of the fire-flies, discussing cigars of average merit and a native wine that was not without virtues. The long bar of the wine-house was brilliantly illuminated; from within came shouts of laughter mingled with the ting, tang of the guitar and the rollicking clack of the castanets.

“They seem to be happy in there,” Tarrer remarked. “It isn’t all daggers and ball in this distressful country.”

A certain curiosity came over Scarlett.

“It is the duty of a good officer,” he said, “to lose no opportunity of acquiring useful information. Let us join the giddy throng, Tarrer.”

Tarrer expressed himself with enthusiasm in favour of any amusement that might be going. A month’s idleness on shipboard increases the appetite for that kind of thing wonderfully. The long bar was comfortable, and filled with Cubans who took absolutely no notice of the intruders. Their eyes were turned towards a rude stage at the far end of the bar, whereon a girl was gyrating in a dance with a celerity and grace that caused the wreath of flowers around her shoulders to resemble a trembling zone of purple flame.

“A wonderfully pretty girl and a wonderfully pretty dance,” Scarlett murmured, when the motions ceased and the girl leapt gracefully to the ground. “Largesse, I expect. I thought so. Well, I’m good for a quarter.”

The girl came forward, extending a shell prettily. She curtsied before Scarlett and fixed her dark, liquid eyes on his. As he smiled and dropped his quarter-dollar into the shell a coquettish gleam came into the velvety eyes. An ominous growl came from the lips of a bearded ruffian close by.

“Othello’s jealous,” said Tarrer. “Look at his face.”

“I am better employed,” Scarlett laughed. “That was a graceful dance, pretty one. I hope you are going to give us another one presently—”

Scarlett paused suddenly. His eyes had fallen on the purple band of flowers the girl had twined round her shoulder. Scarlett was an enthusiastic botanist;

he knew most of the gems in Flora's crown, but he had never looked upon such a vivid wealth of blossom before.

The flowers were orchids, and orchids of a kind unknown to collectors anywhere. On this point Scarlett felt certain. And yet this part of the world was by no means a difficult one to explore in comparison with New Guinea and Sumatra, where the rarer varieties had their homes.

The blooms were immensely large, far larger than any flower of the kind known to Europe or America, of a deep pure purple, with a blood-red centre. As Scarlett gazed upon them he noticed a certain cruel expression on the flower. Most orchids have a kind of face of their own; the purple blooms had a positive expression of ferocity and cunning. They exhuded, too, a queer, sickly fragrance. Scarlett had smelt something like it before, after the Battle of Manila. The perfume was the perfume of a corpse.

"And yet they are magnificent flowers," said Scarlett. "Won't you tell me where you got them from, pretty one?"

The girl was evidently flattered by the attention bestowed upon her by the smart young American. The bearded Othello alluded to edged up to her side.

"The señor had best leave the girl alone," he said, insolently.

Scarlett's fist clenched as he measured the Cuban with his eyes. The Admiral's letter crackled in his breast-pocket, and discretion got the best of valour.

"You are paying yourself a poor compliment, my good fellow," he said, "though I certainly admire your good taste. Those flowers interested me."

The man appeared to be mollified. His features corrugated in a smile.

"The señor would like some of those blooms?" he asked. "It was I who procured them for little Zara here. I can show you where they grow."

Every eye in the room was turned in Scarlett's direction. It seemed to him that a kind of diabolical malice glistened on every dark face there, save that of the girl, whose features paled under her healthy tan.

“If the señor is wise,” she began, “he will not—”

“Listen to the tales of a silly girl,” Othello put in menacingly. He grasped the girl by the arm, and she winced in positive pain. “Pshaw, there is no harm where the flowers grow, if one is only careful. I will take you there, and I will be your guide to Port Anna, where you are going, for a gold dollar.”

All Scarlett’s scientific enthusiasm was aroused. It is not given to every man to present a new orchid to the horticultural world. And this one would dwarf the finest plant hitherto discovered.

“Done with you,” he said; “we start at daybreak. I shall look to you to be ready. Your name is Tito? Well, good-night, Tito.”

As Scarlett and Tarrer withdrew the girl suddenly darted forward. A wild word or two fluttered from her lips. Then there was a sound as of a blow, followed by a little stifled cry of pain.

“No, no,” Tarrer urged, as Scarlett half turned. “Better not. They are ten to one, and they are no friends of ours. It never pays to interfere in these family quarrels. I daresay, if you interfered, the girl would be just as ready to knife you as her jealous lover.”

“But a blow like that, Tarrer!”

“It’s a pity, but I don’t see how we can help it. Your business is the quick dispatch of the Admiral’s letter, not the squiring of dames.”

Scarlett owned with a sigh that Tarrer was right.

II

It was quite a different Tito who presented himself at daybreak the following morning. His insolent manner had disappeared. He was cheerful, alert, and he had a manner full of the most winning politeness.

“You quite understand what we want,” Scarlett said. “My desire is to reach Port Anna as soon as possible. You know the way?”

“Every inch of it, señor. I have made the journey scores of times. And I shall have the felicity of getting you there early on the third day from now.”

“Is it so far as that?”

“The distance is not great, señor. It is the passage through the woods. There are parts where no white man has been before.”

“And you will not forget the purple orchids?”

A queer gleam trembled like summer lightning in Tito’s eyes. The next instant it had gone. A time was to come when Scarlett was to recall that look, but for the moment it was allowed to pass.

“The señor shall see the purple orchid,” he said; “thousands of them. They have a bad name amongst our people, but that is all nonsense. They grow in the high trees, and their blossoms cling to long, green tendrils. These tendrils are poisonous to the flesh, and great care should be taken in handling them. And the flowers are quite harmless, though we call them the devil’s poppies.”

To all of this Scarlett listened eagerly. He was all-impatient to see and handle the mysterious flower for himself. The whole excursion was going to prove a wonderful piece of luck. At the same time he had to curb his impatience. There would be no chance of seeing the purple orchid to-day.

For hours they fought their way along through the dense tangle. A heat seemed to lie over all the land like a curse—a blistering, sweltering, moist heat with no puff of wind to temper its breathlessness. By the time that the sun was sliding down, most of the party had had enough of it.

They passed out of the underwood at length, and, striking upwards, approached a clump of huge forest trees on the brow of a ridge. All kinds of parasites hung from the branches; there were ropes and bands of green, and high up a fringe of purple glory that caused Scarlett’s pulses to leap a little faster.

“Surely that is the purple orchid?” he cried.

Tito shrugged his shoulders contemptuously.

“A mere straggler or two,” he said, “and out of reach in any case. The señor will have all he wants and more to-morrow.”

“But it seems to me,” said Scarlett, “that I could—”

Then he paused. The sun like a great glowing shield was shining full behind the tree with its crown of purple, and showing up every green rope and thread clinging to the branches with the clearness of liquid crystal. Scarlett saw a network of green cords like a huge spider’s web, and in the centre of it was not a fly, but a human skeleton!

The arms and legs were stretched apart as if the victim had been crucified. The wrists and ankles were bound in the cruel web. Fragments of tattered clothing fluttered in the faint breath of the evening breeze.

“Horrible,” Scarlett cried, “absolutely horrible!”

“You may well say that,” Tarrer exclaimed, with a shudder. “Like the fly in the amber or the apple in the dumpling, the mystery is how he got there.”

“Perhaps Tito can explain the mystery,” Scarlett suggested.

Tito appeared to be uneasy and disturbed. He looked furtively from one to the other of his employers as a culprit might who feels he has been found out. But his courage returned as he noted the absence of suspicion in the faces turned upon him.

“I can explain,” he exclaimed, with teeth that chattered from some unknown terror or guilt. “It is not the first time that I have seen the skeleton. Some plant-hunter doubtless who came here alone. He climbed into the tree without a knife, and those green ropes got twisted round his limbs, as a swimmer gets entangled in the weeds. The more he struggled, the more the cords bound him. He would call in vain for anyone to assist him here. And so he must have died.”

The explanation was a plausible one, but by no means detracted from the horror of the discovery. For some time the party pushed their way on in the twilight, till the darkness descended suddenly like a curtain.

“We will camp here,” Tito said; “it is high, dry ground, and we have this belt

of trees above us. There is no better place than this for miles around. In the valley the miasma is dangerous.”

As Tito spoke he struck a match, and soon a torch flamed up. The little party were on a small plateau, fringed by trees. The ground was dry and hard, and, as Scarlett and his party saw to their astonishment, littered with bones. There were skulls of animals and skulls of human beings, the skeletons of birds, the frames of beasts both great and small. It was a weird, shuddering sight.

“We can’t possibly stay here,” Scarlett exclaimed.

Tito shrugged his shoulders.

“There is nowhere else,” he replied. “Down in the valley there are many dangers. Further in the woods are the snakes and jaguars. Bones are nothing. Peuf, they can be easily cleared away.”

They had to be cleared away, and there was an end of the matter. For the most part the skeletons were white and dry as air and sun could make them. Over the dry, calcined mass the huge fringe of trees nodded mournfully. With the rest, Scarlett was busy scattering the mocking frames aside. A perfect human skeleton lay at his feet. On one finger something glittered—a signet ring. As Scarlett took it in his hand he started.

“I know this ring!” he exclaimed; “it belonged to Pierre Anton, perhaps the most skilled and intrepid plant-hunter the *Jardin des Plantes* ever employed. The poor fellow was by way of being a friend of mine. He met the fate that he always anticipated.”

“There must have been a rare holocaust here,” said Tarrer.

“It beats me,” Scarlett responded. By this time a large circle had been shifted clear of human and other remains. By the light of the fire loathsome insects could be seen scudding and straddling away. “It beats me entirely. Tito, can you offer any explanation? If the bones were all human I could get some grip of the problem. But when one comes to birds and animals as well! Do you see that the skeletons lie in a perfect circle, starting from the centre of the clump of trees above us? What does it mean?”

Tito professed utter ignorance of the subject. Some years before a small

tribe of natives invaded the peninsula for religious rites. They came from a long way off in canoes, and wild stories were told concerning them. They burnt sacrifices, no doubt.

Scarlett turned his back contemptuously on this transparent tale. His curiosity was aroused. There must be some explanation, for Pierre Anton had been seen of men within the last ten years.

“There’s something uncanny about this,” he said, to Tarrer. “I mean to get to the bottom of it, or know why.”

“As for me,” said Tarrer, with a cavernous yawn, “I have but one ambition, and that is my supper, followed by my bed.”

III

Scarlett lay in the light of the fire looking about him. He felt restless and uneasy, though he would have found it difficult to explain the reason. For one thing, the air trembled to strange noises. There seemed to be something moving, writhing in the forest trees above his head. More than once it seemed to his distorted fancy that he could see a squirming knot of green snakes in motion.

Outside the circle, in a grotto of bones, Tito lay sleeping. A few moments before his dark, sleek head had been furtively raised, and his eyes seemed to gleam in the flickering firelight with malignant cunning. As he met Scarlett’s glance he gave a deprecatory gesture and subsided.

“What the deuce does it all mean?” Scarlett muttered. “I feel certain yonder rascal is up to some mischief. Jealous still because I paid his girl a little attention. But he can’t do us any real harm. Quiet, there!”

The big mastiff growled and then whined uneasily. Even the dog seemed to be conscious of some unseen danger. He lay down again, cowed by the stern command, but he still whimpered in his dreams.

“I fancy I’ll keep awake for a spell,” Scarlett told himself.

For a time he did so. Presently he began to slide away into the land of poppies. He was walking amongst a garden of bones which bore masses of

purple blossoms. Then Pierre Anton came on the scene, pale and resolute as Scarlett had always known him; then the big mastiff seemed in some way to be mixed up with the phantasm of the dream, barking as if in pain, and Scarlett came to his senses.

He was breathing short, a beady perspiration stood on his forehead, his heart hammered in quick thuds—all the horrors of nightmare were still upon him. In a vague way as yet he heard the mastiff howl, a real howl of real terror, and Scarlett knew that he was awake.

Then a strange thing happened. In the none too certain light of the fire, Scarlett saw the mastiff snatched up by some invisible hand, carried far on high towards the trees, and finally flung to the earth with a crash. The big dog lay still as a log.

A sense of fear born of the knowledge of impotence came over Scarlett; what in the name of evil did it all mean? The smart scientist had no faith in the occult, and yet what *did* it all mean?

Nobody stirred. Scarlett's companions were soaked and soddened with fatigue; the rolling thunder of artillery would have scarce disturbed them. With teeth set and limbs that trembled, Scarlett crawled over to the dog.

The great, black-muzzled creature was quite dead. The full chest was stained and soaked in blood; the throat had been cut apparently with some jagged, saw-like instrument away to the bone. And, strangest thing of all, scattered all about the body was a score or more of the great purple orchid flowers broken off close to the head. A hot, pricking sensation travelled slowly up Scarlett's spine and seemed to pass out at the tip of his skull. He felt his hair rising.

He was frightened. As a matter of honest fact, he had never been so horribly scared in his life before. The whole thing was so mysterious, so cruel, so bloodthirsty.

Still, there must be some rational explanation. In some way the matter had to do with the purple orchid. The flower had an evil reputation. Was it not known to these Cubans as the devil's poppy?

Scarlett recollected vividly now Zara's white, scared face when Tito had volunteered to show the way to the resplendent bloom; he remembered the

cry of the girl and the blow that followed. He could see it all now. The girl had meant to warn him against some nameless horror to which Tito was leading the small party. This was the jealous Cuban's revenge.

A wild desire to pay this debt to the uttermost fraction filled Scarlett, and shook him with a trembling passion. He crept along in the drenching dew to where Tito lay, and touched his forehead with the chill blue rim of a revolver barrel. Tito stirred slightly.

"You dog!" Scarlett cried. "I am going to shoot you."

Tito did not move again. His breathing was soft and regular. Beyond a doubt the man was sleeping peacefully. After all he might be innocent; and yet, on the other hand, he might be so sure of his quarry that he could afford to slumber without anxiety as to his vengeance.

In favour of the latter theory was the fact that the Cuban lay beyond the limit of what had previously been the circle of dry bones. It was just possible that there was no danger outside that pale. In that case it would be easy to arouse the rest, and so save them from the horrible death which had befallen the mastiff. No doubt these were a form of upas tree, but that would not account for the ghastly spectacle in mid-air.

"I'll let this chap sleep for the present," Scarlett muttered.

He crawled back, not without misgivings, into the ring of death. He meant to wake the others and then wait for further developments. By now his senses were more alert and vigorous than they had ever been before. A preternatural clearness of brain and vision possessed him. As he advanced he saw suddenly falling a green bunch of cord that straightened into a long, emerald line. It was triangular in shape, fine at the apex, and furnished with hooked spines. The rope appeared to dangle from the tree overhead; the broad, sucker-like termination was evidently soaking up moisture.

A natural phenomenon evidently, Scarlett thought. This was some plant new to him, a parasite living amongst the tree-tops and drawing life and vigour by means of these green, rope-like antennae designed by Nature to soak and absorb the heavy dews of night.

For a moment the logic of this theory was soothing to Scarlett's distracted

nerves, but only for a moment, for then he saw at regular intervals along the green rope the big purple blossoms of the devil's poppy.

He stood gasping there, utterly taken aback for the moment. There must be some infernal juggling behind all this business. He saw the rope slacken and quiver, he saw it swing forward like a pendulum, and the next minute it had passed across the shoulders of a sleeping seaman.

Then the green root became as the arm of an octopus. The line shook from end to end like the web of an angry spider when invaded by a wasp. It seemed to grip the sailor and tighten, and then, before Scarlett's afrighted eyes, the sleeping man was raised gently from the ground.

Scarlett jumped forward with a desire to scream hysterically. Now that a comrade was in danger he was no longer afraid. He whipped a jack-knife from his pocket and slashed at the cruel cord. He half expected to meet with the stoutness of a steel strand, but to his surprise the feeler snapped like a carrot, bumping the sailor heavily on the ground.

He sat up, rubbing his eyes vigorously.

"That you, sir?" he asked. "What is the matter?"

"For the love of God, get up at once and help me to arouse the others," Scarlett said, hoarsely. "We have come across the devil's workshop. All the horrors of the inferno are invented here."

The bluejacket struggled to his feet. As he did so, the clothing from his waist downwards slipped about his feet, clean cut through by the teeth of the green parasite. All around the body of the sailor blood oozed from a zone of teeth-marks.

Two-o'clock-in-the-morning courage is a virtue vouchsafed to few. The tar, who would have faced an ironclad cheerfully, fairly shivered with fright and dismay.

"What does it mean, sir?" he cried. "I've been—"

"Wake the others," Scarlett screamed; "wake the others."

Two or three more green tangles of rope came tumbling to the ground,

straightening and quivering instantly. The purple blossoms stood out like a frill upon them. Like a madman, Scarlett shouted, kicking his companions without mercy.

They were all awake at last, grumbling and moaning for their lost slumbers. All this time Tito had never stirred.

“I don’t understand it at all,” said Tarrer.

“Come from under those trees,” said Scarlett, “and I will endeavour to explain. Not that you will believe me for a moment. No man can be expected to believe the awful nightmare I am going to tell you.”

Scarlett proceeded to explain. As he expected, his story was followed with marked incredulity, save by the wounded sailor, who had strong evidence to stimulate his otherwise defective imagination.

“I can’t believe it,” Tarrer said, at length. They were whispering together beyond earshot of Tito, whom they had no desire to arouse for obvious reasons. “This is some diabolical juggling of yonder rascally Cuban. It seems impossible that those slender green cords could—”

Scarlett pointed to the centre of the circle.

“Call the dog,” he said grimly, “and see if he will come.”

“I admit the point as far as the poor old mastiff is concerned. But at the same time I don’t—however, I’ll see for myself.”

By this time a dozen or more of the slender cords were hanging pendent from the trees. They moved from spot to spot as if jerked up by some unseen hand and deposited a foot or two farther. With the great purple bloom fringing the stem, the effect was not unlovely save to Scarlett, who could see only the dark side of it. As Tarrer spoke he advanced in the direction of the trees.

“What are you going to do?” Scarlett asked.

“Exactly what I told you. I am going to investigate this business for myself.”

Without wasting further words Scarlett sprang forward. It was no time for

the niceties of an effete civilization. Force was the only logical argument to be used in a case like this, and Scarlett was the more powerful man of the two.

Tarrer saw and appreciated the situation.

“No, no,” he cried; “none of that. Anyway, you’re too late.”

He darted forward and threaded his way between the slender emerald columns. As they moved slowly and with a certain stately deliberation there was no great danger to an alert and vigorous individual. As Scarlett entered the avenue he could hear the soak and suck as the dew was absorbed.

“For Heaven’s sake, come out of it,” he cried.

The warning came too late. A whip-like trail of green touched Tarrer from behind, and in a lightning flash he was in the toils. The tendency to draw up anything and everything gave the cords a terrible power. Tarrer evidently felt it, for his breath came in great gasps.

“Cut me free,” he said, hoarsely; “cut me free. I am being carried off my feet.”

He seemed to be doomed for a moment, for all the cords there were apparently converging in his direction. This, as a matter of fact, was a solution of the whole sickening, horrible sensation. Pulled here and there, thrust in one direction and another, Tarrer contrived to keep his feet.

Heedless of possible danger to himself Scarlett darted forward, calling to his companions to come to the rescue. In less time than it takes to tell, four knives were at work ripping and slashing in all directions.

“Not all of you,” Scarlett whispered. So tense was the situation that no voice was raised above a murmur. “You two keep your eyes open for fresh cords, and cut them as they fall, instantly. Now then.”

The horrible green spines were round Tarrer’s body like snakes. His face was white, his breath came painfully, for the pressure was terrible. It seemed to Scarlett to be one horrible dissolving view of green, slimy cords and great weltering, purple blossoms. The whole of the circle was strewn with them. They were wet and slimy underfoot.

Tarrer had fallen forward half unconscious. He was supported now by but two cords above his head. The cruel pressure had been relieved. With one savage sweep of his knife Scarlett cut the last of the lines, and Tarrer fell like a log unconscious to the ground. A feeling of nausea, a yellow dizziness, came over Scarlett as he staggered beyond the dread circle. He saw Tarrer carried to a place of safety, and then the world seemed to wither and leave him in the dark.

“I feel a bit groggy and weak,” said Tarrer an hour or so later: “but beyond that this idiot of a Richard is himself again. So far as I am concerned, I should like to get even with our friend Tito for this.”

“Something with boiling oil in it,” Scarlett suggested, grimly. “The callous scoundrel has slept soundly through the whole of this business. I suppose he felt absolutely certain that he had finished with us.”

“Upon my word, we ought to shoot the beggar,” Tarrer exclaimed.

“I have a little plan of my own,” said Scarlett, “which I am going to put in force later on. Meanwhile we had better get on with breakfast. When Tito wakes a pleasant little surprise will await him.”

Tito roused from his slumbers in due course and looked around him. His glance was curious, disappointed, then full of a white and yellow fear. A thousand conflicting emotions streamed across his dark face. Scarlett read them at a glance as he called the Cuban over to him.

“I am not going into any unnecessary details with you,” he said. “It has come to my knowledge that you are playing traitor to us. Therefore we prefer to complete our journey alone. We can easily find the way now.”

“The señor may do as he pleases,” he replied. “Give me my dollar and let me go.”

Scarlett replied grimly that he had no intention of doing anything of the kind. He did not propose to place the lives of himself and his comrades in the power of a rascally Cuban who had played false.

“We are going to leave you here till we return,” he said. “You will have plenty of food, you will be perfectly safe under the shelter of these trees, and

there is no chance of anybody disturbing you. We are going to tie you up to one of these trees for the next four-and-twenty hours.”

All the insolence died out of Tito’s face. His knees bowed, a cold dew came out over the ghastly green of his features. From the shaking of his limbs he might have fared disastrously with ague.

“The trees,” he stammered, “the trees, señor! There is danger from snakes, and—and from many things. There are other places—”

“If this place was safe last night it is safe to-day,” Scarlett said, grimly. “I have quite made up my mind.”

Tito fought no longer. He fell forward on his knees, he howled for mercy, till Scarlett fairly kicked him up again.

“Make a clean breast of it,” he said, “or take the consequences. You know perfectly well that we have found you out, scoundrel.”

Tito’s story came in gasps. He wanted to get rid of the Americans. He was jealous. Besides, under the Americanos would Cuba be any better off? By no means and assuredly not. Therefore it was the duty of every good Cuban to destroy the Americanos where possible.

“A nice lot to fight for,” Scarlett muttered. “Get to the point.”

Hastened to the point by a liberal application of stout shoe-leather, Tito made plenary confession. The señor himself had suggested death by medium of the devil’s poppies. More than one predatory plant-hunter had been lured to his destruction in the same way. The skeleton hung on the tree was a Dutchman who had walked into the clutch of the purple terror innocently. And Pierre Anton had done the same. The suckers of the devil’s poppy only came down at night to gather moisture; in the day they were coiled up like a spring. And anything that they touched they killed. Tito had watched more than one bird or small beast crushed and mauled by these cruel spines with their fringe of purple blossoms.

“How do you get the blooms?” Scarlett asked.

“That is easy,” Tito replied. “In the daytime I moisten the ground under the

trees. Then the suckers unfold, drawn by the water. Once the suckers unfold one cuts several of them off with long knives. There is danger, of course, but not if one is careful.”

“I’ll not trouble the devil’s poppy any further at present,” said Scarlett, “but I shall trouble you to accompany me to my destination as a prisoner.”

Tito’s eyes dilated.

“They will not shoot me?” he asked, hoarsely.

“I don’t know,” Scarlett replied. “They may hang you instead. At any rate, I shall be bitterly disappointed if they don’t end you one way or the other. Whichever operation it is, I can look forward to it with perfect equanimity.”

The Strange Orchid

H. G. Wells

The buying of orchids always has in it a certain speculative flavour. You have before you the brown shrivelled lump of tissue, and for the rest you must trust your judgment, or the auctioneer, or your good-luck, as your taste may incline. The plant may be moribund or dead, or it may be just a respectable purchase, fair value for your money, or perhaps—for the thing has happened again and again—there slowly unfolds before the delighted eyes of the happy purchaser, day after day, some new variety, some novel richness, a strange twist of the labellum, or some subtler colouration or unexpected mimicry. Pride, beauty, and profit blossom together on one delicate green spike, and, it may be, even immortality. For the new miracle of Nature may stand in need of a new specific name, and what so convenient as that of its discoverer? “Johnsmithia”! There have been worse names.

It was perhaps the hope of some such happy discovery that made Winter-Wedderburn such a frequent attendant at these sales—that hope, and also, maybe, the fact that he had nothing else of the slightest interest to do in the world. He was a shy, lonely, rather ineffectual man, provided with just enough income to keep off the spur of necessity, and not enough nervous energy to make him seek any exacting employments. He might have collected stamps or coins, or translated Horace, or bound books, or invented new species of diatoms. But, as it happened, he grew orchids, and had one ambitious little hothouse.

“I have a fancy,” he said over his coffee, “that something is going to happen to me to-day.” He spoke—as he moved and thought—slowly.

“Oh, don’t say *that!*” said his housekeeper—who was also his remote cousin. For “something happening” was a euphemism that meant only one thing to her.

“You misunderstand me. I mean nothing unpleasant—though what I do mean I scarcely know.

“To-day,” he continued after a pause, “Peters are going to sell a batch of plants from the Andamans and the Indies. I shall go up and see what they have. It may be I shall buy something good, unawares. That may be it.”

He passed his cup for his second cupful of coffee.

“Are these the things collected by that poor young fellow you told me of the other day?” asked his cousin as she filled his cup.

“Yes,” he said, and became meditative over a piece of toast.

“Nothing ever does happen to me,” he remarked presently, beginning to think aloud. “I wonder why? Things enough happen to other people. There is Harvey. Only the other week, on Monday he picked up sixpence, on Wednesday his chicks all had the staggers, on Friday his cousin came home from Australia, and on Saturday he broke his ankle. What a whirl of excitement!— compared to me.”

“I think I would rather be without so much excitement,” said his housekeeper. “It can’t be good for you.”

“I suppose it ‘s troublesome. Still—you see, nothing ever happens to me. When I was a little boy I never had accidents. I never fell in love as I grew up. Never married—I wonder how it feels to have something happen to you, something really remarkable.

“That orchid-collector was only thirty-six—twenty years younger than myself—when he died. And he had been married twice and divorced once; he had had malarial fever four times, and once he broke his thigh. He killed a Malay once, and once he was wounded by a poisoned dart. And in the end he was killed by jungle-leeches. It must have all been very troublesome, but then it must have been very interesting, you know—except, perhaps, the leeches.”

“I am sure it was not good for him,” said the lady, with conviction.

“Perhaps not.” And then Wedderburn looked at his watch. “Twenty-three minutes past eight. I am going up by the quarter to twelve train, so that there is plenty of time. I think I shall wear my alpaca jacket—it is quite warm enough—and my grey felt hat and brown shoes. I suppose—”

He glanced out of the window at the serene sky and sunlit garden, and then nervously at his cousin’s face.

“I think you had better take an umbrella if you are going to London,” she

said in a voice that admitted of no denial. "There 's all between here and the station coming back."

When he returned he was in a state of mild excitement. He had made a purchase. It was rare that he could make up his mind quickly enough to buy, but this time he had done so.

"There are Vandas," he said, "and a Dendrobe and some Palæonophis." He surveyed his purchases lovingly as he consumed his soup. They were laid out on the spotless tablecloth before him, and he was telling his cousin all about them as he slowly meandered through his dinner. It was his custom to live all his visits to London over again in the evening for her and his own entertainment.

"I knew something would happen to-day. And I have bought all these. Some of them—some of them—I feel sure, do you know, that some of them will be remarkable. I don't know how it is, but I feel just as sure as if some one had told me that some of these will turn out remarkable.

"That one"—he pointed to a shrivelled rhizome—"was not identified. It may be a Palæonophis—or it may not. It may be a new species, or even a new genus. And it was the last that poor Batten ever collected."

"I don't like the look of it," said his housekeeper. "It 's such an ugly shape."

"To me it scarcely seems to have a shape."

"I don't like those things that stick out," said his housekeeper.

"It shall be put away in a pot to-morrow."

"It looks," said the housekeeper, "like a spider shamming dead."

Wedderburn smiled and surveyed the root with his head on one side. "It is certainly not a pretty lump of stuff. But you can never judge of these things from their dry appearance. It may turn out to be a very beautiful orchid indeed. How busy I shall be to-morrow! I must see tonight just exactly what to do with these things, and to-morrow I shall set to work.

"They found poor Batten lying dead, or dying, in a mangrove swamp—I forget which," he began again presently, "with one of these very orchids crushed

up under his body. He had been unwell for some days with some kind of native fever, and I suppose he fainted. These mangrove swamps are very unwholesome. Every drop of blood, they say, was taken out of him by the jungle-leeches. It may be that very plant that cost him his life to obtain.”

“I think none the better of it for that.”

“Men must work though women may weep,” said Wedderburn, with profound gravity.

“Fancy dying away from every comfort in a nasty swamp! Fancy being ill of fever with nothing to take but chlorodyne and quinine—if men were left to themselves they would live on chlorodyne and quinine—and no one round you but horrible natives! They say the Andaman islanders are most disgusting wretches — and, anyhow, they can scarcely make good nurses, not having the necessary training. And just for people in England to have orchids!”

“I don’t suppose it was comfortable, but some men seem to enjoy that kind of thing,” said Wedderburn. “ Anyhow, the natives of his party were sufficiently civilised to take care of all his collection until his colleague, who was an ornithologist, came back again from the interior; though they could not tell the species of the orchid, and had let it wither. And it makes these things more interesting.”

“It makes them disgusting. I should be afraid of some of the malaria clinging to them. And just think, there has been a dead body lying across that ugly thing! I never thought of that before. There! I declare I cannot eat another mouthful of dinner.”

“I will take them off the table if you like, and put them in the window-seat. I can see them just as well there.”

The next few days he was indeed singularly busy in his steamy little hothouse, fussing about with charcoal, lumps of teak, moss, and all the other mysteries of the orchid cultivator. He considered he was having a wonderfully eventful time. In the evening he would talk about these new orchids to his friends, and over and over again he reverted to his expectation of something strange.

Several of the Vandas and the Dendrobium died under his care, but presently the strange orchid began to show signs of life. He was delighted, and took his

housekeeper right away from jam-making to see it at once, directly he made the discovery.

“That is a bud,” he said, “and presently there will be a lot of leaves there, and those little things coming out here are aerial rootlets.”

“They look to me like little white fingers poking out of the brown. I don’t like them,” said his housekeeper.

“Why not?”

“I don’t know. They look like fingers trying to get at you. I can’t help my likes and dislikes.”

“I don’t know for certain, but I don’t *think* there are any orchids I know that have aerial rootlets quite like that. It may be my fancy, of course. You see they are a little flattened at the ends.”

“I don’t like ‘em,” said his housekeeper, suddenly shivering and turning away. “I know it’s very silly of me—and I’m very sorry, particularly as you like the thing so much. But I can’t help thinking of that corpse.”

“But it may not be that particular plant. That was merely a guess of mine.”

His housekeeper shrugged her shoulders.

“Anyhow I don’t like it,” she said.

Wedderburn felt a little hurt at her dislike to the plant. But that did not prevent his talking to her about orchids generally, and this orchid in particular, whenever he felt inclined.

“There are such queer things about orchids,” he said one day; “such possibilities of surprises. You know, Darwin studied their fertilisation, and showed that the whole structure of an ordinary orchid-flower was contrived in order that moths might carry the pollen from plant to plant. Well, it seems that there are lots of orchids known the flower of which cannot possibly be used for fertilisation in that way. Some of the *Cypripediums*, for instance; there are no insects known that can possibly fertilise them, and some of them have never been found with seed.”

“But how do they form new plants?”

“By runners and tubers, and that kind of outgrowth. That is easily explained. The puzzle is, what are the flowers for?”

“Very likely,” he added, “*my* orchid may be something extraordinary in that way. If so, I shall study it. I have often thought of making researches as Darwin did. But hitherto I have not found the time, or something else has happened to prevent it. The leaves are beginning to unfold now. I do wish you would come and see them!”

But she said that the orchid-house was so hot it gave her the headache. She had seen the plant once again, and the aerial rootlets, which were now some of them more than a foot long, had unfortunately reminded her of tentacles reaching out after something; and they got into her dreams, growing after her with incredible rapidity. So that she had settled to her entire satisfaction that she would not see that plant again, and Wedderburn had to admire its leaves alone. They were of the ordinary broad form, and a deep glossy green, with splashes and dots of deep red towards the base. He knew of no other leaves quite like them. The plant was placed on a low bench near the thermometer, and close by was a simple arrangement by which a tap dripped on the hot-water pipes and kept the air steamy. And he spent his afternoons now with some regularity meditating on the approaching flowering of this strange plant.

And at last the great thing happened. Directly he entered the little glass house he knew that the spike had burst out, although his great *Palæonophis Lowii* hid the corner where his new darling stood. There was a new odour in the air, a rich, intensely sweet scent, that overpowered every other in that crowded, steaming little greenhouse.

Directly he noticed this he hurried down to the strange orchid. And, behold! the trailing green spikes bore now three great splashes of blossom, from which this overpowering sweetness proceeded. He stopped before them in an ecstasy of admiration.

The flowers were white, with streaks of golden orange upon the petals; the heavy labellum was coiled into an intricate projection, and a wonderful bluish purple mingled there with the gold. He could see at once that the genus was altogether a new one. And the insufferable scent! How hot the place was! The blossoms swam before his eyes.

He would see if the temperature was right. He made a step towards the thermometer. Suddenly everything appeared unsteady. The bricks on the floor were dancing up and down. Then the white blossoms, the green leaves behind them, the whole greenhouse, seemed to sweep sideways, and then in a curve upward.

.....

At half-past four his cousin made the tea, according to their invariable custom. But Wedderburn did not come in for his tea.

“He is worshipping that horrid orchid,” she told herself, and waited ten minutes. “His watch must have stopped. I will go and call him.”

She went straight to the hothouse, and, opening the door, called his name. There was no reply. She noticed that the air was very close, and loaded with an intense perfume. Then she saw something lying on the bricks between the hot-water pipes.

For a minute, perhaps, she stood motionless.

He was lying, face upward, at the foot of the strange orchid. The tentacle-like aerial rootlets no longer swayed freely in the air, but were crowded together, a tangle of grey ropes, and stretched tight with their ends closely applied to his chin and neck and hands.

She did not understand. Then she saw from under one of the exultant tentacles upon his cheek there trickled a little thread of blood.

With an inarticulate cry she ran towards him, and tried to pull him away from the leech-like suckers. She snapped two of these tentacles, and their sap dripped red.

Then the overpowering scent of the blossom began to make her head reel. How they clung to him! She tore at the tough ropes, and he and the white inflorescence swam about her. She felt she was fainting, knew she must not. She left him and hastily opened the nearest door, and, after she had panted for a moment in the fresh air, she had a brilliant inspiration. She caught up a flower-pot and smashed in the windows at the end of the greenhouse. Then she re-entered. She tugged now with renewed strength at Wedderburn’s

motionless body, and brought the strange orchid crashing to the floor. It still clung with the grimmest tenacity to its victim. In a frenzy, she lugged it and him into the open air.

Then she thought of tearing through the sucker rootlets one by one, and in another minute she had released him and was dragging him away from the horror.

He was white and bleeding from a dozen circular patches.

The odd-job man was coming up the garden, amazed at the smashing of glass, and saw her emerge, hauling the inanimate body with red-stained hands. For a moment he thought impossible things.

“Bring some water!” she cried, and her voice dispelled his fancies. When, with unnatural alacrity, he returned with the water, he found her weeping with excitement, and with Wedderburn’s head upon her knee, wiping the blood from his face.

“What ‘s the matter?” said Wedderburn, opening his eyes feebly, and closing them again at once.

“Go and tell Annie to come out here to me, and then go for Dr. Haddon at once,” she said to the odd-job man so soon as he brought the water; and added, seeing he hesitated, “I will tell you all about it when you come back.”

Presently Wedderburn opened his eyes again, and, seeing that he was troubled by the puzzle of his position, she explained to him, “You fainted in the hothouse.”

“And the orchid?”

“I will see to that,” she said.

Wedderburn had lost a good deal of blood, but beyond that he had suffered no very great injury. They gave him brandy mixed with some pink extract of meat, and carried him upstairs to bed. His housekeeper told her incredible story in fragments to Dr. Haddon. “Come to the orchid-house and see,” she said.

The cold outer air was blowing in through the open door, and the sickly perfume was almost dispelled. Most of the torn aerial rootlets lay already withered amidst a number of dark stains upon the bricks. The stem of the inflorescence was broken by the fall of the plant, and the flowers were growing limp and brown at the edges of the petals. The doctor stooped towards it, then saw that one of the aerial rootlets still stirred feebly, and hesitated.

The next morning the strange orchid still lay there, black now and putrescent. The door banged intermittingly in the morning breeze, and all the array of Wedderburn's orchids was shrivelled and prostrate. But Wedderburn himself was bright and garrulous upstairs in the story of his strange adventure.

The Treasure In The Forest

H. G. Wells

The canoe was now approaching the land. The bay opened out, and a gap in the white surf of the reef marked where the little river ran out to the sea; the thicker and deeper green of the virgin forest showed its course down the distant hill-slope. The forest here came close to the beach. Far beyond, dim and almost cloudlike in texture, rose the mountains, like suddenly frozen waves. The sea was still save for an almost imperceptible swell. The sky blazed.

The man with the carved paddle stopped. "It should be somewhere here," he said. He shipped the paddle and held his arms out straight before him.

The other man had been in the fore part of the canoe, closely scrutinising the land. He had a sheet of yellow paper on his knee.

"Come and look at this, Evans," he said.

Both men spoke in low tones, and their lips were hard and dry.

The man called Evans came swaying along the canoe until he could look over his companion's shoulder.

The paper had the appearance of a rough map. By much folding it was creased and worn to the pitch of separation, and the second man held the discoloured fragments together where they had parted. On it one could dimly make out, in almost obliterated pencil, the outline of the bay.

"Here," said Evans, "is the reef and here is the gap." He ran his thumb-nail over the chart.

"This curved and twisting line is the river—I could do with a drink now!—and this star is the place."

"You see this dotted line," said the man with the map; "it is a straight line, and runs from the opening of the reef to a clump of palm-trees. The star comes just where it cuts the river. We must mark the place as we go into the lagoon."

“It’s queer,” said Evans, after a pause, “what these little marks down here are for. It looks like the plan of a house or something; but what all these little dashes, pointing this way and that, may mean I can’t get a notion. And what’s the writing?”

“Chinese,” said the man with the map.

“Of course! *He* was a Chinese,” said Evans.

“They all were,” said the man with the map.

They both sat for some minutes staring at the land, while the canoe drifted slowly. Then Evans looked towards the paddle.

“Your turn with the paddle now, Hooker,” said he.

And his companion quietly folded up his map, put it in his pocket, passed Evans carefully, and began to paddle. His movements were languid, like those of a man whose strength was nearly exhausted.

Evans sat with his eyes half closed, watching the frothy breakwater of the coral creep nearer and nearer. The sky was like a furnace now, for the sun was near the zenith. Though they were so near the Treasure he did not feel the exaltation he had anticipated. The intense excitement of the struggle for the plan, and the long night voyage from the mainland in the unprovisioned canoe had, to use his own expression, “taken it out of him.” He tried to arouse himself by directing his mind to the ingots the Chinamen had spoken of, but it would not rest there; it came back headlong to the thought of sweet water rippling in the river, and to the almost unendurable dryness of his lips and throat. The rhythmic wash of the sea upon the reef was becoming audible now, and it had a pleasant sound in his ears; the water washed along the side of the canoe, and the paddle dripped between each stroke. Presently he began to doze.

He was still dimly conscious of the island, but a queer dream texture interwove with his sensations. Once again it was the night when he and Hooker had hit upon the Chinamen’s secret; he saw the moonlit trees, the little fire burning, and the black figures of the three Chinamen—silvered on one side by moonlight, and on the other glowing from the firelight—and heard them talking together in pigeon-English—for they came from different provinces. Hooker had caught the drift of their talk first, and had motioned to him to listen.

Fragments of the conversation were inaudible and fragments incomprehensible. A Spanish galleon from the Philippines hopelessly aground, and its treasure buried against the day of return, lay in the background of the story; a shipwrecked crew thinned by disease, a quarrel or so, and the needs of discipline, and at last taking to their boats never to be heard of again. Then Chang-hi, only a year since, wandering ashore, had happened upon the ingots hidden for two hundred years, had deserted his junk, and reburied them with infinite toil, single-handed but very safe. He laid great stress on the safety—it was a secret of his. Now he wanted help to return and exhume them. Presently the little map fluttered and the voices sank. A fine story for two stranded British wastrels to hear! Evans' dream shifted to the moment when he had Chang-hi's pigtail in his hand. The life of a Chinaman is scarcely sacred like a European's. The cunning little face of Chang-hi, first keen and furious like a startled snake, and then fearful, treacherous, and pitiful, became overwhelmingly prominent in the dream. At the end Chang-hi had grinned, a most incomprehensible and startling grin. Abruptly things became very unpleasant, as they will do at times in dreams. Chang-hi gibbered and threatened him. He saw in his dream heaps and heaps of gold, and Chang-hi intervening and struggling to hold him back from it. He took Chang-hi by the pigtail—how big the yellow brute was, and how he struggled and grinned! He kept growing bigger, too. Then the bright heaps of gold turned to a roaring furnace, and a vast devil, surprisingly like Chang-hi, but with a huge black tail, began to feed him with coals. They burnt his mouth horribly. Another devil was shouting his name: "Evans, Evans, you sleepy fool!"—or was it Hooker?

He woke up. They were in the mouth of the lagoon.

"There are the three palm-trees. It must be in a line with that clump of bushes," said his companion. "Mark that. If we go to those bushes and then strike into the bush in a straight line from here, we shall come to it when we come to the stream."

They could see now where the mouth of the stream opened out. At the sight of it Evans revived. "Hurry up, man," he said, "or, by heaven, I shall have to drink sea-water!" He gnawed his hand and stared at the gleam of silver among the rocks and green tangle.

Presently he turned almost fiercely upon Hooker. "Give *me* the paddle," he said.

So they reached the river mouth. A little way up Hooker took some water in the hollow of his hand, tasted it, and spat it out. A little further he tried again. "This will do," he said, and they began drinking eagerly.

"Curse this!" said Evans, suddenly. "It's too slow." And, leaning dangerously over the fore part of the canoe, he began to suck up the water with his lips.

Presently they made an end of drinking, and, running the canoe into a little creek, were about to land among the thick growth that overhung the water.

"We shall have to scramble through this to the beach to find our bushes and get the line to the place," said Evans.

"We had better paddle round," said Hooker.

So they pushed out again into the river and paddled back down it to the sea, and along the shore to the place where the clump of bushes grew. Here they landed, pulled the light canoe far up the beach, and then went up towards the edge of the jungle until they could see the opening of the reef and the bushes in a straight line. Evans had taken a native implement out of the canoe. It was L-shaped, and the transverse piece was armed with polished stone. Hooker carried the paddle. "It is straight now in this direction," said he; "we must push through this till we strike the stream. Then we must prospect."

They pushed through a close tangle of reeds, broad fronds, and young trees, and at first it was toilsome going; but very speedily the trees became larger and the ground beneath them opened out. The blaze of the sunlight was replaced by insensible degrees by cool shadow. The trees became at last vast pillars that rose up to a canopy of greenery far overhead. Dim white flowers hung from their stems, and rosy creepers swung from tree to tree. The shadow deepened. On the ground, blotched fungi and a red-brown incrustation became frequent.

Evans shivered. "It seems almost cold here after the blaze outside."

"I hope we are keeping to the straight," said Hooker.

Presently they saw, far ahead, a gap in the sombre darkness where white shafts of hot sunlight smote into the forest. There also was brilliant green undergrowth, and coloured flowers. Then they heard the rush of water.

“Here is the river. We should be close to it now,” said Hooker.

The vegetation was thick by the river bank. Great plants, as yet unnamed, grew among the roots of the big trees, and spread rosettes of huge green fans towards the strip of sky. Many flowers and a creeper with shiny foliage clung to the exposed stems. On the water of the broad, quiet pool which the treasure-seekers now overlooked there floated big, oval leaves and a waxen, pinkish-white flower not unlike a water-lily. Further, as the river bent away from them, the water suddenly frothed and became noisy in a rapid.

“Well?” said Evans.

“We have swerved a little from the straight,” said Hooker. “That was to be expected.”

He turned and looked into the dim, cool shadows of the silent forest behind them. “If we beat a little way up and down the stream we should come to something.”

“You said—” began Evans.

“*He* said there was a heap of stones,” said Hooker.

The two men looked at each other for a moment.

“Let us try a little down-stream first,” said Evans.

They advanced slowly, looking curiously about them. Suddenly Evans stopped. “What the devil’s that?” he said.

Hooker followed his finger. “Something blue,” he said. It had come into view as they topped a gentle swell of the ground. Then he began to distinguish what it was.

He advanced suddenly with hasty steps, until the body that belonged to the limp hand and arm had become visible. His grip tightened on the implement he carried. The thing was the figure of a Chinaman lying on his face. The *abandon* of the pose was unmistakable.

The two men drew closer together, and stood staring silently at this ominous

dead body. It lay in a clear space among the trees. Near by was a spade after the Chinese pattern, and further off lay a scattered heap of stones, close to a freshly dug hole.

“Somebody has been here before,” said Hooker, clearing his throat.

Then suddenly Evans began to swear and rave, and stamp upon the ground.

Hooker turned white but said nothing. He advanced towards the prostrate body. He saw the neck was puffed and purple, and the hands and ankles swollen. “Pah!” he said, and suddenly turned away and went towards the excavation. He gave a cry of surprise. He shouted to Evans, who was following him slowly.

“You fool! It’s all right. It’s here still.” Then he turned again and looked at the dead Chinaman, and then again at the hole.

Evans hurried to the hole. Already half exposed by the ill-fated wretch beside them lay a number of dull yellow bars. He bent down in the hole, and, clearing off the soil with his bare hands, hastily pulled one of the heavy masses out. As he did so a little thorn pricked his hand. He pulled the delicate spike out with his fingers and lifted the ingot.

“Only gold or lead could weigh like this,” he said exultantly.

Hooker was still looking at the dead Chinaman. He was puzzled.

“He stole a march on his friends,” he said at last. “He came here alone, and some poisonous snake has killed him—I wonder how he found the place.”

Evans stood with the ingot in his hands. What did a dead Chinaman signify? “We shall have to take this stuff to the mainland piecemeal, and bury it there for a while. How shall we get it to the canoe?”

He took his jacket off and spread it on the ground, and flung two or three ingots into it. Presently he found that another little thorn had punctured his skin.

“This is as much as we can carry,” said he. Then suddenly, with a queer rush of irritation, “What are you staring at?”

Hooker turned to him. "I can't stand—him." He nodded towards the corpse. "It's so like—"

"Rubbish!" said Evans. "All Chinamen are alike."

Hooker looked into his face. "I'm going to bury *that*, anyhow, before I lend a hand with this stuff."

"Don't be a fool, Hooker," said Evans. "Let that mass of corruption bide."

Hooker hesitated, and then his eye went carefully over the brown soil about them. "It scares me somehow," he said.

"The thing is," said Evans, "what to do with these ingots. Shall we re-bury them over here, or take them across the strait in the canoe?"

Hooker thought. His puzzled gaze wandered among the tall tree-trunks, and up into the remote sunlit greenery overhead. He shivered again as his eye rested upon the blue figure of the Chinaman. He stared searchingly among the grey depths between the trees.

"What's come to you, Hooker?" said Evans. "Have you lost your wits?"

"Let's get the gold out of this place, anyhow," said Hooker.

He took the ends of the collar of the coat in his hands, and Evans took the opposite corners, and they lifted the mass. "Which way?" said Evans. "To the canoe?"

"It's queer," said Evans, when they had advanced only a few steps, "but my arms ache still with that paddling.

"Curse it!" he said. "But they ache! I must rest."

They let the coat down. Evans' face was white, and little drops of sweat stood out upon his forehead. "It's stuffy, somehow, in this forest."

Then with an abrupt transition to unreasonable anger: "What is the good of waiting here all the day? Lend a hand, I say! You have done nothing but moon since we saw the dead Chinaman."

Hooker was looking steadfastly at his companion's face. He helped raise the coat bearing the ingots, and they went forward perhaps a hundred yards in silence. Evans began to breathe heavily. "Can't you speak?" he said.

"What's the matter with you?" said Hooker.

Evans stumbled, and then with a sudden curse flung the coat from him. He stood for a moment staring at Hooker, and then with a groan clutched at his own throat.

"Don't come near me," he said, and went and leant against a tree. Then in a steadier voice, "I'll be better in a minute."

Presently his grip upon the trunk loosened, and he slipped slowly down the stem of the tree until he was a crumpled heap at its foot. His hands were clenched convulsively. His face became distorted with pain. Hooker approached him.

"Don't touch me! Don't touch me!" said Evans, in a stifled voice. "Put the gold back on the coat."

"Can't I do anything for you?" said Hooker.

"Put the gold back on the coat."

As Hooker handled the ingots he felt a little prick on the ball of his thumb. He looked at his hand and saw a slender thorn, perhaps two inches in length.

Evans gave an inarticulate cry and rolled over.

Hooker's jaw dropped. He stared at the thorn for a moment with dilated eyes. Then he looked at Evans, who was now crumpled together on the ground, his back bending and straitening spasmodically. Then he looked through the pillars of the trees and net-work of creeper stems, to where in the dim grey shadow the blue-clad body of the Chinaman was still indistinctly visible. He thought of the little dashes in the corner of the plan, and in a moment he understood.

"God help me!" he said. For the thorns were similar to those the Dyaks poison and use in their blowing-tubes. He understood now what Chang-hi's

assurance of the safety of his treasure meant. He understood that grin now.

“Evans!” he cried

But Evans was silent and motionless now, save for a horrible spasmodic twitching of his limbs. A profound silence brooded over the forest.

Then, Hooker began to suck furiously at the little pink spot on the ball of his thumb—sucking for dear life. Presently he felt a strange aching pain in his arms and shoulders, and his fingers seemed difficult to bend. Then he knew that sucking was no good.

Abruptly he stopped, and sitting down by the pile of ingots, and resting his chin upon his hands and his elbows upon his knees, stared at the distorted but still stirring body of his companion. Chang-hi’s grin came in his mind again. The dull pain spread towards his throat and grew slowly in intensity. Far above him a faint breeze stirred the greenery, and the white petals of some unknown flower came floating down through the gloom.

The Orchid Horror

John Blunt

So the four of us, Helen Chadwick, Dufresne, who was our host, Loring, and I, went into the conservatory. The argument, begun at dinner, as to whether the sensitive plant is responsive to the breath as well as to the touch, had to be settled. Dufresne, laughing, promised that we should soon see how wrong we were—how little we really knew.

The warm damp of the place was a trifle disagreeable to me. I would much rather have kept my seat at table, where the port and cigarettes were, than to have made one of this pseudo-scientific investigating party. But, idly drawn into the discussion at first, nothing would do save that I come along and have my chance-expressed opinions beaten to earth under the demonstrated truth of Dufresne's assertions.

He and the girl had paused near the door of the hot-house to admire a rhododendron in full bloom; I was loitering a little way behind them on the brick-paved walk—when it happened. Nothing more thoroughly unexpected could have been imagined. Loring, who had wandered a bit farther along, suddenly turned and came hurtling toward us, his jaw hanging, eyes a-bulge, the light of stark madness on his face!

I took a step forward.

“What, in the name—”

And then he was upon the two beside the pink-blossomed bush. Dufresne, knocked clean off his feet, with a stifled cry and a wild upflinging of his arms, sank from view in a whirlpool of swishing leaves into the foliage beside the path. Miss Chadwick, sent spinning to the opposite edge of the walk by a glancing blow from the Loring's shoulder, staggered a moment, strove ineffectually to regain her balance by clutching at the near-by shrubbery, then toppled ungracefully to her knees in the moist loam.

“Loring!” I cried out. “In pity's name, man—”

Side-stepping quickly, I reached out and tried to hold him. As well try to

detain a runaway express-train. My grip on his shoulder was off in a twinkling, and on he plowed, with huge, swift strides toward the conservatory door.

Another moment and he had gone.

Dazed, I stared at the aperture through which he had fled. Behind me I heard fat Dufresne struggling to get out of the branches into which he had fallen; vaguely gathered that he had at last extricated himself and approached the girl, inquiring with wheezing solicitude as to her state.

Loring was sane when he came into the green-house. Sane up to thirty seconds ago. And then—mad.

What in the world—

Then I came to myself with a start. Loring was my friend. I had brought him to this house to-night. In a way, I was responsible for his actions. Curse the fellow! Yet he hadn't cut up as he had because he wanted to be eccentric. Something had happened to him. Something back there along the walk had given him a bad scare. Something, terrifying enough to unbalance his reason.

Great Heaven, he was at large now in the crowded drawing-rooms beyond! What might he not be up to? I was his friend, accountable to my host and hostess.

Swiftly I turned and went out of the door. No trace of him, or of any freakish action of which he might have been guilty, appearing among the gay party in the ground-floor rooms, I mounted the stairs to the chamber set apart for the men's hats and coats, and there found Loring's things. Evidently he had not left the house.

"Beg pardon, sir?" the servant at the front door met me at the foot of the stairway. "The gentleman who came in with you this evening, sir. I thought I ought to say something to you. Left without a thing on his head, just the way you are now, Mr. Murdock, not ten minutes ago. First I thought he was going after something he'd left behind in the motor you came in. But he ain't come back. I thought—"

I had run up-stairs, got into my overcoat and hat, and was descending the steps of the stoop in another two minutes. The fellow was mad! Whatever had

upset him in the conservatory had driven him in a panic of fright from the very house itself, bare-headed, coatless.

I was frightfully worried. Unconsciously my steps were taking me in the direction of our club, where, I suppose, I had an unformed idea he might have run. As I entered the place, the first man I saw was—Loring!

He sat at a table nearest the open door of the café. His dress-coat had been exchanged for a dinner-jacket; there was something liquid in a glass before him. I crossed to his side. He did not look up. To all outward appearance, he was as cool and collected as ever I had seen him.

“Well?”

I let a pent breath escape me, and dropped into the opposite chair. I stared, speechless, at the man. And what a man he was! Six feet three, huge in proportion, with a bronze-skinned, smooth-shaven face. A man to look at with an involuntary straightening of the shoulders, inflation of the chest, and general attempt at “bigening”—if I may coin the word—in instinctive imitation of his splendid physique. Indeed, a man!

And he had been thrown into a paroxysm of fear so great that heedlessly he had knocked down his host of the evening and a frail woman, then bolted from the house to flee through the streets without stopping for proper covering, temporarily a lunatic through excessive fright—*this* near-giant, as badly scared as that?

“Well?” I repeated eagerly after him. “What’s it all about?”

He said nothing.

“Don’t you mean to talk?” I blurted, amazed. “Am I entitled to an explanation—or not?”

His eyes had not yet met mine.

“Can’t you see,” he said through his set teeth, “that I’ve had a shock, and a bad one? I’m trying to hold myself together. It isn’t easy. I’d be obliged to you if you wouldn’t ask questions. Not just now, anyway.”

I sat back, gnawing my mustache. Could any but a strong man have held himself even thus well in check after the way he had gone to pieces not a half-hour before? Yet, if he was strong-willed enough for that, what could have shaken him so completely at Dufresne's house? Curiosity such as mine could not be concealed under even the wettest blanket.

"Will you tell me this?" I said after a while. "What threw you into such a funk?"

In silence he tore the bar-check between his fingers into tiny bits.

"You didn't see a reptile in the greenhouse?" I hazarded. "There wasn't a tarantula hidden on some transplanted bush? Nothing like that?"

He gave a scornfully negative gesture.

"Well, what the deuce was it?" I rapped out. "Dufresne, the girl, and myself were the only living human beings besides yourself in the place. We didn't do anything to alarm you surely. Did you go stark, staring mad on account of the silly flowers themselves?"

At last he looked full at me.

"What would you say," he almost whispered in his intensity, "if I told you it was the flowers? A little cluster of exotic plants that you didn't see in the far corner of the room, and that I didn't see either, but that I smelled? That those drove me clear out of my mind for a minute and more—eh?"

He leaned back.

"What would you say?" he went on. "You'd have nothing to say, because you don't understand. You don't know the past. It won't make pleasant telling, I promise you. But you must know. Very well. Listen to me.

"Nine years ago I sat in this very club. Thirty at the time, I had realized every ambition in life but one. I had money, plenty of it, all earned by myself. Thirty, you understand, and with a fortune means hard work. I had worked hard. Harder than most men ever do, I guess; but I was built for doing hard things.

"The one attainment I lacked was a wife. No woman so far had pleased

me. If that sounds egotistical, remember that my financial success had convinced me that I was the sort of a man capable of entertaining for a woman that thing known as a 'grand passion'; that I must pick and choose the girl upon whom to lavish a powerful love with care. Hence I had been waiting all these years, waiting for the one woman.

"But I was tired of waiting. And that night a man came and sat in the next lounge-chair to mine in the billiard-room and gave me hope that perhaps my waiting was over. A new member of the club, I believe. A corpse was what he would have reminded you of; his yellow skin was drawn tight over his cheek-bones; there was far too little flesh on his limbs to make him an attractive figure to contemplate; and his eyes—I don't like to think of those burned holes in a sheepskin even now.

"His talk was full of a wonderful collection of exotic plants he had seen in a house near Washington Square. To my monosyllables of polite interest he brought forth an invitation to visit the place and look at the collection. I protested myself ignorant in such matters. That made no difference, said he; I would enjoy seeing this botanical display, he was sure. Besides, the collector had a daughter. I would surely like to see *her*.

"And then, for a solid hour, the emaciated stranger poured into my ear a description of a woman such as no one ever listened to, I'll take oath upon, since the world began. Impassioned, inspired of his theme, he set my brain on fire with the picture of his friend, the daughter of the floramaniac.

"I jumped to my feet.

"Take me there!" I exclaimed, 'I want to see—these wonderful plants.'

"We went straight to the house, a large brown stone dwelling of the old-fashioned type. The conservatory was in the rear of the building. My breath caught in my throat as I entered the heated room. Orchids, nothing but orchids, thousands, tens of thousands of the flowing, multi-shaded flowers, hung from the walls and ceiling of the place. Having seen nobody but the servant at the door, my corpse-like acquaintance told me that doubtless the collector was too busy at the moment to welcome me; however, he assured me that it was all right; I might stay there as long as I chose; then he left me.

"As I stood gazing around the room I felt my senses swaying within me in

time to the languorous nodding of the rows upon rows of trailing blossoms everywhere in view. What was this feeling? I looked down at my outstretched hand. Steady as a rock. Yet all inside my arm, the nerves, the tissue, the blood, the muscle, were in motion, in swaying motion.

“How long I stood entranced, deliciously thrilled by that movement within me which the rhythmical moving of the flowers inspired, I cannot say. Perhaps it was five, ten minutes—perhaps an hour, two—that I stood spellbound, hypnotized, incapable of any other sensation but that one of inner motion. And then—

“Before my eyes the rows of orchids bent apart. Slowly, with exquisite grace, it was like the waving open of a lane in a wheat field caused by the wind. Yet there was no wind, not the faintest breeze, in the room. Wider became the opening of that aisle in the blossoms’ close ranks. Suddenly at its end I saw—the collector’s daughter.

“How the man who had brought me here had lied. She was a million times more perfect than he had pictured her. Beautiful, she transcended beauty. A tall woman, lithe, well-rounded as to figure, black-haired and with eyes and lips which were the only ‘rememberable’ features of her face for me at the moment, I felt love at first sight—a stirring of my grand passion at last!—at my first glimpse of her, this goddess of the orchids.

“Slowly, with the languid grace of the swaying flowers, she advanced toward me through the lane they had made, as though by her royal command. She put out her hand. I took it in mine. The words I would have said to explain my presence there did not pass my lips. What use were words—between us? Eye to eye, hand clasped in hand, it was as if all the words in the world had already been spoken to perform our introduction.

“After a while we talked. What of it no matter. Hours later I left the house—alone. The next afternoon I returned. The day following found me there as well. Days sped into weeks, the weeks into a month, and we were engaged. I did not declare my love. I had no need to do so. It was plain without speech—as was her regard for me.

“‘When will you marry me, my Goddess of the Orchids?’ I whispered.

“At first she hesitated. She could not leave her father; he was very old; she

was all he had, and he would be unhappy without her. I remarked that his unhappiness could not be of long standing, surely, if she came with me, since he had never manifested enough interest in her welfare even to see me from the first time I came into the house.

“‘You do not understand,’ she told me gently. ‘My father’s way is strange, perhaps, but he loves me. Next to his flowers I come only second in his heart. If he lost me he would grieve. I cannot cause him pain. There is only one way—’

“She stopped.

“‘What is the one way?’ I asked.

“‘There’s an orchid,’ said she, ‘that he would give his life to possess if he could. So rare is it that not one has ever been seen by a white man; only rumors of its existence have come through the natives in the region of its growth. If my father could own one of that rare species, a single specimen—well, don’t you see that he would be so happy, so completely absorbed in its possession, that he would not mind the shock of giving me up—not till long after you had brought the *Cattleya Trixsemtia* back and we were married, at all events.’

“‘I am to bring him this orchid, am I?’ I smiled.

“‘You love me?’ she asked, anxiously.

“‘We were sitting on the ledge of a splashing fountain in the center of the conservatory. I rose and took her hands.

“‘You shall see,’ I said. ‘Tell me where this flower grows. I will get it. Not till I have proved my love for you will I look into your eyes again.’

“‘We parted. That night I made one at a dinner given in honor of a celebrated Englishman who was a professional orchid-hunter. Bound for South America next day, to the section of the country, indeed, near which I had been told the plant I sought was to be found, I decided that I would be in luck if I could persuade this experienced traveler to let me accompany him into that strange land. Of course, after we arrived in Venezuela our ways would part; he was after a type of orchid different from the species I desired, and in hunting his quarry, he would go along one route inland, I another.

“He was sincerely glad of my offer to join him. I explained that I wanted to go on an orchid hunt ‘just for the adventure.’ Next morning we took steamer together; in a week had reached South America, and then—a queer thing fell out.

“An Indian came to the Englishman with word of an orchid field that lay behind the Orinoco. It was the same spot toward which I had been directed to go. According to the native’s story, it was perilous work getting to the place, and would take at least a month of the hardest kind of journeying. But the orchids there were very fine, very rare. If the professional cared to make the attempt—

“‘Look here,’ said he to me, ‘I’m going to have a try for some of those flowers.’

“Here was a second stroke of luck. Since there was an entire field of these plants, I could come out with the truth at last that this, I felt certain, was the species of orchid I was hunting on my own hook. There was no longer any danger that the Englishman would hunt the same flower that I wanted if he knew my purpose, and would perhaps be lucky enough to ‘nose me out’ in the search. Plainly, there were enough orchids of this description for all. So, together with this expert huntsman, I could journey to the spot with much less difficulty than alone.

“‘But I won’t take you with me,’ he went on. ‘You heard what his nibs the native chief said just now. The trip’s mighty dangerous. You couldn’t stand it. Sorry, old man, but you’ve got to be left out of this.’

“‘Just the same,’ I informed him. ‘I’m coming.’ And I told him the business that had brought me from home. ‘That’s all—I’m coming,’ I added.

“‘No, you aren’t,’ said he firmly. ‘That’s all right about your hunting this kind of an orchid. Don’t know where you ever heard of it, or what put the notion of finding one in your head. But you’ve got to give it up. You don’t know what you’re about. A green hand at the business, and take a journey like this—man, you’d die!’

“‘Will you?’ I asked.

“‘That I can’t say,’ and he shrugged his shoulders. ‘I’ll stand a better chance of getting to the place than you, though. I’m inured, rather, to this sort of thing. Though I don’t mind saying that I’d rather not go on this particular journey.

From maps and hearsay of the trail it's going to be a little bit of a crosscut through Hades.'

"Then why go?' I pursued.

"There's an incentive in my case. A group of collectors is behind me, money-coffers open to pay a prize for whatever I get. My reason's clear. But, blame me if I can see yours in wanting to come along with me so headstrong and keen.'

"This time I shrugged.

"Oh,' said he, 'so it's a girl? Been thrown over by some woman, have you, and want to go into danger to forget?'

"On the contrary,' I smiled. 'I'm doing it to please the girl I've won.'

"Good Lord!' he blurted out, gaping at me. 'Good Lord—you mean to tell me a girl, a girl who cares about you, has let you come down here to hunt a trophy in the spot you want to go? Does she know anything about the way orchids are found? Oh, her father's a collector? Then she does know.'

"He continued to stare at me.

"Look here, Loring,' he said suddenly. 'Don't mind if I ask you a question. But weren't you introduced to the lady of your choice by a rack-boned skeleton of a man with yellow skin, deep-burning eyes—sort of an upheaval-from-the-crypt sort of chap?'

"Yes,' I exclaimed, my eyes widening.

"I thought so,' he said. And after a moment: 'I see,' he added. 'The same old game. I know the woman who sent you down here. Everybody in the orchid-collecting business knows her, more or less. She's a plant fiend. Same sort of mania as attacks people by way of drugs, the drink, and so on, you know. Seen her collection? It's the finest in the world; pretty nearly every orchid known is there. Shall I tell you how she got them?' He leaned toward me. 'Through just such fools as you, Loring.'

"I stumbled to my feet, furious.

“Steady on!’ he cried. ‘Hear me out. I want to do you a friendly turn, old fellow; upon my soul I do. Listen. That woman, I tell you, is a fiend. We all know her well. See if this isn’t the way she’s hoodwinked you. Told you, didn’t she, that her father would never be happy if she married and left him; that just one thing might be counted on to take his mind off losing her—a certain rare orchid? Anyway, that’s what she’s told other men time and again. All of them have started out to bring here the plant, too. Some succeeded. And the reward? She laughs at them, and then tells the truth. There is no doting father. The orchids she wanted for herself. It’s all she cares for—orchids. Men are nothing. Orchids—they cost men—she wants orchids.

“That’s the fate of the men who succeed. But those who fail? Loring, the bones of a dozen, a score of the men who have tried to perform her mission lie bleaching now in the swamps and along the roots of jungle-trees the world over. Only one man failed to bring back the orchid for which he was sent and still lives. Do you know who he is? The man who brought you and the orchid queen together.

“You remember his looks. She put that brand on him down this very way three years ago. Since then he’s been trying to win her in the only way that seems possible—through her passion for the flowers. Men like you, big and strong, he seeks out, brings to her so that she can send them forth to complete her collection. When she has a specimen of every orchid ever known, he hopes that she will marry him. That’s the living, disgusting truth, old man, as I breathe here before you.

“Believe me, you’re designed for a victim like all the rest. I’m telling you the truth. And I’m warning you to turn back before it’s too late. Will you take my word—will you go home?’

“No!’ I roared. ‘You lying hound—’

“I think I meant to kill him with my own hands. But suddenly reason came to my aid. Evidently it was going to be no easy matter for an untoughened white man to penetrate alone to the spot where the orchids I was after were to be found; I must bring what I had vowed I would back to my affianced. With this man’s aid, I might better be able to do so. What if he had dared to traduce the woman who was to be my wife? I could gloss even that over for the time, for the sake of getting what I sought. Afterward the lies he had told me—the lies, built up on some rumor of the girl’s existence which he had come upon,

and retailed to me for the purpose of causing me to abandon the field, with the glory of being first to find a new plant, to him—I could cram these down his throat with my fists.

“‘I beg your pardon,’ I said, appearing to be cool. ‘You’ll have to overlook what I’ve just said. I’m a good deal upset over what you’ve told me. I—I’ve no doubt you mean to be decent to me.’

“‘And you’ll quit this idea of hunting the orchid?’ he asked eagerly.

“‘No,’ I replied, and the sneer with which I glanced him over must have been plain. ‘I’m going with you.’

“His face reddened.

“‘As you like,’ he said curtly.

“Followed a week of busiest activity. Our outfit was purchased, porters hired, guides engaged. At length, when everything was in readiness, we assembled, a small army with enough supplies for quite that body, to start the march into the solitude. One month it took us to reach the head of the Orinoco. Then began the real hardships of the journey into the unbroken jungle.

“No such strain could be imagined as was put upon our party in the next fortnight. A bare chronicle of the events that befell us could not convey a tithe of what the suffering really meant. Menaced by reptiles, crawling creatures of every revolting description; attacked by the wild men of that forest region with their deadly blowguns; racked by swamp fevers, and always pressing on—on into the unknown—in a silence that daily grew more and more oppressive—the memory of that trip will be with me always in its harrowing details.

“And now our chief guide died. Before him had dropped a third of our original number of porters and choppers. Without the leadership of the native, who knew the general direction in which lay the orchids, we were helpless. A party of Indians were encountered three days later, and, in response to our question, they waved their hands toward the sun as the course we must follow before the ‘poison plants’ were in reach. On we fought.

“And in another week a perceptible odor was in the air; an odor which the Englishman said meant that we were nearing the orchids. Each day, as we

progressed, this odor became more clearly defined. Finally it was distinctly unpleasant, then disagreeable, lastly uncomfortable. Another day and the scent grew positively menacing. Each breath one drew into the lungs seemed charged with fumes of a poisonous sickish-sweet drug. Five porters fell senseless on the fifth day as we drew nearer to the source of the noxious aroma.

“And yet the orchids were not yet in sight, seemingly no nearer than when we started. Another day, and the odor in the air was insupportable. The natives refused to go farther. My white companion, the professional hunter, lay senseless in his tracks. I was near swooning myself. With the wind in our faces, blowing that poison off the orchid-field somewhere in advance of us, it was useless to think of keeping on any further.

“Then, and then only, did I believe the truth of what I had heard of the woman who had sent me on this wild-goose chase. Indeed, she must have known something of the perils into which I had gone at her bidding. And she had let me go. I was to have been another victim.

“I cursed her to high heaven, there in the middle of that black, silent forest, with the spirals of the invisible poison-odor coiling around me in the air. And I swore that I would have revenge—the revenge of bringing her what she had driven me out to get!

“Alone, I essayed one final dash forward in the endeavor to reach the flowers which seemed so near, yet were ever so far from my touch. Surely, we could not have halted many miles distant from the field. Perhaps by running, with body bent close to the ground—but it was useless. The wind brought the deadly fumes full in my face, cramming them down throat and nostrils. Reeling, half dead, I returned to the others.

“At once we began the homeward march. More than half our corps were dead by the time we had progressed a quarter way back along our trail. Half-way to the coast, and only a miserable handful of our original party remained. How those of us who survived managed to do so is a mystery. But at last four shattered ghosts of human beings, two Indian porters, the Englishman and myself, returned to the civilization of Venezuela.

“But I was not through. A month’s rest, and I was trying to organize another party to start back toward our abandoned goal. Not in the same way we had gone before. I had worked out a plan. By approaching that unseen field of

orchids from the opposite side, the wind blowing the other way, a chance might hold good that the flowers could be reached by circumventing the full effect of the poisoned perfume.

“No one would attempt the journey with me. The Englishman was finished—forever, he said, with all orchid-hunting. His motive was now not so strong as mine, I thought with a smile. Money could not tempt him to keep up the search for the *Cattleya Trixsemtia*. My revenge, though, kept me in full enthusiasm for the hunt; it was all I thought of, waking or sleeping.

“When I was satisfied that nobody would accompany me, I set back toward the head of the Orinoco myself alone. This time, traveling swiftly because lightly burdened and unaccompanied by any laggards, I made the edge of the jungle in a little over two weeks. The plunge through the forest, however, took longer alone than when I had expert choppers to clear a trail before me. But I made progress somehow.

“Often as I fought my way through the tangle of rank underbrush, waist-high and almost inextricable, I muttered aloud: ‘So they picked you for a strong man, eh? A strong, robust man? A good one to send on a difficult mission, yes. Well, I’ll show them yet—I’ll bring back that flower!’

“And—how I do not know—I reached the orchid field at last! For two days previously the same old noxious odor had been in the air, but not nearly so perceptibly as before, because I had figured well in keeping the wind in my back. Inside an hour all the gathering force of the perfume which had turned our party back on the first attempt was compressed; dizzy, almost stupefied, drugged into partially insensibility, I parted the leaves in the foliage before me—and gazed upon the end of my journey!

“There were the flowers—blue, blue orchids! The only ones ever looked upon by white man’s eyes. A thrill ran through me; almost I had the feeling then of the collector, the scientist in untrod fields, the primal discoverer of the miraculous.

“And then—drowsiness, languid heaviness, an overwhelming desire to cast myself down to sleep then and there, came to replace the momentary feeding of elation. I must pick my blossom, and be quick. The fumes of those waving, ultramarine flowers before my eyes were stealing over me more powerfully than ever before. Quick! I must be quick!

“I advanced. Step by step I drew near the largest cluster of the nodding, swaying poisoned cups of light, dark, dappled blue. Another dozen paces forward. My sensations were those of the opium smoker yielding himself gradually to the influence of the drug, yet withholding full surrender to prolong the delicious agony of complete capitulation. Could I reach an orchid, pluck it, get away, before—before it was—too—late—

“Heavens, I must fly! I could not hold out against that overpowering odor. I wheeled drunkenly. Blindly I lurched forward. Something swept my face. My eyes flew open—it was a cluster of orchids behind me which had been drawn across my cheek. With a scream of fright, I bounded sidewise, tripped over a vine, fell—

“And for that interval I knew no more.

“When I awoke it was to find that the breeze which blew over the tiny clearing where the poison plants were had shifted. Their perfume was no longer in the air. I staggered up. My head ached, and my eyeballs burned. What had I been doing, lying there on the ground?

“It came back to me. I had been overcome by the odor of the flowers. Only for the changing of the wind, preventing more of the fumes entering my lungs as I slept that drugged sleep—I shook myself together. Now was my chance to get away.

“Not for any price on earth would I have sought once again to pluck one of those blossoms so near to me. My plan of revenge against the woman who had sent me into this Gehenna was completely driven from my head. Now—while I yet could—was my chance to get away. Facing about, I started running.

“On and on I sped. Gradually, though, my speed was diminishing. Not from weariness, not from fatigue. Something else. I slackened to a walk. I stopped short in my tracks. Turning about, I sniffed the air. No trace of that odor—no trace—

“Wildly I dashed back toward the clearing and its orchids. *I must have that scent in my nostrils again! I must go to sleep under its spell once more.* I could no more resist the impulse that brought me back toward the poisonous blossoms than I could voluntarily stop breathing. I burst into the clearing. On tiptoe, I reached up to the nearest cluster of the blue buds, drank deep of the awful, sickish odor—once—twice—

“In my tracks I fell, overcome, a smile on my lips.

“I ought never to have walked again, I know. Yet I did. How long after it was, I have no means of telling. It was still daylight—or was it another day? I was heavy, sluggish, deeply depressed. I felt suddenly so frightened there alone in the clearing with those hideous, mocking plants swaying around me, that I hurled myself upon the ground, screaming, beating the moss with my hands and feet, frantic with hear of my loneliness, my dreadful plight.

“Then that feeling passed. I would get out of here. I would break and run now, and never stop running till I had put the length and breadth of the jungle between me and those ghastly plants. I sprang up. With a wild yell—a sort of farewell to the fearful spot—I leaped away into the neighboring forest.

“This time I did run until I was physically exhausted. I dropped down on a fallen moss-hung log to gather breath. An hour or more I sat there. And when I rose—it was to hobble off in the direction of the *Cattleya Trixsemtia* again, the lustful light in my eyes of the opium fiend returning to his den, the drunkard to his dive!

“I was caught. Useless to try to break away from the spell now. That poisonous perfume of the blue orchids had enchained me to the spot forever. I spent the next interval of the time—three days, as near as I could judge—in the heart of the clearing, drugging myself with the scent of the flowers, waking, drugging myself again.

“Why didn’t I die? I prayed for death, a release from my agonizing dilemma. Weak, now, to the point of prostration, yet I continued to live. I knew that I had wasted away to a mere skeleton of skin and bones—by no effort could I make my lips meet over my teeth—that I was emaciated by lack of food as well as the injurious effects of the poison I was inhaling, to the point almost of bloodlessness in all my veins—and yet I lived on.

“What was to be the end? I felt only a mild curiosity as to this, so it be soon. Another day went by. I was weaker now. Sixteen hours of the twenty-four, at a guess, had been spent in drugged sleep on my back in the middle of the clearing.

“With glazed eyes I looked around me. And looked again.

“Was I mad at last?

“There before my eyes stood my Goddess of the Orchids—she who had brought me to this plight!

“Slowly she approached across the noiseless moss. She stretched out her hand. I tottered to my feet. The claw at the end of my broomstick arm went out, encountered her fingers—*real flesh and blood!*”

“‘Drink this,’ she whispered in my ear.

“A flask was held to my chattering teeth. Something scalding hot ran down my parched throat.

“‘Now lean on me’—again her voice, wondrous soft.

“And slowly, carefully she began to lead me out of the clearing, through the jungle. A little way and we meet her train of porters and guides. While a rough litter was being made for me I sat upon the ground, leaning against her knees as she stood. Strangely, now that I was with this party I felt no craving for the drugged breath of the blue orchid to which I had been the slave.

“The journey back to the coast I do not remember. Something of my days of convalescence in Venezuela, though, I can recall. There it was that I heard the story of her search for me from the woman who had saved my life.

“Her passion for orchids was really so powerful that she had served men very much as the Englishmen had told me for years. I was to have been treated no better nor worse than the rest. Only—me of all the others she really loved. After she had sent me forth on her mission, she recalled the fate of so many of her suitors who had gone into the wildernesses before; she realized then that she could not let me die or suffer as she knew I would.

“That was the strange point. You see, she knew the dangers that would beset any one upon that trail into the jungle. And, knowing the perils of such a journey, she took it upon herself to save me if she could. Much as she had always loved orchids never once had she sought a rare plant herself. With me, though—she thought me worth seeking after, it seems.”

“So I suppose,” I remarked, “you married her and lived happily ever after?”

He looked at me, wild-eyed. “*Married her?*” And he shuddered.

The Man-Eating Tree ¹

Phil Robinson

Peregrine Oriel, my maternal uncle, was a great traveller, as his prophetic sponsors at the font seemed to have guessed he would be. Indeed he had rummaged in the garrets and cellars of the earth with something more than ordinary diligence. But in the narrative of his travels he did not, unfortunately, preserve the judicious caution of Xenophon between the thing seen and the thing heard, and thus it came about that the town-councillors of Brunsbüttel (to whom he had shown a duck-billed platypus, caught alive by him in Australia, and who had him posted for an importer of artificial vermin) were not alone in their scepticism of some of the old man's tales.

Thus, for instance, who could hear and believe the tale of the man-sucking tree from which he had barely escaped with life? He called it himself more terrible than the Upas. "This awful plant, that rears its splendid death-shade in the central solitude of a Nubian fern forest, sickens by its unwholesome humors all vegetation from its immediate vicinity, and feeds upon the wild beasts that, in the terror of the chase, or the heat of noon, seek the thick shelter of its boughs; upon the birds that, flitting across the open space, come within the charmed circle of its power, or innocently refresh themselves from the cups of its great waxen flowers; upon even man himself when, an infrequent prey, the savage seeks its asylum in the storm, or turns from the harsh foot-wounding

¹ Before committing this paper to the ridicule of the Great Mediocre—for many, I fear, will be inclined to regard this story as incredible—I would venture on the expression of an opinion regarding credulity, which I do not remember to have met before. It is this. Placing supreme Wisdom and supreme Unwisdom at the two extremes, and myself in the exact mean between them, I am surprised to find that, whether I travel towards the one extreme or the other, the credulity of those I meet increases. To put it as a paradox—*whether a man be foolisher or wiser than I am, he is more credulous*. I make this remark to point out to those of the Great Mediocre, whose notice it may have escaped, that credulity is not of itself shameful or contemptible, and that it depends upon the manner rather than the matter of their belief, whether they gravitate towards the sage or the reverse way. According, therefore, to the incredibility found in the following, the reader may measure, as pleases him, his wisdom or his unwisdom.

sword-grass of the glade, to pluck the wondrous fruit that hang plumb down among the wondrous foliage.” And such fruit! — “glorious golden ovals, great honey drops, swelling by their own weight into pear-shaped translucencies. The foliage glistens with a strange dew, that all day long drips on to the ground below; nurturing a rank growth of grasses, which shoot up in places so high that their spikes of fierce blood-fed green show far up among the deep-tinted foliage of the terrible tree, and, like a jealous body-guard, keep concealed the fearful secret of the charnel-house within, and draw round the black roots of the murderous plant a decent screen of living green.”

Such was his description of the plant; and the other day, looking it up in a botanical dictionary, I find that there is really known to naturalists a family of carnivorous-plants; but I see that they are most of them very small, and prey upon little insects only. My maternal uncle, however, knew nothing of this, for he died before the days of the discovery of the sun, dew, and pitcher plants; and grounding his knowledge of the man-sucking tree simply on his own terrible experience of it, explained its existence by theories of his own. Denying the fixity of all the laws of nature except one, that the stronger shall endeavor to consume the weaker, and holding even this fixity to be itself only a means to a greater general changefulness, he argued that — since any partial distribution of the faculty of self-defence would presume an unworthy partiality in the Creator, and since the sensual instincts of beast and vegetable are manifestly analogous — the world must be as percipient as sentient throughout. Carrying on his theory (for it was something more than hypothesis with him) a stage or two further, he arrived at the belief that, given the necessity of any imminent danger or urgent self-interest, every animal or vegetable could eventually revolutionize its nature, the wolf feeding on grass or nesting in trees, and the violet arming herself with thorns or entrapping insects.

“How,” he would ask, “can we claim for man the consequence of perceptions to sensations, and yet deny to beasts that hear, see, feel, smell, and taste, a percipient principle co-existent with their senses? And if in the whole range of the animate world there is this gift of self-defence against extirpation, and offence against weakness, why is the inanimate world, holding as fierce a struggle for existence as the other, to be left defenceless and unarmed? And I deny that it is. The Brazilian epiphyte strangles the tree and sucks out its juices. The tree, again, to starve off its vampire parasite, withdraws its juices into its roots, and piercing the ground in some new place, turns the current of its sap into other growths. The epiphyte then drops off the dead boughs on to the fresh green sprouts springing from the ground beneath it, — and so the fight

goes on. Again, look at the Indian peepul tree; in what does the fierce yearning of its roots towards the distant well differ from the sad struggling of the camel to the oasis, or of Sennacherib's army to the saving Nile?

“Is the sensitive plant unconscious! I have walked for miles through plains of it, and watched, till the watching almost made me afraid lest the plant should pluck up courage and turn upon me, the green carpet paling into silver gray before my feet, and fainting away all round me as I walked. So strangely did I feel the influence of this universal aversion, that I would have argued with the plant; but what was the use? If only I stretched out my hands, the mere shadow of the limb terrified the vegetable to sickness; shrubs crumbled up at every commencement of my speech; and at my periods great sturdy-looking bushes, to whose robustness I had foolishly appealed, sank in pallid supplication. Not a leaf would keep me company. A breath went forth from me that sickened life. My mere presence paralyzed life, and I was glad at last to come out among a less timid vegetation, and to feel the resentful spear-grass retaliating on the heedlessness that would have crushed it. The vegetable world, however, has its revenges. You may keep the guinea-pig in a hutch, but how will you pet the basilisk? The little sensitive plant in your garden amuses your children (who will find pleasure also in seeing cockchafers spin round on a pin), but how could you transplant a vegetable that seizes the running deer, strikes down the passing bird, and once taking hold of him, sucks the carcass of man himself, till his matter becomes as vague as his mind, and all his animate capabilities cannot snatch him from the terrible embrace of — God help him! — an inanimate tree?

“Many years ago,” said my uncle, “I turned my restless steps towards Central Africa, and made the journey from where the Senegal empties itself into the Atlantic to the Nile, skirting the Great Desert, and reaching Nubia on my way to the eastern coast. I had with me then three native attendants, — two of them brothers, the third, Otona, a young savage from the gaboon uplands, a mere lad in his teens; and one day, leaving my mule with the two men, who were pitching my tent for the night, I went on with my gun, the boy accompanying me, towards a fern forest, which I saw in the near distance. As I approached it I found the forest was cut into two by a wide glade; and seeing a small herd of the common antelope, an excellent beast in the pot, browsing their way along the shaded side, I crept after them. Though ignorant of their real danger the herd was suspicious, and, slowly trotting along before me, enticed me for a mile or more along the verge of the fern growths. Turning a corner I suddenly became aware of a solitary tree growing in the middle of the

glade — one tree alone. It struck me at once that I had never seen a tree exactly like it before; but, being intent upon venison for my supper, I looked at it only long enough to satisfy my first surprise at seeing a single plant of such rich growth flourishing luxuriantly in a spot where only the harsh fern-canecan seemed to thrive.

“The deer meanwhile were midway between me and the tree, and looking at them I saw they were going to cross the glade. Exactly opposite them was an opening in the forest, in which I should certainly have lost my supper; so I fired into the middle of the family as they were filing before me. I hit a young fawn, and the rest of the herd, wheeling round in their sudden terror, made off in the direction of the tree, leaving the fawn struggling on the ground. Otona, the boy, ran forward at my order to secure it, but the little creature seeing him coming, attempted to follow its comrades, and at a fair pace held on their course. The herd had meanwhile reached the tree, but suddenly, instead of passing under it, swerved in their career, and swept round it at some yards distance.

“Was I mad, or did the plant really try to catch the deer? On a sudden I saw, or thought I saw, the tree violently agitated, and while the ferns all round were standing motionless in the dead evening air, its boughs were swayed by some sudden gust towards the herd, and swept, in the force of their impulse, almost to the ground. I drew my hand across my eyes, closed them for a moment, and looked again. The tree was as motionless as myself!

“Towards it, and now close to it, the boy was running in excited pursuit of the fawn. He stretched out his hands to catch it. It bounded from his eager grasp. Again he reached forward, and again it escaped him. There was another rush forward, and the next instant boy and deer were beneath the tree.

“And now there was no mistaking what I saw.

“The tree was convulsed with motion, leaned forward; swept its thick foliated boughs to the ground, and enveloped from my sight the pursuer and the pursued; I was within a hundred yards, and the cry of Otona from the midst of the tree came to me in all the clearness of its agony. There was then one stifled, strangling scream, and except for the agitation of the leaves where they had closed upon the boy, there was not a sign of life!

“I called out ‘Otona!’ No answer came. I tried to call out again, but my utterance was like that of some wild beast smitten at once with sudden terror

and its death wound. I stood there, changed from all semblance of a human being. Not all the terrors of earth together could have made me take my eye from the awful plant, or my foot off the ground. I must have stood thus for at least an hour, for the shadows had crept out from the forest half across the glade before that hideous paroxysm of fear left me. My first impulse then was to creep stealthily away lest the tree should perceive me, but my returning reason bade me approach it. The boy might have fallen into the lair of some beast of prey, or perhaps the terrible life in the tree was that of some great serpent among its branches. Preparing to defend myself I approached the silent tree, — the harsh grass crisping beneath my feet with a strange loudness, the cicadas in the forest shrilling till the air seemed throbbing round me with waves of sound. The terrible truth was soon before me in all its awful novelty.

“The vegetable first discovered my presence at about fifty yards distance. I then became aware of a stealthy motion among the thick-lipped leaves, reminding me of some wild beast slowly gathering itself up from long sleep, a vast coil of snakes in restless motion. Have you ever seen bees hanging from a bough — a great cluster of bodies, bee clinging to bee — and by striking the bough, or agitating the air, caused that massed life to begin sulkily to disintegrate, each insect asserting its individual right to move? And do you remember how without one bee leaving the pensile cluster, the whole became gradually instinct with sullen life and horrid with a multitudinous motion?

“I came within twenty yards of it. The tree was quivering through every branch, muttering for blood, and, helpless with rooted feet, yearning with every branch towards me. It was that terror of the deep sea which the men of the northern fiords dread, and which, anchored upon some sunken rock, stretches into vain space its longing arms, pellucid as the sea itself, and as relentless — maimed Polypheme groping for his victims.

“Each separate leaf was agitated and hungry. Like hands they fumbled together, their fleshy palms curling upon themselves and again unfolding, closing on each other and falling apart again, — thick, helpless, fingerless hands (rather lips or tongues than hands) dimpled closely with little cup-like hollows. I approached nearer and nearer, step by step, till I saw that these soft horrors were all of them in motion, opening and closing incessantly.

“I was now within ten yards of the farthest reaching bough. Every part of it was hysterical with excitement. The agitation of its members was awful — sickening yet fascinating. In an ecstasy of eagerness for the food so near them,

the leaves turned upon each other. Two meeting would suck together face to face, with a force that compressed their joint thickness to a half, thinning the two leaves into one, now grappling in a volute like a double shell, writhing like some green worm, and at last, faint with the violence of the paroxysm, would slowly separate, falling apart as leeches gorged drop off the limbs. A sticky dew glistened in the dimples, welled over, and trickled down the leaf. The sound of it dripping from leaf to leaf made it seem as if the tree was muttering to itself. The beautiful golden fruit as they swung here and there were clutched now by one leaf and now by another, held for a moment close enfolded from the sight, and then as suddenly released. Here a large leaf, vampire-like, had sucked out the juices of a smaller one. It hung limp and bloodless, like a carcass of which the weasel has tired.

“I watched the terrible struggle till my starting eyes, strained by intense attention, refused their office, and I can hardly say what I saw. But the tree before me seemed to have become a live beast. Above me I felt conscious was a great limb, and each of its thousand clammy hands reached downwards towards me, fumbling. It strained, shivered, rocked, and heaved. It flung itself about in despair. The boughs, tantalized to madness with the presence of flesh, were tossed to this side and to that, in the agony of a frantic desire. The leaves were wrung together as the hands of one driven to madness by sudden misery. I felt the vile dew spurting from the tense veins fall upon me. My clothes began to give out a strange odor. The ground I stood on glistened with animal juices.

“Was I bewildered by terror? Had my senses abandoned me in my need? I know not—but the tree seemed to me to be alive. Leaning over towards me, it seemed to be pulling up its roots from the softened ground, and to be moving towards me. A mountainous monster, with myriad lips, mumbling together for my life, was upon me!

“Like one who desperately defends himself from imminent death, I made an effort for life, and fired my gun at the approaching horror. To my dizzied senses the sound seemed far off, but the shock of the recoil partially recalled me to myself, and starting back I reloaded. The shot had torn their way into the soft body of the great thing. The trunk as it received the wound shuddered, and the whole tree was struck with a sudden quiver. A fruit fell down — slipping from the leaves, now rigid with swollen veins, as from carven foliage. Then I saw a large arm slowly droop, and without a sound it was severed from the juice-fattened bole, and sank down softly, noiselessly, through the glistening leaves. I fired again, and another vile fragment was powerless — dead. At

each discharge the terrible vegetable yielded a life. Piecemeal I attacked it, killing here a leaf and there a branch. My fury increased with the slaughter till, when my ammunition was exhausted, the splendid giant was left a wreck as if some hurricane had torn through it. On the ground lay heaped together the fragments, struggling, rising and falling, gasping. Over them drooped in dying languor a few stricken boughs, while upright in the midst stood, dripping at every joint, the glistening trunk.

“My continued firing had brought up one of my men on my mule. He dared not, so he told me, come near me, thinking me mad. I had now drawn my hunting-knife, and with this was fighting — with the leaves. Yes — but each leaf was instinct with a horrid life; and more than once I felt my hand entangled for a moment and seized as if by sharp lips. Ignorant of the presence of my companion I made a rush forward over the fallen foliage, and with a last paroxysm of frenzy drove my knife up to the handle into the soft bole, and, slipping on the fast congealing sap, fell exhausted and unconscious, among the still panting leaves.

“My companions carried me back to the camp, and after vainly searching for Otona awaited my return to consciousness. Two or three hours elapsed before I could speak, and several days before I could approach the terrible thing. My men would not go near it. It was quite dead; for as we came up a great-billed bird with gaudy plumage that had been securely feasting on the decaying fruit, flew up from the wreck. We removed the rotting foliage, and there among the dead leaves still limp with juices, and piled round the roots, we found the ghastly relics of many former meals, and — its last nourishment — the corpse of little Otona. To have removed the leaves would have taken too long, so we buried the body as it was with a hundred vampire leaves still clinging to it.”

Such, as nearly as I remember it, was my uncle’s story of the man-eating tree.