



MONSTERS MONSTERS MONSTERS

HELEN HOKE

PICTURES BY CHARLES KEEPING

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BY HELEN HOKE

pictures by
CHARLES KEEPING

It was a gray-black hood of horror sliding through the soft ooze. It had no eyes and was as old as the ocean itself. It did not know fear and ate whatever moved....

This is just one of the fascinating and ghastly creatures in Helen Hoke's marvelous new anthology. Also featured are a gigantic hairless caterpillar, a mechanical murdering monster, vampires, werewolves, and a hideous creation with a neck seventy feet long and a death's-head on its breast.

Just sit back and let your flesh creep. You are in the hands of those well-known masters of horror H. P. Lovecraft, Arthur Conan Doyle, H. G. Wells, Ambrose Bierce, Ray Bradbury, Eric Frank Russell, Edgar Allan Poe, E. F. Benson, and Saki.



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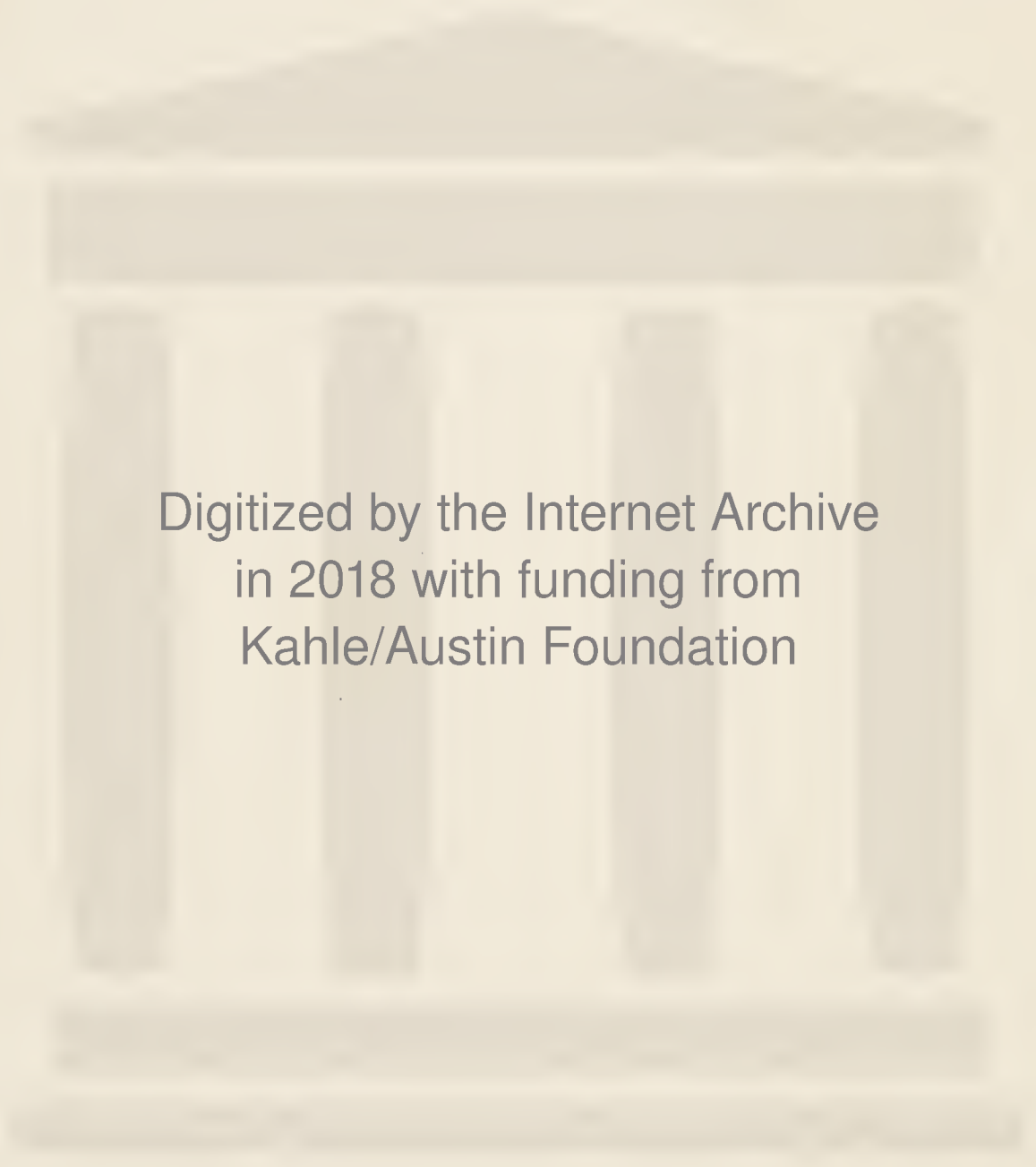
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Selected by
HELEN HOKE

Pictures by
CHARLES KEEPING

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ABOUT THIS BOOK

What is a monster? The dictionary says: “anything out of the usual course of nature;” “a fabulous animal;” “an unnatural-formed animal;” “imaginary animal compounded of incongruous elements.”

Perhaps you have only thought of monsters as grotesque animals. Werewolves, vampires, griffins, centaurs—these are all familiar monsters. But monsters can also be even weirder, insubstantial creatures, like the purple patch of vapour with a white vulture’s beak in Arthur Conan Doyle’s *The Horror of the Heights*, or the monstrous black shape with sharp little teeth which attacks Woodhouse in the Avu observatory in H. G. Wells’ story. These could loom even more horrible than the more familiar monsters, because it cannot be known quite *what* they are!

In Joseph Payne Brennan’s *Slime*, an enormous glob of mucky substance spreads across the countryside, devouring everything in its path: it may be hard to think of slime as a monster, but its havoc compounds into something even more monstrous than a werewolf.

And, of course, in this anthology there are all the “usuals”—a werewolf, vampires, and Grendel, the monster who was slain by Beowulf.

Many of the best fiction writers are masters of the horror story. Edgar Allan Poe set the scene as a writer of weird stories in the 1830’s, and since then many writers have followed

his lead. *The Sphinx* is an example of his special skill in making living and convincing terrors to haunt the nights.

Ambrose Bierce, born in 1842, has long had a reputation for his grim and savage short stories, which were published in two volumes, *Can Such Things Be?* and *In the Midst of Life*. *Moxon's Master* is a splendid example of his skill.

Another contributor to the horror story was E. F. Benson, whose book *Visible and Invisible* contains several powerful stories. I have chosen one, *Negotium Perambulans*, which tells of an abnormal monster, from an ancient ecclesiastical panel, performing an act of miraculous vengeance in a lonely village on the Cornish coast in England.

The Outsider, by H. P. Lovecraft, is one of the most original monster stories ever written. Lovecraft spent his life writing fantastic stories, which were first published in a magazine called *Weird Tales*. The unusual nature of his stories led to his receiving many letters from strangers, especially aspiring writers. Many authors have expressed their gratitude to him for his help and generosity; one of them, August Derleth, rescued Lovecraft's stories from obscurity and published them in book form. Lovecraft died in 1937, leaving a sure place in the literature of the fantastic.

Arthur Conan Doyle, H. G. Wells and Saki are all renowned for their contributions to the bibliography of weird short stories; and I have also included two modern writers of supernatural and science fiction tales: Ray Bradbury and Eric Frank Russell.

So—the contents of this book are garnered from a star-studded cast.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Helen Hoke". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned at the bottom right of the page.

SLIME

JOSEPH PAYNE BRENNAN

In which a monstrous mantle of grey-black slime is hurled out of the ocean bed by a subterranean explosion to rest on the swampy shore. Ravenous with hunger it devours every living creature in its path . . . and then advances on the town!

IT was a great grey-black hood of horror moving over the floor of the sea. It slid through the soft ooze like a monstrous mantle of slime obscenely animated with questing life. It was by turns viscid and fluid. At times it flattened out and flowed through the carpet of mud like an inky pool; occasionally it paused, seeming to shrink in upon itself, and reared up out of the ooze until it resembled an irregular cone or a gigantic hood. Although it possessed no eyes, it had a marvellously developed sense of touch, and it possessed a sensitivity to minute vibrations which was almost akin to telepathy. It was plastic, essentially shapeless. It could shoot out long tentacles, until it bore a resemblance to a nightmare squid or a huge starfish; it could retract itself into a round flattened disk, or squeeze into an irregular hunched shape so that it looked like a black boulder sunk on the bottom of the sea.

It had prowled the black water endlessly. It had been formed when the earth and the seas were young; it was almost as old as the ocean itself. It moved through a night which had no

beginning and no dissolution. The black sea basin where it lurked has been dark since the world began—an environment only a little less inimical than the stupendous gulfs of interplanetary space.

It was animated by a single, unceasing, never-satisfied drive: a voracious, insatiable hunger. It could survive for months without food, but minutes after eating it was as ravenous as ever. Its appetite was appalling and incalculable.

On the icy ink-black floor of the sea the battle for survival was savage, hideous—and usually brief. But for the shape of moving slime there was no battle. It ate whatever came its way, regardless of size, shape or disposition. It absorbed microscopic plankton and giant squid with equal assurance. Had its surface been less fluid, it might have retained the circular scars left by the grappling suckers of the wildly threshing deep-water squid, or the jagged toothmarks of the anachronistic frillshark, but as it was, neither left any evidence of its absorption. When the lifting curtain of living slime swayed out of the mud and closed upon them, their fiercest death throes came to nothing.

The horror did not know fear. There was nothing to be afraid of. It ate whatever moved, or tried not to move, and it had never encountered anything which would in turn eat it. If a squid's sucker, or a shark's tooth, tore into the mass of its viscosity, the rent flowed in upon itself and immediately closed. If a segment was detached, it could be retrieved and absorbed back into the whole.

The black mantle reigned supreme in its savage world of slime and silence. It groped greedily and endlessly through the mud, eating and never sleeping, never resting. If it lay still, it was only to trap food which might otherwise be lost. If it rushed with terrifying speed across the slimy bottom, it was never to escape an enemy, but always to flop its hideous

fluidity upon its sole and inevitable quarry—food.

It has evolved out of the muck and slime of the primitive sea floor, and it was as alien to ordinary terrestrial life as the weird denizens of some wild planet in a distant galaxy. It was an anachronistic experiment of nature compared to which the sabre-toothed tiger, the woolly mammoth and even Tyrannosaurus, the slashing, murderous king of the great earth reptiles, were as tame, weak entities.

Had it not been for a vast volcanic upheaval on the bottom of the ocean basin, the black horror would have crept out its entire existence on the silent sea ooze without ever manifesting its hideous powers to mankind.

Fate, in the form of a violent subterranean explosion, covering huge areas of the ocean's floor, hurled it out of its black slime world and sent it spinning toward the surface.

Had it been an ordinary deep-water fish, it never could have survived the experience. The explosion itself, or the drastic lessening of water pressure as it shot toward the surface, would have destroyed it. But it was no ordinary fish. Its viscosity, or plasticity, or whatever it was that constituted its essentially amoebic structure, permitted it to survive.

It reached the surface slightly stunned and flopped on the surging waters like a great blob of black blubber. Immense waves stirred up by the subterranean explosion swept it swiftly toward shore, and because it was somewhat stunned it did not try to resist the roaring mountains of water.

Along with scattered ash, pumice and the puffed bodies of dead fish, the black horror was hurled toward a beach. The huge waves carried it more than a mile inland, far beyond the strip of sandy shore, and deposited it in the midst of a deep brackish swamp area.

As luck would have it, the submarine explosion and subsequent tidal wave took place at night, and therefore the slime

horror was not immediately subjected to a new and hateful experience—light.

Although the midnight darkness of the storm-lashed swamp did not begin to compare with the stygian blackness of the sea bottom where even violet rays of the spectrum could not penetrate, the marsh darkness was nevertheless deep and intense.

As the water of the great wave receded, sluicing through the thorn jungle and back out to sea, the black horror clung to a mud bank surrounded by a rank growth of cattails. It was aware of the sudden, startling change in its environment and for some time it lay motionless, concentrating its attention on obscure internal readjustment which the absence of crushing pressure and a surrounding cloak of frigid sea water demanded. Its adaptability was incredible and horrifying. It achieved in a few hours what an ordinary creature would have attained only through a process of gradual evolution. Three hours after the titanic wave flopped it onto the mud bank, it had undergone swift organic changes which left it relatively at ease in its new environment.

In fact, it felt lighter and more mobile than it ever had before in its sea basin existence.

As it flung out feelers and attuned itself to the minutest vibrations and emanations of the swamp area, its pristine hunger drive reasserted itself with overwhelming urgency. And the tale which its sensory apparatus returned to the monstrous something which served it as a brain, excited it tremendously. It sensed at once that the swamp was filled with luscious tidbits of quivering food—more food, and food of a greater variety than it had ever encountered on the cold floor of the sea.

Its savage, incessant hunger seemed unbearable. Its slimy mass was swept by a shuddering wave of anticipation.

Sliding off the mud bank, it slithered over the cattails into an adjacent area consisting of deep black pools interspersed with water-logged tussocks. Weed stalks stuck up out of the water and the decayed trunks of fallen trees floated half-submerged in the larger pools.

Ravenous with hunger, it sloshed into the bog area, flicking its fluid tentacles about. Within minutes it had snatched up several fat frogs and a number of small fish. These, however, merely titillated its appetite. Its hunger turned into a kind of ecstatic fury. It commenced a systematic hunt, plunging to the bottom of each pool and quickly but carefully exploring every inch of its oozy bottom. The first creature of any size which it encountered was a musk-rat. An immense curtain of adhesive slime suddenly swept out of the darkness, closed upon it—and squeezed.

Heartened and whetted by its find, the hood of horror rummaged the rank pools with renewed zeal. When it surfaced, it carefully probed the tussocks for anything that might have escaped it in the water. Once it snatched up a small bird nesting in some swamp grass. Occasionally it slithered up the criss-crossed trunks of fallen trees, bearing them down with its unspeakable slimy bulk, and hung briefly suspended like a great dripping curtain of black marsh mud.

It was approaching a somewhat less swampy and more deeply wooded area when it gradually became aware of a subtle change in its new environment. It paused, hesitating, and remained half in and half out of a small pond near the edge of the nearest trees.

Although it had absorbed twenty-five or thirty pounds of food in the form of frogs, fish, water snakes, the muskrat and a few smaller creatures, its fierce hunger had not left it. Its monstrous appetite urged it on, and yet something held it anchored in the pond.

What it sensed, but could not literally see, was the rising sun spreading a grey light over the swamp. The horror had never encountered any illumination except that generated by the grotesque phosphorescent appendages of various deep-sea fishes. Natural light was totally unknown to it.

As the dawn light strengthened, breaking through the scattering storm clouds, the black slime monster fresh from the inky floor of the sea sensed that something utterly unknown was flooding in upon it. Light was hateful to it. It cast out quick feelers, hoping to catch and crush the light. But the more frenzied its efforts became, the more intense became the abhorred aura surrounding it.

At length, as the sun rose visibly above the trees, the horror, in baffled rage rather than in fear, grudgingly slid back into the pond and burrowed into the soft ooze of its bottom. There it remained while the sun shone and the small creatures of the swamp ventured forth on furtive errands.

A few miles away from Wharton's Swamp, in the small town of Clinton Centre, Henry Hossing sleepily crawled out of the improvised alley shack which had afforded him a degree of shelter for the night and stumbled into the street. Passing a hand across his rheumy eyes, he scratched the stubble on his cheek and blinked listlessly at the rising sun. He had not slept well; the storm of the night before had kept him awake. Besides he had gone to bed hungry, and that never agreed with him.

Glancing furtively along the street, he walked slouched forward, with his head bent down, and most of the time he kept his eyes on the walk or on the gutter in the hopes of spotting a chance coin.

Clinton Centre had not been kind to him. The handouts were sparse, and only yesterday he had been warned out of

town by one of the local policemen.

Grumbling to himself, he reached the end of the street and started to cross. Suddenly he stooped quickly and snatched up something from the edge of the pavement.

It was a crumpled green bill, and as he frantically unfolded it, a look of stupefied rapture spread across his bristly face. Ten dollars! More money than he had possessed at any one time in months!

Stowing it carefully in the one good pocket of his seedy grey jacket, he crossed the street with a swift stride. Instead of sweeping the sidewalks, his eyes now darted along the rows of stores and restaurants.

He paused at one restaurant, hesitated, and finally went on until he found another less pretentious one a few blocks away.

When he sat down, the counterman shook his head. "Get goin', bud. No free coffee today."

With a wide grin, the hobo produced his ten-dollar bill and spread it on the counter. "That covers a good breakfast here, pardner?"

The counterman seemed irritated. "O.K. O.K. What'll you have?" He eyed the bill suspiciously.

Henry Hossing ordered orange juice, toast, ham and eggs, oatmeal, melon and coffee.

When it appeared, he ate every bit of it, ordered three additional cups of coffee, paid the check as if two-dollar breakfasts were customary with him, and then sauntered back to the street.

Shortly after noon, after his three-dollar lunch, he saw the liquor store. For a few minutes he stood across the street from it, fingering his five-dollar bill. Finally he crossed with an abstracted smile, entered and bought a quart of rye.

He hesitated on the sidewalk, debating whether or not he should return to the little shack in the side alley. After a minute

or two of indecision, he decided against it and struck out instead for Wharton's Swamp. The local police were far less likely to disturb him there, and since the skies were clearing and the weather mild, there was little immediate need of shelter.

Angling off the highway which skirted the swamp several miles from town, he crossed a marshy meadow, pushed through a fringe of brush and sat down under a sweet-gum tree which bordered a deeply wooded area.

By late afternoon he had achieved a quite cheerful glow, and he had little inclination to return to Clinton Centre. Rousing himself from reverie, he stumbled about collecting enough wood for a small fire and went back to his sylvan seat under the sweet-gum.

He slept briefly as dusk descended, but finally bestirred himself again to build a fire, as deeper shadows fell over the swamp. Then he returned to his swiftly diminishing bottle. He was suspended in a warm net of inflamed fantasy when something abruptly broke the spell and brought him back to earth.

The flickering flames of his fire had dwindled down until now only a dim eerie glow illuminated the immediate area under the sweet-gum. He saw nothing and at the moment heard nothing and yet he was filled with a sudden and profound sense of lurking menace.

He stood up, staggering, leaned back against the sweet-gum and peered fearfully into the shadows. In the deep darkness beyond the warning arc of firelight he could distinguish nothing which had any discernible form or colour.

Then he detected the stench and shuddered. In spite of the reek of cheap whisky which clung around him, the smell was overpowering. It was a fulsome fetidness, alien and utterly repellent. It was vaguely fishlike, but otherwise beyond any

known comparison.

As he stood trembling under the sweet-gum, Henry Hossing thought of something dead which had lain for long ages at the bottom of the sea.

Filled with mounting alarm, he looked around for some wood which he might add to the dying fire. All he could find nearby however were a few twigs. He threw these on and the flames licked up briefly and subsided.

He listened and heard—or imagined he heard—an odd sort of slithering sound in the nearby bushes. It seemed to retreat slightly as the flames shot up.

Genuine terror took possession of him. He knew that he was in no condition to flee—and now he came to the horrifying conclusion that whatever unspeakable menace waited in the surrounding darkness was temporarily held at bay only by the failing gleam of his little fire.

Frantically he looked around for more wood. But there was none. None, that is, within the faint glow of firelight. And he dared not venture beyond.

He began to tremble uncontrollably. He tried to scream but no sound came out of his tightened throat.

The ghastly stench became stronger, and now he was sure that he could hear a strange sliding, slithering sound in the black shadows beyond the remaining spark of firelight.

He stood frozen in absolute helpless panic as the tiny fire smouldered down into darkness.

At the last instant a charred bit of wood broke apart, sending up a few sparks, and in that flicker of final light he glimpsed the horror.

It had already glided out of the bushes and now it rushed across the small clearing with nightmare speed. It was a final incarnation of all the fears, shuddering apprehensions and bad dreams which Henry Hossing had ever known in his life. It

was a fiend from the pit of Hell come to claim him at last.

A terrible ringing scream burst from his throat, but it was smothered before it was finished as the black shape of slime fastened upon him with irresistible force.

Giles Gowse—"Old Man" Gowse—got out of bed after eight hours of fitful tossing and intermittent nightmares and grouchily brewed coffee in the kitchen of his dilapidated farmhouse on the edge of Wharton's Swamp. Half the night, it seemed, the stench of stale sea-water had permeated the house. His interrupted sleep had been full of foreboding, full of shadowy and evil portents.

Muttering to himself, he finished breakfast, took a milk pail from the pantry and started for the barn where he kept his single cow.

As he approached the barn, the strange offensive odour which had plagued him during the night assailed his nostrils anew.

"Wharton's Swamp! That's what it is!" he told himself. And he shook his fist at it.

When he entered the barn the stench was stronger than ever. Scowling, he strode toward the rickety stall where he kept the cow, Sarey.

Then he stood still and stared. Sarey was gone. The stall was empty.

He re-entered the barnyard. "Sarey!" he called.

Rushing back into the barn, he inspected the stall. The rancid reek of the sea was strong here and now he noticed a kind of shine on the floor. Bending closer, he saw that it was a slick coat of glistening slime, as if some unspeakable creature covered with ooze had crept in and out of the stall.

This discovery, coupled with the weird disappearance of Sarey, was too much for his jangled nerves. With a wild yell



he ran out of the barn and started for Clinton Centre, two miles away.

His reception in the town enraged him. When he tried to tell people about the disappearance of his cow, Sarey, about the reek of sea and ooze in his barn the night before, they laughed at him. The more impolite ones, that is. Most of the others patiently heard him out—and then winked and touched their heads significantly when he was out of sight.

One man, the druggist, Jim Jelinson, seemed mildly interested. He said that as he was coming through his back-yard from the garage late the previous evening, he had heard a fearful shriek somewhere in the distant darkness. It might, he averred, have come from the direction of Wharton's Swamp. But it had not been repeated and eventually he had dismissed it from his mind.

When Old Man Gowse started for home late in the afternoon he was filled with sullen, resentful bitterness. They thought he was crazy, eh? Well, Sarey *was* gone; they couldn't explain *that* away, could they? They explained the smell by saying it was dead fish cast up by the big wave which had washed into the swamp during the storm. Well—maybe. And the slime on his barn floor they said was snails. *Snails!* As if any he'd ever seen could cause that much slime!

As he was nearing home, he met Rupert Barnaby, his nearest neighbour. Rupert was carrying a rifle and he was accompanied by Jibbe, his hound.

Although there had been an element of bad blood between the two bachelor neighbours for some time, Old Man Gowse, much to Barnaby's surprise, nodded and stopped.

"Evenin' hunt, neighbour?"

Barnaby nodded. "Thought Jibbe might start up a coon. Moon later, likely."

"My cow's gone," Old Man Gowse said abruptly. "If you

should see her—” He paused. “But I don’t think you will. . . .”

Barnaby, bewildered, stared at him. “What you gettin’ at?”

Old Man Gowse repeated what he had been telling all day in Clinton Centre.

He shook his head when he finished, adding, “I wouldn’t go huntin’ in that swamp tonight fur—ten thousand dollars!”

Rupert Barnaby threw back his head and laughed. He was a big man, muscular, resourceful and levelheaded—little given to even mild flights of the imagination.

“Gowse,” he laughed, “no use you givin’ me those spook stories! Your cow just got loose and wandered off. Why, I ain’t even seen a bobcat in that swamp for over a year!”

Old Man Gowse set his lips in a grim line. “Maybe,” he said, as he turned away, “you’ll see suthin’ worse than a wild-cat in that swamp tonight!”

Shaking his head, Barnaby took after his impatient hound. Old Man Gowse was getting queer all right. One of these days he’d probably go off altogether and have to be locked up.

Jibbe ran ahead, sniffing, darting from one ditch to another. As twilight closed in, Barnaby angled off the main road onto a twisting path which led into Wharton’s Swamp.

He loved hunting. He would rather tramp through the brush than sit home in an easy chair. And even if an evening’s foray turned up nothing, he didn’t particularly mind. Actually he made out quite well; at least half his meat supply consisted of the rabbits, racoons and occasional deer which he brought down in Wharton’s Swamp.

When the moon rose, he was deep in the swamp. Twice Jibbe started off after rabbits, but both times he returned quickly, looking somewhat sheepish.

Something about his actions began to puzzle Barnaby. The dog seemed reluctant to move ahead; he hung directly in front of the hunter. Once Barnaby tripped over him and nearly fell headlong.

The hunter paused finally, frowning, and looked ahead. The swamp appeared no different than usual. True, a rather offensive stench hung over it, but that was merely the result of the big waves which had splashed far inland during the recent storm. Probably an accumulation of seaweed and the decaying bodies of some dead fish lay rotting in the stagnant pools of the swamp.

Barnaby spoke sharply to the dog. "What ails you, boy? Git now! You trip me again, you'll get a boot!"

The dog started ahead some distance, but with an air of reluctance. He sniffed the clumps of marsh grass in a perfunctory manner and seemed to have lost interest in the hunt.

Barnaby grew exasperated. Even when they discovered the fresh track of a racoon in the soft mud near a little pool, Jibbe manifested only slight interest.

He did run on ahead a little further however, and Barnaby began to hope that, as they closed in, he would regain his customary enthusiasm.

In this he was mistaken. As they approached a thickly wooded area, latticed with tree thorns and covered with a heavy growth of cattails, the dog suddenly crouched in the shadows and refused to budge.

Barnaby was sure that the racoon had taken refuge in the nearby thickets. The dog's unheard of conduct infuriated him.

After a number of sharp cuffs, Jibbe arose stiffly and moved ahead, the hair on his neck bristled up like a lion's mane.

Swearing to himself, Barnaby pushed into the darkened thickets after him.

It was quite black under the trees, in spite of the moonlight, and he moved cautiously in order to avoid stepping into a pool.

Suddenly, with a frantic yelp of terror, Jibbe literally darted between his legs and shot out of the thickets. He ran on, howling weirdly as he went.

For the first time that evening Barnaby experienced a thrill of fear. In all his previous experience, Jibbe had never turned tail. On one occasion he had even plunged in after a sizeable bear.

Scowling into the deep darkness, Barnaby could see nothing. There were no baleful eyes glaring at him.

As his own eyes tried to penetrate the surrounding blackness, he recalled Old Man Gowse's warning with a bitter grimace. If the old fool happened to spot Jibbe streaking out of the swamp, Barnaby would never hear the end of it.

The thought of this angered him. He pushed ahead now with a feeling of sullen rage for whatever had terrified the dog. A good rifle shot would solve the mystery.

All at once he stopped and listened. From the darkness immediately ahead, he detected an odd sound, as if a large bulk were being dragged over the cattails.

He hesitated, unable to see anything, stoutly resisting an idiotic impulse to flee. The black darkness and the slimy stench of stagnant pools here in the thickets seemed to be suffocating him.

His heart began to pound as the slithering noise came closer. Every instinct told him to turn and run, but a kind of desperate stubbornness held him rooted to the spot.

The sound grew louder and suddenly he was positive that something deadly and formidable was rushing toward him through the thickets with accelerated speed.

Throwing up his rifle, he pointed at the direction of the sound and fired.

In a brief flash of the rifle he saw something black and enormous and glistening, like a great flapping hood, break through the final thicket. It seemed to be *rolling* toward him, and it was moving with nightmare swiftness.

He wanted to scream and run, but even as the horror rushed

forward, he understood that flight at this point would be futile. Even though the blood seemed to have congealed in his veins, he held the rifle pointed up and kept on firing.

The shots had not more visible effect than so many pebbles launched from a slingshot. At the last instant his nerve broke and he tried to escape, but the monstrous hood lunged upon him, flapped over him and squeezed, and his attempt at a scream turned into a tiny gurgle in his throat.

Old Man Gowse got up early, after another uneasy night, and walked out to inspect the barnyard area. Nothing further seemed amiss, but there was still no sign of Sarey. And that detestable odour arose from the direction of Wharton's Swamp when the wind was right.

After breakfast, Gowse set out for Rupert Barnaby's place, a mile or so distant along the road. He wasn't sure himself what he expected to find.

When he reached Barnaby's small but neat frame house, all was quiet. Too quiet. Usually Barnaby was up and about soon after sunrise.

On a sudden impulse, Gowse walked up the path and rapped on the front door. He waited and there was no reply. He knocked again, and after another pause, stepped off the porch.

Jibbe, Barnaby's hound, slunk around the side of the house. Ordinarily he would bound about and bark. But today he stood motionless—or nearly so—he was trembling—and stared at Gowse. The dog had a cowed, frightened, guilty air which was entirely alien to him.

"Where's Rup?" Gowse called to him. "Go get Rup!"

Instead of starting off, the dog threw back his head and emitted an eerie, long-drawn howl.

Gowse shivered. With a backward glance at the silent house, he started off down the road.

Now maybe they'd listen to him, he thought grimly. The day before they had laughed about the disappearance of Sarey. Maybe they wouldn't laugh so easily when he told them that Rupert Barnaby had gone into Wharton's Swamp with his dog—and that the dog had come back alone!

When Police Chief Miles Underbeck saw Old Man Gowse come into headquarters in Clinton Centre, he sat back and sighed heavily. He was busy this morning and undoubtedly Old Man Gowse was coming in to inquire about the infernal cow of his that had wandered off.

The old eccentric had a new and startling report, however. He claimed that Rupert Barnaby was missing. He'd gone into the swamp the night before, Gowse insisted, and had not returned.

When Chief Underbeck questioned him closely, Gowse admitted that he wasn't *positive* Barnaby hadn't returned. It was barely possible that he had returned home very early in the morning and then left again before Gowse arrived.

But Gowse fixed his flashing eyes on the Chief and shook his head. "He never came out, I tell ye! That dog of his knows! Howled, he did, like a dog howls for the dead! Whatever come took Sarey—got Barnaby in the swamp last night!"

Chief Underbeck was not an excitable man. Gowse's burst of melodrama irritated him and left him unimpressed.

Somewhat gruffly he promised to look into the matter if Barnaby had not turned up by evening. Barnaby, he pointed out, knew the swamp better than anyone else in the county. And he was perfectly capable of taking care of himself. Probably, the Chief suggested, he had sent the dog home and gone elsewhere after finishing his hunt the evening before. The chances were he'd be back by suppertime.

Old Man Gowse shook his head with a kind of fatalistic

scepticism. Vouching that events would soon prove his fears well founded, he shambled grouchily out of the station.

The day passed and there was no sign of Rupert Barnaby. At six o'clock, Old Man Gowse grimly marched into the Crown, Clinton Centre's second-rate hotel, and registered for a room. At seven o'clock Chief Underbeck dispatched a prowler car to Barnaby's place. He waited impatiently for its return, drumming on the desk, disinterestedly shuffling through a sheaf of reports which had accumulated during the day.

The prowler car returned shortly before eight. Sergeant Grimes made his report. "Nobody there, sir. Place locked up tight. Searched the grounds. All we saw was Barnaby's dog. Howled and ran off as if the devil were on his tail!"

Chief Underbeck was troubled. If Barnaby *was* missing, a search should be started at once. But it was already getting dark, and portions of Wharton's Swamp were very nearly impassable even during the day. Besides, there was no proof that Barnaby had not gone off for a visit, perhaps to nearby Stantonville, for instance, to call on a crony and stay overnight.

By nine o'clock he had decided to postpone any action till morning. A search now would probably be futile in any case. The swamp offered too many obstacles. If Barnaby had not turned up by morning, and there was no report that he had been seen elsewhere, a systematic search of the marsh could begin.

Not long after he had arrived at this decision, and as he was somewhat wearily preparing to leave Headquarters and go home, a new and genuinely alarming interruption took place.

Shortly before nine-thirty, a car braked to a sudden stop outside Headquarters. An elderly man hurried in, supporting by the arm a sobbing, hysterical young girl. Her skirt and stockings were torn and there were a number of scratches on her face.

After assisting her to a chair, the man turned to Chief Underbeck and the other officers who gathered around.

“Picked her up on the highway out near Wharton’s Swamp. Screaming at the top of her lungs!” He wiped his forehead. “She ran right in front of my car. Missed her by a miracle. She was so crazy with fear I couldn’t make sense out of what she said. Seems like something grabbed her boy friend in the bushes out there. Anyway, I got her in the car without much trouble and I guess I broke a speed law getting here.”

Chief Underbeck surveyed the man keenly. He was obviously shaken himself and, since he did not appear to be concealing anything, the Chief turned to the girl.

He spoke soothingly, doing his best to reassure her, and at length she composed herself sufficiently to tell her story.

Her name was Dolores Rell and she lived in nearby Stantonville. Earlier in the evening she had gone riding with her fiance, Jason Bukmeist of Clinton Centre. As Jason was driving along the highway adjacent to Wharton’s Swamp, she had remarked that the early evening moonlight looked very romantic over the marsh. Jason had stopped the car, and after they had surveyed the scene for some minutes, he suggested that since the evening was warm, a brief “stroll in the moonlight” might be fun.

Dolores had been reluctant to leave the car, but at length had been persuaded to take a short walk along the edge of the marsh where the terrain was relatively firm.

As the couple were walking along under the trees, perhaps twenty yards or so from the car, Dolores became aware of an unpleasant odour and wanted to turn back. Jason, however, told her she only imagined it and insisted on going further. As the trees grew closer together, they walked Indian file, Jason taking the lead.

Suddenly, she said, they both heard something swishing

through the brush toward them. Jason told her not to be frightened, that it was probably someone's cow. As it came closer, however, it seemed to be moving with incredible speed. And it didn't seem to be making the kind of noise a cow would make.

At the last second Jason whirled with a cry of fear and told her to run. Before she could move, she saw a monstrous something rushing under the trees in the dim moonlight. For an instant she stood rooted with horror; then she turned and ran. She thought she heard Jason running behind her. She couldn't be sure. But immediately after she heard him scream.

In spite of her terror, she turned and looked behind her.

At this point in her story she became hysterical again and several minutes passed before she could go on.

She could not describe exactly what she had seen as she looked over her shoulder. The thing which she had glimpsed rushing under the trees had caught up with Jason. It almost completely covered him. All she could see of him was his agonized face and part of one arm, low near the ground, as if the thing were squatting astride him. She could not say what it was. It was black, formless, bestial and yet not bestial. It was the dark gliding kind of indescribable horror which she had shuddered at when she was a little girl alone in the nursery at night.

She shuddered now and covered her eyes as she tried to picture what she had seen. "O God—*the darkness came alive! The darkness came alive!*"

Somehow, she went on presently, she had stumbled through the trees into the road. She was so terrified she hardly noticed the approaching car.

There could be no doubt that Dolores Rell was in the grip of genuine terror. Chief Underbeck acted with alacrity. After the white-faced girl had been driven to a nearby hospital for

treatment of her scratches and the administration of a sedative, Underbeck rounded up all available men on the force, equipped them with shotguns, rifles and flashlights, hurried them into four prowl cars and started off for Wharton's Swamp.

Jason Bukmeist's car was found where he had parked it. It had not been disturbed. A search of the nearby swamp area, conducted in the glare of flashlights, proved fruitless. Whatever had attacked Bukmeist had apparently carried him off into the farthest recesses of the sprawling swamp.

After two futile hours of brush breaking and marsh sloshing, Chief Underbeck wearily rounded up his men and called off the hunt until morning.

As the first faint streaks of dawn appeared in the sky over Wharton's Swamp, the search began again. Reinforcements, including civilian volunteers from Clinton Centre, had arrived, and a systematic combing of the entire swamp commenced.

By noon, the search had proved fruitless—or nearly so. One of the searchers brought in a battered hat and a rye whiskey bottle which he had discovered on the edge of the marsh under a sweet-gum tree. The shapeless felt hat was old and worn, but it was dry. It had, therefore, apparently been discarded in the swamp since the storm of a few days ago. The whiskey bottle looked new; in fact, a few drops of rye remained in it. The searcher reported that the remains of a small campfire were also found under the sweet-gum.

In the hope that this evidence might have some bearing on the disappearance of Jason Bukmeist, Chief Underbeck ordered a canvass of every liquor store in Clinton Centre in an attempt to learn the names of everyone who had recently purchased a bottle of the particular brand of rye found under the tree.

The search went on, and mid-afternoon brought another,

more ominous discovery. A diligent searcher, investigating a trampled area in a large growth of cattails, picked a rifle out of the mud.

After the slime and dirt had been wiped away, two of the searchers vouched that it belonged to Rupert Barnaby. One of them had hunted with him and remembered a bit of scroll-work on the rifle stock.

While Chief Underbeck was weighing this unpalatable bit of evidence, a report of the liquor store canvass in Clinton Centre arrived. Every recent purchaser of a quart bottle of the particular brand in question had been investigated. Only one could not be located—a tramp who had hung around the town for several days and had been ordered out.

By evening most of the exhausted searching party were convinced that the tramp, probably in a state of homicidal viciousness brought on by drink, had murdered both Rupert Barnaby and Jason and secreted their bodies in one of the deep pools of the swamp. The chances were the murderer was still sleeping off the effects of drink somewhere in the tangled thickets of the marsh.

Most of the searchers regarded Dolores Rell's melodramatic story with a great deal of scepticism. In the dim moonlight, they pointed out, a frenzied, wild-eyed tramp bent on imminent murder might very well have resembled some kind of monster. And the girl's hysteria had probably magnified what she had seen.

As night closed over the dismal morass, Chief Underbeck reluctantly suspended the hunt. In view of the fact that the murderer probably still lurked in the woods, however, he decided to establish a system of night-long patrols along the highway which paralleled the swamp. If the quarry lay hidden in the treacherous tangle of trees and brush, he would not be able to escape onto the highway without running into one of

the patrols. The only other means of egress from the swamp lay miles across the mire where the open sea washed against a reedy beach. And it was quite unlikely that the fugitive would even attempt escape in that direction.

The patrols were established in three-hour shifts, two men to a patrol, both heavily armed and both equipped with powerful searchlights. They were ordered to investigate every sound or movement which they detected in the brush bordering the highway. After a single command to halt, they were to shoot to kill. Any curious motorists who stopped to inquire about the hunt were to be swiftly waved on their way, after being warned not to give rides to anyone and to report all hitchhikers.

Fred Storr and Luke Matson, on the midnight to three o'clock patrol, passed an uneventful two hours on their particular stretch of the highway. Matson finally sat down on a fallen tree stump a few yards from the edge of the road.

"Legs givin' out," he commented wryly, resting his rifle on the stump. "Might as well sit a few minutes."

Fred Storr lingered nearby. "Guess so, Luke. Don't look like—" Suddenly he scowled into the black fringes of the swamp. "You hear something, Luke?"

Luke listened, twisting around on the stump. "Well, maybe," he said finally, "kind of a little scratchy sound like."

He got up, retrieving his rifle.

"Let's take a look," Fred suggested in a low voice. He stepped over the stump and Luke followed him toward the tangle of brush which marked the border of the swamp jungle.

Several yards further along they stopped again. The sound became more audible. It was a kind of slithering, scraping sound, such as might be produced by a heavy body dragging itself over uneven ground.

"Sounds like—a snake," Luke ventured. "A damn big snake!"

"We'll get a little closer," Fred whispered. "You be ready with that gun when I switch on my light!"

They moved ahead a few more yards. Then a powerful yellow ray stabbed into the thickets ahead as Fred switched on his flashlight. The ray searched the darkness, probing in one direction and then another.

Luke lowered his rifle a little, frowning. "Don't see a thing," he said. "Nothing but a big pool of black scum up ahead there."

Before Fred had time to reply, the pool of black scum reared up into horrible life. In one hideous second it hunched itself into an unspeakable glistening hood and rolled forward with fearful speed.

Luke Matson screamed and fired simultaneously as the monstrous scarf of slime shot forward. A moment later it swayed above him. He fired again and the thing fell upon him.

In avoiding the initial rush of the horror, Fred Storr lost his footing. He fell headlong—and turned just in time to witness a sight which slowed the blood in his veins.

The monster had pounced upon Luke Matson. Now, as Fred watched, literally paralyzed with horror, it spread itself over and around the form of Luke until he was completely enveloped. The faint writhing of his limbs could still be seen. Then the thing squeezed, swelling into a hood and flattening itself again, and the writhing ceased.

As soon as the thing lifted and swung forward in his direction, Fred Storr, goaded by frantic fear, overcame the paralysis of horror which had frozen him.

Grabbing the rifle which had fallen beside him, he aimed it at the shape of living slime and started firing. Pure terror possessed him as he saw that the shots were having no effect. The thing lunged toward him, to all visible appearances entirely oblivious to the rifle slugs tearing into its loathsome viscid mass.

Acting out of some instinct which he himself could not have named, Fred Storr dropped the rifle and seized his flashlight, playing its powerful beam directly upon the onrushing horror.

The thing stopped, scant feet away, and appeared to hesitate. It slid quickly aside at an angle, but he followed it immediately with the cone of light. It backed up finally and flattened out, as if trying by that means to avoid the light, but he trained the beam on it steadily, sensing with every primitive fibre which he possessed that the yellow shaft of light was the one thing which held off hideous death.

Now there were shouts in the nearby darkness and other lights began stabbing the shadows. Members of the adjacent patrols, alarmed by the sound of rifle fire, had come running to investigate.

Suddenly the nameless horror squirmed quickly out of the flashlight's beam and rushed away in the darkness.

In the leaden light of early dawn Chief Underbeck climbed into a police car waiting on the highway near Wharton's Swamp and headed back for Clinton Centre. He had made a decision and he was grimly determined to act on it at once.

When he reached Headquarters, he made two telephone calls in quick succession, one to the governor of the state and the other to the commander of the nearby Camp Evans Military Reservation.

The horror in Wharton's Swamp—he had decided—could not be coped with by the limited men and resources at his command.

Rupert Barnaby, Jason Bukmeister and Luke Matson had without any doubt perished in the swamp. The anonymous tramp, it now began to appear, far from being the murderer, had been only one more victim. And Fred Storr—well, he hadn't disappeared. But the other patrol members had found

him sitting on the ground near the edge of the swamp in the clutches of a mind-warping fear which had, temporarily at least, reduced him to near idiocy. Even after he had been taken home and put to bed, he had refused to loosen his grip on a flashlight which he squeezed in one hand. When they switched the flashlight off, he screamed, and they had to switch it on again. His story was so wildly melodramatic it could scarcely be accepted by rational minds. And yet—they had said as much about Dolores Rell's hysterical account. And Fred Storr was no excitable young girl; he had a reputation for level-headedness, stolidity and verbal honesty which was touched with understatement rather than exaggeration. As Chief Underbeck arose and walked out to his car in order to start back to Wharton's Swamp, he noticed Old Man Gowse coming down the block.

With a sudden thrill of horror he remembered the eccentric's missing cow. Before the old man came abreast, he slammed the car door and issued crisp directions to the waiting driver. As the car sped away, he glanced in the rear-view mirror.

Old Man Gowse stood grimly motionless on the walk in front of Police Headquarters.

"Old Man Cassandra," Chief Underbeck muttered. The driver shot a swift glance at him and stepped on the gas.

Less than two hours after Chief Underbeck arrived back at Wharton's Swamp, the adjacent highway was crowded with cars—state police patrol cars, cars of the local curious and Army trucks from Camp Evans.

Promptly at nine o'clock over three hundred soldiers, police and citizen volunteers, all armed, swung into the swamp to begin a careful search.

Shortly before dusk most of them had arrived at the sea on the far side of the swamp. Their exhaustive efforts had netted nothing. One soldier, noticing fierce eyes glaring out of a tree,

had bagged an owl, and one of the state policemen had flushed a young bobcat. Someone else had stepped on a copperhead and been treated for snakebite. But there was no sign of a monster, a murderous tramp, nor any of the missing men.

In the face of mounting scepticism, Chief Underbeck stood firm. Pointing out that so far as they knew to date, the murderer prowled only at night, he ordered that after a four-hour rest and meal period the search should continue.

A number of helicopters which had hovered over the area during the afternoon landed on the strip of shore, bringing food and supplies. At Chief Underbeck's insistence, barriers were set up on the beach. Guards were stationed along the entire length of the highway; powerful searchlights were brought up. Another truck from Camp Evans arrived with a portable machine-gun and several flame-throwers.

By eleven o'clock that night the stage was set. The beach barriers were in place, guards were at station, and huge searchlights, erected near the highway, swept the dismal marsh with probing cones of light.

At eleven-fifteen the night patrols, each consisting of ten strongly-armed men, struck into the swamp again.

Ravenous with hunger, the hood of horror reared out of the mud at the bottom of a rancid pool and rose toward the surface. Flopping ashore in the darkness, it slid quickly away over the clumps of scattered swamp grass. It was impelled, as always, by a savage and enormous hunger.

Although hunting in its new environment had been good, its immense appetite knew no appeasement. The more food it consumed, the more it seemed to require.

As it rushed off, alert to the minute vibrations which indicated food, it became aware of various disturbing emanations. Although it was the time of darkness in this strange world, the

darkness at this usual hunting period was oddly pierced by the monster's hated enemy—light. The food vibrations were stronger than the shape of slime had ever experienced. They were on all sides, powerful, purposeful, moving in many directions all through the lower layers of puzzling, light-riven darkness.

Lifting out of the ooze, the hood of horror flowed up a lattice-work of gnarled swamp snags and hung motionless, while drops of muddy water rolled off its glistening surface and dripped below. The thing's sensory apparatus told it that the maddening streaks of lack of darkness were everywhere.

Even as it hung suspended on the snags like a great filthy carpet coated with slime, a terrible torch of light slashed through the surrounding darkness and burned against it.

It immediately loosened its hold on the snags and fell back into the ooze with a mighty *plop*. Nearby, the vibrations suddenly increased in intensity. The maddening streamers of light shot through the darkness on all sides.

Baffled and savage, the thing plunged into the ooze and propelled itself in the opposite direction.

But this proved to be only a temporary respite. The vibrations redoubled in intensity. The darkness almost disappeared, riven and pierced by bolts and rivers of light.

For the first time in its incalculable existence, the thing experienced something vaguely akin to fear. The light could not be snatched up and squeezed and smothered to death. It was an alien enemy against which the hood of horror had learned only one defence—flight, hiding.

And now as its world of darkness was torn apart by sudden floods and streamers of light, the monster instinctively sought the refuge afforded by that vast black cradle from which it had climbed.

Flinging itself through the swamp, it headed back for sea.

The guard patrols stationed along the beach, roused by the sound of gunfire and urgent shouts of warning from the interior of the swamp, stood or knelt with ready weapons as the clamour swiftly approached the sea.

The dismal reedy beach lay fully exposed in the harsh glare of searchlights. Waves rolled in toward shore, splashing white crests of foam far up the sands. In the searchlights' illumination the dark waters glistened with an oily iridescence.

The shrill cries increased. The watchers tensed, waiting. And suddenly across the long dreary flats clotted with weed stalks and sunken drifts there burst into view a nightmare shape which froze the shore patrols in their tracks.

A thing of slimy blackness, a thing which had no essential shape, no discernible earthly features, rushed through the thorn thickets and onto the flats. It was a shape of utter darkness, one second a great flapping hood, the next a black viscid pool of living ooze which flowed upon itself, sliding forward with incredible speed.

Some of the guards remained rooted where they stood, too overcome with horror to pull the triggers of their weapons. Others broke the spell of terror and began firing. Bullets from half a dozen rifles tore into the black monster speeding across the mud flats.

As the thing neared the end of the flats and approached the first sand dunes of the open beach, the patrol guards who had flushed it from the swamp broke into the open.

One of them paused, bellowing at the beach guards. "It's heading for sea! For God's sake don't let it escape!"

The beach guards redoubled their firing, suddenly realizing with a kind of sick horror that the monster was apparently unaffected by the rifle slugs. Without a single pause, it rolled through the last fringe of cattails and flopped onto the sands.

As in a hideous nightmare, the guards saw it flap over the

nearest sand dune and slide toward the sea. A moment later however, they remembered the barbed wire beach barrier which Chief Underbeck had stubbornly insisted on their erecting.

Gaining heart, they closed in, running over the dunes toward the spot where the black horror would strike the wire.

Someone in the lead yelled in sudden triumph. "It's caught! It's stuck on the wire!"

The searchlights concentrated swaths of light on the barrier.

The thing had reached the barbed wire fence and apparently flung itself against the twisted strands. Now it appeared to be hopelessly caught; it twisted and flopped and squirmed like some unspeakable giant jellyfish snared in a fisherman's net.

The guards ran forward, sure of their victory. All at once however, the guard in the lead screamed a wild warning. "It's squeezing through! It's getting away!"

In the glare of light they saw with consternation that the monster appeared to be *flowing* through the wire, like a blob of liquescent ooze.

Ahead lay a few yards of downward slanting beach and, beyond that, rolling breakers of the open sea.

There was a collective gasp of horrified dismay as the monster, with a quick forward lurch, squeezed through the barrier. It tilted there briefly, twisting, as if a few last threads of itself might still be entangled in the wire.

As it moved to disengage itself and rush down the wet sands into the black sea, one of the guards hurled himself forward until he was almost abreast of the barrier. Sliding to his knees, he aimed at the escaping hood of horror.

A second later a great searing spout of flame shot from his weapon and burst in a smoke red blossom against the thing on the opposite side of the wire.

Black oily smoke billowed into the night. A ghastly stench

flowed over the beach. The guards saw a flaming mass of horror grope away from the barrier. The soldier who aimed the flame-thrower held it remorselessly steady.

There was a hideous bubbling, hissing sound. Vast gouts of thick, greasy smoke swirled into the night air. The indescribable stench became almost unbearable.

When the soldier finally shut off the flame-thrower, there was nothing in sight except the white-hot glowing wires of the barrier and a big patch of blackened sand.

With good reason the mantle of slime had hated light, for the ultimate source of light is fire—the final unknown enemy that even the black hood could not drag down and devour.

THE FOGHORN

RAY BRADBURY

In which a gigantic monster comes out of the Deeps to answer the call of the lighthouse Fog Horn . . .

OUT there in the cold water, far from land, we waited every night for the coming of the fog, and it came, and we oiled the brass machinery and lit the fog light up in the stone tower. Feeling like two birds in the grey sky, McDunn and I sent the light touching out, red, then white, then red again, to eye the lonely ships. And if they did not see our light, then there was always our Voice, the great deep cry of our Fog Horn shuddering through the rags of mist to startle the gulls away like decks of scattered cards and make the waves turn high and foam.

"It's a lonely life, but you're used to it now, aren't you?" asked McDunn.

"Yes," I said. "You're a good talker, thank the Lord."

"Well, it's your turn on land tomorrow," he said, smiling, "to dance the ladies and drink gin."

"What do you think, McDunn, when I leave you out here alone?"

"On the mysteries of the sea." McDunn lit his pipe. It was a quarter past seven of a cold November evening, the heat on,

the light switching its tail in two hundred directions, the Fog Horn bumbling in the high throat of the tower. There wasn't a town for a hundred miles down the coast, just a road, which came lonely through dead country to the sea, with few cars on it, a stretch of two miles of cold water out to our rock, and rare few ships.

"The mysteries of the sea," said McDunn thoughtfully. "You know, the ocean's the biggest damned snowflake ever? It rolls and swells a thousand shapes and colours, no two alike. Strange. One night, years ago, I was here alone, when all of the fish of the sea surfaced out there. Something made them swim in and lie in the bay, sort of trembling and staring up at the tower light going red, white, red, white across them so I could see their funny eyes. I turned cold. They were like a big peacock's tail, moving out there until midnight. Then, without so much as a sound, they slipped away, the million of them was gone. I kind of think maybe, in some sort of way, they came all those miles to worship. Strange. But think how the tower must look to them, standing seventy feet above the water, the God-light flashing out from it, and the tower declaring itself with a monster voice. They never came back, those fish, but don't you think for a while they thought they were in the Presence?"

I shivered. I looked out at the long grey lawn of the sea stretching away into nothing and nowhere.

"Oh, the sea's full." McDunn puffed his pipe nervously, blinking. He had been nervous all day and hadn't said why. "For all our engines and so-called submarines, it'll be ten thousand centuries before we set foot on the real bottom of the sunken lands, in the fairy kingdoms there, and know *real* terror. Think of it, it's still the year 300,000 Before Christ down under there. While we've paraded around with trumpets, lopping off each other's countries and heads, they have been

living beneath the sea twelve miles deep and cold in a time as old as the beard of a comet.”

“Yes, it’s an old world.”

“Come on. I got something special I been saving up to tell you.”

We ascended the eighty steps, talking and taking our time. At the top, McDunn switched off the room lights so there’d be no reflection in the plate glass. The great eye of the light was humming, turning easily in its oiled socket. The Fog Horn was blowing steadily, once every fifteen seconds.

“Sounds like an animal, don’t it?” McDunn nodded to himself. “A big lonely animal crying in the night. Sitting here on the edge of ten billion years calling out to the Deeps, I’m here, I’m here, I’m here. And the Deeps do answer, yes, they do. You been here now for three months, Johnny, so I better prepare you. About this time of year,” he said, studying the murk and fog, “something comes to visit the lighthouse.”

“The swarms of fish like you said?”

“No, this is something else. I’ve put off telling you because you might think I’m daft. But tonight’s the latest I can put it off, for if my calendar’s marked right from last year, tonight’s the night it comes. I won’t go into detail, you’ll have to see it yourself. Just sit down there. If you want, tomorrow you can pack your duffel and take the motorboat into land and get your car parked there at the dinghy pier on the cape and drive on back to some little inland town and keep your lights burning nights. I won’t question or blame you. It’s happened three years now, and this is the only time anyone’s been here with me to verify it. You wait and watch.”

Half an hour passed with only a few whispers between us. When we grew tired waiting, McDunn began describing some of his ideas to me. He had some theories about the Fog Horn itself.

“One day many years ago a man walked along and stood in the sound of the ocean on a cold sunless shore and said, ‘We need a voice to call across the water, to warn ships; I’ll make one. I’ll make a voice like all of time and all of the fog that ever was; I’ll make a voice that is like an empty bed beside you all night long, and like an empty house when you open the door, and like trees in autumn with no leaves. A sound like the birds flying south, crying, and a sound like November wind and the sea on the hard, cold shore. I’ll make a sound that’s so alone that no one can miss it, that whoever hears it will weep in their souls, and hearths will seem warmer, and being inside will seem better to all who hear it in the distant towns. I’ll make me a sound and an apparatus and they’ll call it a Fog Horn and whoever hears it will know the sadness of eternity and the briefness of life.’”

The Fog Horn blew.

“I made up that story,” said McDunn quietly, “to try to explain why this thing keeps coming back to the lighthouse every year. The Fog Horn calls it, I think, and it comes. . . .”

“But—” I said.

“Ssst!” said McDunn. “There!” He nodded out to the Deeps.

Something was swimming toward the lighthouse tower.

It was a cold night, as I have said; the high tower was cold, the light was coming and going, and the Fog Horn calling and calling through the ravelling mist. You couldn’t see far and you couldn’t see plain, but there was the deep sea moving on its way about the night earth, flat and quiet, the colour of grey mud, and here were the two of us alone in the high tower, and there, far out at first, was a ripple, followed by a wave, a rising, a bubble, a bit of froth. And then, from the surface of the cold sea came a head, a large head, dark-coloured, with immense eyes, and then a neck. And then—not a body—but more neck

and more! The head rose a full forty feet above the water on a slender and beautiful dark neck. Only then did the body, like a little island of black coral and shells and crayfish, drip up from the subterranean. There was a flicker of tail. In all, from head to tip of tail, I estimated the monster at ninety or a hundred feet.

I don't know what I said. I said something.

"Steady, boy, steady," whispered McDunn.

"It's impossible!" I said.

"No, Johnny, *we're* impossible. *It's* like it always was ten million years ago. *It* hasn't changed. It's *us* and the land that've changed, become impossible. *Us!*"

It swam slowly and with a great dark majesty out in the icy waters, far away. The fog came and went about it, momentarily erasing its shape. One of the monster eyes caught and held and flashed back our immense light, red, white, red, white, like a disc held high and sending a message in primeval code. It was as silent as the fog through which it swam.

"It's a dinosaur of some sort!" I crouched down, holding to the stair rail.

"Yes, one of the tribe."

"But they died out!"

"No, only hid away in the Deeps. Deep, deep down in the deepest Deeps. Isn't *that* a word now, Johnny, a real word, it says so much: the Deeps. There's all the coldness and darkness and deepness in the world in a world like that."

"What'll we do?"

"Do? We got our job, we can't leave. Besides, we're safer here than in any boat trying to get to land. That thing's as big as a destroyer and almost as swift."

"But here, why does it come *here*?"

The next moment I had my answer.

The Fog Horn blew.



And the monster answered.

A cry came across a million years of water and mist. A cry so anguished and alone that it shuddered in my head and my body. The monster cried out at the tower. The Fog Horn blew. The monster roared again. The Fog Horn blew. The monster opened its great toothed mouth and the sound that came from it was the sound of the Fog Horn itself. Lonely and vast and far away. The sound of isolation, a viewless sea, a cold night, apartness. That was the sound.

“Now,” whispered McDunn, “do you know why it comes here?”

I nodded.

“All year long, Johnny, that poor monster there lying far out, a thousand miles at sea, and twenty miles deep maybe, biding its time, perhaps it’s a million years old, this one creature. Think of it, waiting a million years; could *you* wait that long? Maybe it’s the last of its kind. I sort of think that’s true. Anyway, here come men on land and build this lighthouse, five years ago. And set up their Fog Horn and sound it and sound it out toward the place where you bury yourself in sleep and sea memories of a world where there were thousands like yourself, but now you’re alone, all alone in a world not made for you, a world where you have to hide.

“But the sound of the Fog Horn comes and goes, comes and goes, and you stir from the muddy bottom of the Deeps, and your eyes open like the lenses of two-foot cameras and you move, slow, slow, for you have the ocean sea on your shoulders, heavy. But that Fog Horn comes through a thousand miles of water, faint and familiar, and the furnace in your belly stokes up, and you begin to rise, slow, slow. You feed yourself on great slakes of cod and minnow, on rivers of jellyfish, and you rise slow through the autumn months, through September when the fogs started, through October with more fog and the

horn still calling you on, and then, late in November, after pressurizing yourself day by day, a few feet higher every hour, you are near the surface and still alive. You've got to go slow; if you surfaces all at once you'd explode. So it takes you all of three months to surface, and then a number of days to swim through the cold waters to the lighthouse. And there you are, out there, in the night, Johnny, the biggest damn monster in creation. And here's the lighthouse calling to you, with a long neck like your neck sticking way up out of the water, and a body like your body, and, most important of all, a voice like your voice. Do you understand now, Johnny, do you understand?"

The Fog Horn blew.

The monster answered.

I saw it all, I knew it all—the million years of waiting alone, for someone to come back who never came back. The million years of isolation at the bottom of the sea, the insanity of time there, while the skies cleared of reptile-birds, the swamps dried on the continental lands, the sloths and sabre-tooths had their day and sank in tar pits, and men ran like white ants upon the hills.

The Fog Horn blew.

"Last year," said McDunn, "that creature swam round and round, round and round, all night. Not coming too near, puzzled, I say. Afraid, maybe. And a bit angry after coming all this way. But the next day, unexpectedly, the fog lifted, the sun came out fresh, the sky was as blue as a painting. And the monster swam off away from the heat and the silence and didn't come back. I suppose it's been brooding on it for a year now, thinking it over from every which way."

The monster was only a hundred yards off now, it and the Fog Horn crying at each other. As the lights hit them, the monster's eyes were fire and ice, fire and ice.

“That’s life for you,” said McDunn. “Someone always waiting for someone who never comes home. Always someone loving some thing more than that thing loves them. And after a while you want to destroy whatever that thing is, so it can’t hurt you no more.”

The monster was rushing at the lighthouse.

The Fog Horn blew.

“Let’s see what happens,” said McDunn.

He switched the Fog Horn off.

The ensuing minute of silence was so intense that we could hear our hearts pounding in the glassed area of the tower, could hear the slow greased turn of the light.

The monster stopped and froze. Its great lantern eyes blinked. Its mouth gaped. It gave a sort of rumble, like a volcano. It twitched its head this way and that, as if to seek the sounds now dwindled off into the fog. It peered at the lighthouse. It rumbled again. Then its eyes caught fire. It reared up, threshed the water, and rushed at the tower, its eyes filled with angry torment.

“McDunn!” I cried. “Switch on the horn!”

McDunn fumbled with the switch. But even as he flicked it on, the monster was rearing up. I had a glimpse of its gigantic paws, fishskin glittering in webs between the finger-like projections, clawing at the tower. The huge eye on the right side of its anguished head glittered before me like a cauldron into which I might drop, screaming. The tower shook. The Fog Horn cried; the monster cried. It seized the tower and gnashed at the glass, which shattered in upon us.

McDunn seized my arm. “Downstairs!”

The tower rocked, trembled, and started to give. The Fog Horn and the monster roared. We stumbled and half fell down the stairs. “Quick!”

We reached the bottom as the tower buckled down toward

us. We ducked under the stairs into the small stone cellar. There were a thousand concussions as the rocks rained down; the Fog Horn stopped abruptly. The monster crashed upon the tower. The tower fell. We knelt together, McDunn and I, holding tight, while our world exploded.

Then it was over, and there was nothing but darkness and the wash of the sea on the raw stones.

That and the other sound.

“Listen,” said McDunn quietly. “Listen.”

We waited a moment. And then I began to hear it. First a great vacuumed sucking of air, and then the lament, the bewilderment, the loneliness of the great monster, folded over and over upon us, above us, so that the sickening reek of its body filled the air, a stone’s thickness away from our cellar. The monster gasped and cried. The tower was gone. The light was gone. The thing that had called to it across a million years was gone. And the monster was opening its mouth and sending out great sounds. The sounds of a Fog Horn, again and again. And ships far at sea, not finding the light, not seeing anything, but passing and hearing late that night, must’ve thought: There it is, the lonely sound, the Lonesome Bay horn. All’s well. We’ve rounded the cape.

And so it went for the rest of that night.

The sun was hot and yellow the next afternoon when the rescuers came out to dig us from our stoned-under cellar.

“It fell apart, is all,” said Mr. McDunn gravely. “We had a few bad knocks from the waves and it just crumbled.” He pinched my arm.

There was nothing to see. The ocean was calm, the sky blue. The only thing was a great algaic stink from the green matter that covered the fallen tower stones and the shore rocks. Flies buzzed about. The ocean washed empty on the shore.

The next year they built a new lighthouse, but by that time

I had a job in the little town and a wife and a good small warm house that glowed yellow on autumn nights, the doors locked, the chimney puffing smoke. As for McDunn, he was master of the new lighthouse, built to his own specifications, out of steel-reinforced concrete. "Just in case," he said.

The new lighthouse was ready in November. I drove down alone one evening late and parked my car and looked across the grey waters and listened to the new horn sounding, once, twice, three, four times a minute far out there, by itself.

The monster?

It never came back.

"It's gone away," said McDunn. "It's gone back to the Deeps. It's learned you can't love anything too much in this world. It's gone into the deepest Deeps to wait another million years. Ah, the poor thing! Waiting out there, and waiting out there, while man comes and goes on this pitiful little planet. Waiting and waiting."

I sat in my car, listening. I couldn't see the lighthouse or the light standing out in Lonesome Bay. I could only hear the Horn, the Horn, the Horn. It sounded like the monster calling.

I sat there wishing there was something I could say.

IMPULSE

ERIC FRANK RUSSELL

In which Dr. Blain is visited by a body of Glantokians inhabiting the body of a corpse. A space vessel carried them from their home world of Glantok to Earth, where they transferred to the body of a dog. Then they took the corpse from its grave—but what they really want is an intelligent living body to inhabit. And that is why they need Dr. Blain's help . . .

IT was his receptionist's evening off, and Dr. Blain had to answer the waiting-room buzzer himself. Mentally cursing the prolonged absence of Tod Mercer, his general factotum, he closed the tap of the burette, took the beaker of neutralized liquid from beneath, and set it on a shelf.

Hastily he thrust a folding spatula into a vest pocket, rubbed his hands together, gave a brief glance around the small laboratory. Then he carried his tall, spare form to the waiting room.

The visitor was sprawled in an easy chair. Dr. Blain looked him over and saw a cadaverous individual with mackerel eyes, mottled skin, and pale, bloated hands. The fellow's clothes didn't fit him much better than a sack.

Blain weighed him up as a case of pernicious ulcers, or else a hopeful seller of insurance that he had no intention of buying. In any event, he decided, the man's expression had a weird

twist. It gave him the willies.

“Dr. Blain, I believe?” said the man in the chair. His voice gargled slowly, uncannily, and the sound of it grew pimples down Blain’s spine.

Without waiting for a reply, and with his dead optics fixed on the standing Blain, the visitor continued. “We are a cadaverous individual with mackerel eyes, mottled skin, and pale, bloated hands.”

Sitting down abruptly, Dr. Blain grasped the arms of his chair until his knuckles stood out like blisters. His visitor gurgled on slowly and imperturbably.

“Our clothes don’t fit us much better than a sack. We are a case of pernicious ulcers, or else a seller of insurance that you have no intention of buying. Our expression has a strange twist, and it gives you the willies.”

The speaker rolled a rotting eye which leered, with horrible lack of lustre, at the thunderstruck Blain. He added, “Our voice gargles, and the sound of it raises pimples on your spine. We have decaying eyes that leer at you with lack of lustre that you consider horrible.”

With a mighty effort, Blain leaned forward, red-faced, trembling. His iron-grey hairs were erect on the back of his neck. Before he could open his mouth, his visitor spoke his unuttered words for him. “Good heavens! You’ve been reading my very thoughts!”

The fellow’s cold optics remained riveted to Blain’s astounded face while the latter shot to his feet. Then he said briefly, simply, “Be seated.”

Blain remained standing. Small globules of perspiration crept through the skin of his brow, trickled down his tired, lined face.

More urgently, warningly, the other gulped, “Be seated!”

His legs strangely weak at the knees, Blain sat. He stared at

the ghastly pallor of his visitor's features and stammered, "W—who the devil are you?"

"That!" He tossed Blain a clipping.

A casual look, followed by one far more intent, then Blain protested, "But this is a newspaper report about a corpse being stolen from a morgue."

"Correct," agreed the being opposite.

"But I don't understand." Blain's strained features showed his puzzlement.

"This," said the other, pointing a colourless finger at his sagging vest, "is the corpse."

"*What?*" For the second time, Blain came to his feet. The clipping dropped from his nerveless fingers, fluttered to the carpet. He towered over the thing in the chair, expelled his breath in a loud hiss, and sought vainly for words.

"This is the body," repeated the claimant. His voice sounded as if it were being bubbled through thick oil. He pointed to the clipping. "You failed to notice the picture. Look at it. Compare the face with the one that we have."

"We?" Blain queried, his mind in a whirl.

"We! There are many of us. We commandeered this body. Sit down."

"But—"

"Sit down!" The creature in the chair slid a cold, limp hand inside his sloppy jacket, lugged out a big automatic, and pointed it awkwardly. To Blain's view, the weapon's muzzle gaped hugely. He sat down, recovering the clipping, and stared at the picture.

The caption said, "The late James Winstanley Clegg, whose body mysteriously vanished last night from the Simmstown morgue."

Blain looked at his visitor, then at the picture, then at his visitor again. The two were the same, undoubtedly the same.

Blood began to pound in his arteries.

The automatic drooped, wavered, lifted up once more. "Your questions are anticipated," slobbered the late James Winstanley Clegg. "No, this is not a case of spontaneous revival of a cataleptic. Your idea is ingenious, but it does not explain the thought reading."

"Then of what *is* this a case?" demanded Blain with sudden courage.

"Confiscation." His eyes jerked unnaturally. "We have entered into possession. Before you is a man possessed." He permitted himself a ghoulisn chuckle. "It seems that in life this brain was endowed with a sense of humour."

"Nevertheless, I can't—"

"Silence!" the gun wagged to emphasize the command. "We shall talk; you will listen. We shall comprehend your thoughts."

"All right." Dr. Blain lay back in his chair, kept a wary eye on the door. He felt convinced that he had to deal with a madman. Yes, a maniac—despite the thought reading, despite that picture on the clipping.

"Two days ago," gargled Clegg, or what once had been Clegg, "a so-called meteor landed outside this town."

"I read about it," Blain admitted. "They looked for it, but failed to find it."

"That phenomenon was actually a space vessel." The automatic sagged in the flabby hand; its holder rested the weapon on his lap. "It was a space vessel that had carried us from our home world of Glantok. The vessel was exceedingly small by your standards—but we, too, are small. Very small. We are submicroscopic, and our number is myriad.

"No, not intelligent germs." The ghastly speaker stole the thought from his listener's mind. "We are less even than those." He paused while he searched around for words more explicit.



“In the mass, we resemble a liquid. You might regard us as an intelligent virus.”

“Oh!” Blain struggled to calculate the number of jumps necessary to reach the door, and do it without revealing his thoughts.

“We Glantokians are parasitical in the sense that we inhabit and control the bodies of lesser creatures. We came here, to your world, while occupying the body of a small Glantokian mammal.” He coughed with a viscous rumble deep down in his gullet, then continued.

“When we landed and emerged, an excited dog chased our creature and caught it. We caught the dog. Our creature died when we deserted it. The dog was useless for our purpose, but it served to transport us into your town and find us this body. We acquired the body. When we left the dog, it lay on its back and died.”

The gate creaked with a sudden rasping sound that brought Blain’s taut nerves to the snapping point. Light footsteps pit-patted up the asphalt path toward the front door. He waited with bated breath, ears alert, eyes wide with apprehension.

“We took this body, liquefied the congealed blood, loosened the rigid joints, softened the dead muscles, and made it walk. It seems that its brain was fairly intelligent in life, and even in death its memories remain recorded. We utilize this dead brain’s knowledge to think in human terms and to converse with you after your own fashion.”

The approaching footsteps were near, very near. Blain shifted his feet to a solid position on the rug, tightened his grip on the arms of his chair, and fought to keep his thoughts under control. The other took not the slightest notice, but kept his haggard face turned to Blain and continued slushily to mouth his words.

“Under our control, the body stole these clothes and this

weapon. Its own defunct mind recorded the weapon's purpose and told us how it is used. It also told us about you."

"Me?" Startled, Dr. Blain leaned forward, braced his arms, and calculated that his intended spring would barely beat the lift of the opposing automatic. The feet outside had reached the steps.

"It is not wise," warned the creature who claimed to be a corpse. He raised his gun with lethargic hand. "Your thoughts are not only observed but their conclusions anticipated."

Blain relaxed. The feet were tripping up the steps to the front door.

"A dead body is a mere makeshift," the other mouthed. "We must have a live one, with little or no organic disability. As we increase, we must have more bodies. Unfortunately, the susceptibility of nervous systems is in direct proportion to the intelligence of their owners." He gasped, then choked with the same liquid rattle as before.

"We cannot guarantee to occupy the bodies of the intelligently conscious without sending them insane in the process. A disordered brain is less use to us than a recently dead one, and no more use than a wrecked machine would be to you."

The patter of leather ceased; the front door opened, and somebody entered the passage. The door clicked shut. Feet moved along the carpet toward the waiting room.

"Therefore," continued the human who was not human, "we must occupy the intelligent while they are too deeply unconscious to be affected by our permeation, and we must be in complete possession when they awake. We must have the assistance of someone able to treat the intelligent in the manner we desire, and do it without arousing general suspicion. In other words, we require the cooperation of a doctor."

The awful eyes bulged slightly. Their owner added, "Since this inefficient body is beyond even our power to animate

much longer, we must have a fresh, live, healthy one as soon as it can be obtained."

The feet in the passage hesitated, stopped. The door opened. At that instant, the dead Clegg stabbed a pallid finger at Blain and burbled, "You will assist us"—the finger swerved toward the door—"and that body will do for the first."

The girl in the doorway was young, fair-headed, pleasingly plump. She posed there, one hand concealing the crimson of her small, half-opened mouth. Her blue eyes were wide with fearful fascination as they gazed at the blanched mask behind the pointing finger.

There was a moment's deep silence, while the digit maintained its fateful gesture. Its owner's features became subject to progressive achromatism, grew more hueless, more ashy. His optics—dead balls in frigid sockets—suddenly glittered with minute specks of light, green light, hellish. He struggled clumsily to his feet, teetered backward and forward on his heels.

The girl gasped. Her eyes lowered, saw the automatic in a hand escaped from the grave. She screamed on a note weak because of its height. She screamed as if she were surrendering her soul to the unknown. Then, as the living dead tottered toward her, she closed her eyes and slumped.

Blain got her just before she hit the floor. He covered the distance in three frantic leaps, caught her smoothly moulded body, saved it from bruising contact. He rested her head upon the carpet, patted her cheeks vigorously.

"She's fainted," he growled, in open anger. "She may be a patient or may have come to summon me to a patient. An urgent case, perhaps."

"Enough!" The voice was curt, despite its eerie bubbling. The gun pointed directly at Blain's brow. "We see, from your thoughts, that this fainting condition is a temporary one. Nevertheless, it is opportune. You will take advantage of the

situation, place the body under an anaesthetic, and we shall claim it for our own.”

From his kneeling position beside the girl, Blain looked up and said slowly and deliberately, “I shall see you in hell!”

“No need to have spoken the thought,” remarked the creature. He grimaced horribly, took two jerky steps forward. “You may do it yourself, or else we shall do it with the aid of your own knowledge and your own flesh. A bullet through your heart, we take possession of you, repair the wound, and you are ours.”

“Damn you!” he cursed, stealing the words from Blain’s own lips. “We could use you in any case, but we prefer a live body to a dead one.”

Throwing a hopeless glance around the room, Dr. Blain uttered a mental prayer for help—a prayer cut short by the grin of understanding on his opponent’s face. Getting up from his knees, he lifted the girl’s limp form, carried her through the door, along the passage, and into the surgery. The thing that was the body of Clegg stumbled grotesquely behind him.

Gently lowering the girl to a chair, Blain rubbed her hands and wrists, patted her cheeks again. Faint colour crept back to her skin; her eyes fluttered. Blain stepped to a cupboard, slid aside its glass doors, grasped a bottle of *sal volatile*. Something hard prodded him between his shoulder blades. It was the automatic.

“You forget that your mind processes are like an open book. You are trying to revive the body and are playing for time.” The sickly countenance behind the weapon forced its facial muscles into a lopsided scowl. “Place the body on that table and anaesthetize it.”

Unwillingly, Dr. Blain withdrew his hand from the cupboard. He picked up the girl, laid her on the examination table, switched on the powerful lamp that hung directly overhead.

“More meddling!” commented the other. “Turn off that lamp—the one already burning is quite sufficient.”

Blain turned off the lamp. His face drawn with agitation, but head erect, his fists bunched, he faced the menacing weapon and said, “Listen to me. I’ll make you a proposition.”

“Nonsense!” The former Clegg wandered around the table with slow, dragging steps. “As we remarked before, you are playing for time. Your own brain advertises the fact.” He stopped abruptly as the recumbent girl murmured vague words and tried to sit up. “Quick! The anaesthetic!”

Before either could move, the girl sat up. She came upright and looked straight into a ghastly face that moped and mewed a foot from her own features. She shuddered and said pitifully, “Let me out of here. Let me out. Please!”

A bloated hand reached out to push her. She lay down to avoid contact with the loathsome flesh.

Taking advantage of the slight diversion, Blain slid a hand behind his back, felt for an ornamental poker hanging on the wall. The gun swung up even as his fingers found the impromptu weapon and curled around its cool metal.

“You forget yourself.” Pin-point fires sparkled in the other’s blotchy orbs. “Mental understanding is not limited in direction. We see you even when these eyes are elsewhere.” The gun moved to indicate the girl. “Tie that body down.”

Obediently, Dr. Blain found straps, fastened the girl securely to the table. His grey hair was limp, his face moist, as he bent over her and threaded the buckles. He looked at her with courage hardly justified and whispered, “Patience—do not fear.” He threw a significant glance at the clock ticking upon the wall. The instrument’s hands indicated two minutes before eight.

“So you expect aid,” effervesced the tones of a corporate myriad. “Tod Mercer, your handyman, who ought to have

been here before now. You think he might be of help, though you have little faith in what few wits he has. In your opinion, he is a dumb ox—too stupid to know his feet from his hands.”

“You devil!” swore Dr. Blain at this recital of his thoughts.

“Let this Mercer come. He will be of use—to us! There are enough of us for two bodies—and even a live fool is better than an educated corpse.” Anaemic lips twisted in a snarl that revealed dry teeth. “Meanwhile, get busy with that body.”

“I don’t think I have any ether,” Blain protested.

“You have something that will do. Your cortex shouts it! Be speedy, lest we lose patience and take you at the cost of your sanity.”

Swallowing hard, Blain opened a drawer and extracted a nasal frame. He clipped on its cotton-gauze pad, placed the frame over the frightened girl’s nose. He felt safe in giving her a reassuring wink. A wink is not a thought.

Opening the cupboard once more, Blain stood in front of it, summoned all his faculties, and compelled his mind to recite, “Ether, ether, ether.” At the same time, he forced his hand toward a bottle of concentrated sulphuric acid. He made a mighty effort to achieve his dual purpose, urged his fingers nearer and nearer to the bottle. He got it.

Straining every fibre of his being to do one thing while his mind was fixed upon another, he turned around, withdrawing the glass stopper as he turned. Then he stood still, the open bottle in his right hand. The figure of death was immediately in front of him, gun raised.

“Ether,” sneered the vocal cords of Clegg. “Your conscious mind yelled ‘Ether!’ while your subconscious mind whispered ‘Acid!’ Do you think your inferior intelligence can cope with ours? Do you think you can destroy that which is already dead? You fool!” The gun inched forward. “The anaesthetic—without further delay.”

Offering no reply, Dr. Blain rammed the stopper into its neck, replaced the bottle whence he had taken it. More deliberately moving with utmost slowness, he crossed the floor to a smaller cupboard, opened it, took out a small bottle of ether. He placed the bottle on the radiator and started to close the cupboard.

“Take it off!” croaked the uncanny voice with high-pitched urgency. The gun emitted a warning click as Blain snatched the bottle. “So you hoped the radiator would make the stuff vaporize rapidly enough to burst the bottle, eh?”

Dr. Blain said nothing. Taking as much time as possible, he conveyed the volatile liquid to the table. The girl watched his approach, her eyes wide with apprehension. She gave a low sob. Blain flung a glance at the clock, but, quick as a glance was, his tormenter caught the thought behind it and grinned.

“He is here now.”

“Who is here?” demanded Blain.

“Your man, Mercer. He is outside, just about to enter the front door. We perceive the futile wanderings of his sluggish mind. You have not overestimated what little intelligence he does possess.”

The front door opened in confirmation of the speaker’s prophecy. The girl struggled to raise her head, hope in her eyes.

“Prop her mouth open with something,” articulated the voice under alien control. “We shall enter through the mouth.” He paused, as heavy feet scuffled on the front door mat. “And call that fool in here. We shall use him also.”

His veins bulging on his forehead, Dr. Blain called, “Tod! Come here!” He found a dental gag, toyed with its ratchet.

Excitement thrilled his nerves from head to feet. No gun could shoot two ways at once. If he could wangle the idiotic Mercer into the right position, and put him wise—If he could

be on one side and Tod on the other—

“Don’t try it,” advised the animated Clegg. “Don’t even think it. If you do, we shall end up by having you both.”

Tod Mercer lumbered into the room, his heavy soles thumping the rug. He was a big man, with thick shoulders jutting below a plump, moonlike face that sprouted two days’ growth. He stopped when he saw the table and the girl. His great, wide, stupid eyes roamed from the girl to the doctor.

“Heck, Doc,” he said, with an uneasy fidget, “I got me a puncture and had to change tyres on the road.”

“Never mind about that,” came a sardonic rumble right behind him. “You’re in plenty of time.”

Tod turned around sluggishly, twisting his boots as if each weighed a ton. He stared at the thing that had been Clegg and said, “Beg pardon, Mister. I didn’t know you was there.”

His cowlike eyes wandered disinterestedly over the living corpse, over the pointing automatic, then slewed toward the anxious Blain. Tod opened his mouth to say something. He closed the mouth; a look of faint surprise came into his fat features; his eyes swivelled back and found the automatic again.

This time, the look didn’t last one tenth of a second. His eyes realized what they saw. He swung a hamlike fist with astounding swiftness, slammed it into the erstwhile Clegg’s awful features. The blow was dynamite, sheer dynamite. The cadaver went down with a crash that shook the room.

“Quick!” screamed Dr. Blain. “Get the gun.” He vaulted the intervening table—girl and all—landed heavily, made a wild kick at the weapon still gripped in a flabby hand.

Tod Mercer stood abashed, his eyes turning this way and that. The automatic exploded thunderously; its slug nicked the tubular metal edge of the table, ricocheted with a noise like that of a buzz saw, and ripped a foot of plaster from the

opposite wall.

Blain kicked frantically at a ghastly wrist, missed it when its owner jerked it aside. The gun boomed again. Glass tinkled in the farther cupboard. The girl on the table screamed shrilly.

The scream penetrated Mercer's thick skull and brought action. Slamming down a great boot, he imprisoned a rubbery wrist beneath his heel, plucked the automatic from cold fingers. He hefted the weapon, pointed it.

"You can't kill it like that," shouted Blain. He jabbed Tod Mercer to emphasize his words. "Get the girl out of here. Jump to it, man, for heaven's sake!"

Blain's urgency brooked no argument. Mercer handed over the automatic, moved to the table, ripped the straps from the weeping girl. His huge arms plucked her up, bore her from the room.

Down on the floor, the pilfered body writhed and struggled to get up. Its rotting eyes had disappeared. Their sockets were now filled with swirling pools of emerald luminosity. Its mouth gaped as it slowly regurgitated a bright green phosphorescence. The spawn of Glantok was leaving its host!

The body sat up with its back to the wall. Its limbs jerked and twitched in nightmarish postures. It was a fearful travesty of a human being. Green—bright and living green—crept sinuously from its eyes and mouth, formed twisting, swirling snakes and pools upon the floor.

Blain gained the door in one gigantic leap, snatching the ether bottle from the table as he passed. He stood in the doorway, trembling. Then he flung the bottle in the centre of the seething green. He flicked his automatic lighter, tossed it after the bottle. The entire room boomed into a mighty blast of flame that immediately became a fiery hell.

The girl clung tightly to Dr. Blain's arm while they stood by the roadside and watched the house burn. She said, "I came

to call you to my kid brother. We think he's got measles."

"I'll be along soon," Blain promised.

A sedan roared up the road, stopped near them with engine still racing. A policeman put his head out and shouted, "What a blaze! We saw the glare a mile back along the road. We've called the fire department."

"They'll be too late, I'm afraid," said Blain.

"Insured?" asked the policeman sympathetically.

"Yes."

"Everybody out of the house?"

Blain nodded an affirmative, and the policeman said, "We happened to be out this way looking for an escaped nut." The sedan rolled forward.

"Hey!" Blain shouted. The sedan stopped again. "Was this madman's name James Winstanley Clegg?"

"Clegg?" came the driver's voice from the other side of the sedan. "Why, that's the fellow whose body walked out of the morgue when the attendant had his back turned for a minute. Funny thing, they found a dead mongrel in the morgue right by where the missing body ought to have been. The reporters are starting to call it a werewolf, but it's still a dog to me."

"Anyway, this fellow isn't Clegg," chimed in the first policeman. "He's Wilson. He's small, but nasty. This is what he looks like," He stretched an arm from the automobile, handed Blain a photograph. Blain studied the picture in the light of rising flames. It bore not the slightest resemblance to his visitor of that evening.

"I'll remember that face," Dr. Blain commented, handing the photograph back.

"Know anything about this Clegg mystery?" inquired the driver.

"I know that he's dead," Blain answered truthfully.

Pensively, Dr. Blain watched flames leap skyward from his

home. He turned to the gaping Mercer and said, "What beats me is how you managed to hit that fellow without his anticipating your intention and plugging you where you stood."

"I saw the gun, and I 'it 'im." Mercer spread apologetic hands. "I saw 'e'd got a gun, and I 'it 'im without thinking."

"*Without thinking!*" murmured Blain.

Dr. Blain chewed his bottom lip, stared at the mounting fire. Roof timbers caved in with a violent crash; a flood of sparks poured upward.

With his mind, but not his ears, he heard faint threnodies of an alien wail that became weaker and weaker, and presently died away.

NEGOTIUM PERAMBULANS

E. F. BENSON

In which any man who desecrates the altar of God is attacked by The Thing—a gigantic hairless caterpillar which exudes an odour of corruption and decay. The legend “Negotium perambulans in tenebris” on a panel in the altar is thus fulfilled!

THE casual tourist in west Cornwall may just possibly have noticed, as he bowled along over the bare high plateau between Penzance and the Land’s End, a dilapidated signpost pointing down a steep lane and bearing on its battered finger the faded inscription “Polearn 2 miles,” but probably very few have had the curiosity to traverse those two miles in order to see a place to which their guidebooks award so cursory a notice. It is described there, in a couple of unattractive lines, as a small fishing village with a church of no particular interest except for certain carved and painted wooden panels (originally belonging to an earlier edifice) which form an altar-rail. But the church at St. Creed (the tourist is reminded) has a similar decoration far superior in point of preservation and interest, and thus even the ecclesiastically disposed are not lured to Polearn. So meagre a bait is scarce worth swallowing, and a glance at the very steep lane which in dry weather presents a carpet of sharp-pointed stones, and after rain a muddy water-

course, will almost certainly decide him not to expose his motor or his bicycle to risks like these in so sparsely populated a district. Hardly a house has met his eye since he left Penzance, and the possible trundling of a punctured bicycle for half a dozen weary miles seems a high price to pay for the sight of a few painted panels.

Polearn, therefore, even in the high noon of the tourist season, is little liable to invasion, and for the rest of the year I do not suppose that a couple of folk a day traverse those two miles (long ones at that) of steep and stony gradient. I am not forgetting the postman in this exiguous estimate, for the days are few when, leaving his pony and cart at the top of the hill, he goes as far as the village, since but a few hundred yards down the lane there stands a large white box, like a sea-trunk, by the side of the road, with a slit for letters and a locked door. Should he have in his wallet a registered letter or be the bearer of a parcel too large for insertion in the square lids of the sea-trunk, he must needs trudge down the hill and deliver the troublesome missive, leaving it in person on the owner, and receiving some small reward of coin or refreshment for his kindness. But such occasions are rare, and his general routine is to take out of the box such letters as may have been deposited there, and insert in their place such letters as he has brought. These will be called for, perhaps that day or perhaps the next, by an emissary from the Polearn post-office. As for the fishermen of the place, who, in their export trade, constitute the chief link of movement between Polearn and the outside world, they would not dream of taking their catch up the steep lane and so, with six miles farther of travel, to the market at Penzance. The sea route is shorter and easier, and they deliver their wares to the pier-head. Thus, though the sole industry of Polearn is sea-fishing, you will get no fish there unless you have bespoken your requirements to one of the fishermen.

Back come the trawlers as empty as a haunted house, while their spoils are in the fish-train that is speeding to London.

Such isolation of a little community, continued, as it has been, for centuries, produces isolation in the individual as well, and nowhere will you find greater independence of character than among the people of Polearn. But they are linked together, so it has always seemed to me, by some mysterious comprehension: it is as if they had all been initiated into some ancient rite, inspired and framed by forces visible and invisible. The winter storms that batter the coast, the vernal spell of the spring, the hot, still summers, the season of rains and autumnal decay, have made a spell which, line by line, has been communicated to them, concerning the powers, evil and good, that rule the world, and manifest themselves in ways benignant or terrible. . . .

I came to Polearn first at the age of ten, a small boy, weak and sickly, and threatened with pulmonary trouble. My father's business kept him in London, while for me abundance of fresh air and a mild climate were considered essential conditions if I was to grow to manhood. His sister had married the vicar of Polearn, Richard Bolitho, himself native to the place, and so it came about that I spent three years, as a paying guest, with my relations. Richard Bolitho owned a fine house in the place, which he inhabited in preference to the vicarage, which he let to a young artist, John Evans, on whom the spell of Polearn had fallen, for from year's beginning to year's end he never left it. There was a solid roofed shelter, open on one side to the air, built for me in the garden, and here I lived and slept, passing scarcely one hour out of the twenty-four behind walls and windows. I was out on the bay with the fisher-folk, or wandering along the gorse-clad cliffs that climbed steeply to right and left of the deep combe where the village lay, or pottering about on the pier-head, or bird's-nesting in the

bushes with boys of the village. Except on Sunday and for the few daily hours of my lessons, I might do what I pleased so long as I remained in the open air. About the lessons there was nothing formidable; my uncle conducted me through flowering bypaths among the thickets of arithmetic, and made pleasant excursions into the elements of Latin grammar, and above all, he made me daily give him an account, in clear and grammatical sentences, of what had been occupying my mind or my movements. Should I select to tell him about a walk along the cliffs, my speech must be orderly, not vague, slipshod notes of what I had observed. In this way, too, he trained my observation, for he would bid me tell him what flowers were in bloom, and what birds hovered fishing over the sea or were building in the bushes. For that I owe him a perennial gratitude, for to observe and to express my thoughts in the clear spoken word became my life's profession.

But far more formidable than my weekdays tasks was the prescribed routine for Sunday. Some dark embers compounded of Calvinism and mysticism smouldered in my uncle's soul, and made it a day of terror. His sermon in the morning scorched us with a foretaste of the eternal fires reserved for unrepentant sinners, and he was hardly less terrifying at the children's service in the afternoon. Well do I remember his exposition of the doctrine of guardian angels. A child, he said, might think himself secure in such angelic care, but let him beware of committing any of those numerous offences which would cause his guardian to turn his face from him, for as sure as there were angels to protect us, there were also evil and awful presences which were ready to pounce; and on them he dwelt with peculiar gusto. Well, too, do I remember in the morning sermon his commentary on the carved panels of the altar-rails to which I have already alluded. There was the angel of the Annunciation there, and the angel of the Resur-

rection, but not less was there the witch of Endor, and, on the fourth panel, a scene that concerned me most of all. This fourth panel (he came down from his pulpit to trace its time-worn features) represented the lych-gate of the church-yard at Polearn itself, and indeed the resemblance when thus pointed out was remarkable. In the entry stood the figure of a robed priest holding up a cross, with which he faced a terrible creature like a gigantic slug, that reared itself up in front of him. That, so ran my uncle's interpretation, was some evil agency, such as he had spoken about to us children, of almost infinite malignity and power, which could alone be combated by firm faith and a pure heart. Below ran the legend "*Negotium perambulans in tenebris*" from the ninety-first Psalm. We should find it translated there, "the pestilence that walketh in darkness," which but feebly rendered the Latin. It was more deadly to the soul than any pestilence that can only kill the body: it was the Thing, the Creature, the Business that trafficked in the outer Darkness, a minister of God's wrath on the unrighteous. . . .

I could see, as he spoke, the looks which the congregation exchanged with each other, and knew that his words were evoking a surmise, a remembrance. Nods and whispers passed between them, they understood to what he alluded, and with the inquisitiveness of boyhood I could not rest till I had wormed the story out of my friends among the fisher-boys, as, next morning, we sat basking and naked in the sun after our bathe. One knew one bit of it, one another, but it pieced together into a truly alarming legend. In bald outline it was as follows:

A church far more ancient than that in which my uncle terrified us every Sunday had once stood not three hundred yards away, on the shelf of level ground below the quarry from which its stones were hewn. The owner of the land had

pulled this down, and erected for himself a house on the same site out of these materials, keeping, in a very ecstasy of wickedness, the altar, and on this he dined and played dice afterwards. But as he grew old some black melancholy seized him, and he would have lights burning there all night, for he had deadly fear of the darkness. On one winter evening there sprang up such a gale as was never before known, which broke in the windows of the room where he had supped, and extinguished the lamps. Yells of terror brought in his servants, who found him lying on the floor with the blood streaming from his throat. As they entered some huge black shadow seemed to move away from him, crawled across the floor and up the wall and out of the broken window.

“There he lay a-dying,” said the last of my informants, “and him that had been a great burly man withered to a bag o’ skin, for the critter had drained all the blood from him. His last breath was a scream, and he hollered out the same words as passon read off the screen.”

“*Negotium perambulans in tenebris*,” I suggested eagerly.

“Thereabout. Latin anyhow.”

“And after that?” I asked.

“Nobody would go near the place, and the old house rotted and fell in ruins three years ago, when along comes Mr. Dooliss from Penzance, and built the half of it up again. But he don’t care much about such critters, nor about Latin neither. He takes his bottle of whisky a day and gets drunk’s a lord in the evening. Eh, I’m gwine home to my dinner.”

Whatever the authenticity of the legend, I had certainly heard the truth about Mr. Dooliss from Penzance, who from that day became an object of keen curiosity on my part, the more so because the quarry-house adjoined my uncle’s garden. The Thing that walked in the dark failed to stir my imagination, and already I was so used to sleeping alone in my shelter



that the night had no terrors for me. But it would be intensely exciting to wake at some timeless hour and hear Mr. Dooliss yelling, and conjecture that the Thing had got him.

But by degrees the whole story faded from my mind, overshadowed by the more vivid interest of the day, and, for the last two years of my out-door life in the vicarage garden, I seldom thought about Mr. Dooliss and the possible fate that might await him for his temerity in living in the place where the Thing of darkness had done business. Occasionally I saw him over the garden fence, a great yellow lump of a man, with slow and staggering gait, but never did I set eyes on him outside his gate, either in the village street or down on the beach. He interfered with none, and no one interfered with him. If he wanted to run the risk of being the prey of the legendary nocturnal monster, or quietly drink himself to death, it was his affair. My uncle, so I gathered, had made several attempts to see him when he first came to live at Polearn, but Mr. Dooliss appeared to have no use for parsons, said he was not at home, and never returned the call.

After three years of sun, wind, and rain, I had completely out-grown my early symptoms and had become a tough, strapping youngster of thirteen. I was sent to Eton and Cambridge, and in due course ate my dinners and became a barrister. In twenty years from that time I was earning a yearly income of five figures, and had already laid by in some securities a sum that brought me dividends which would, for one of my simple tastes and frugal habits, supply me with all the material comforts I needed on this side of the grave. The great prizes of my profession were already within my reach, but I had no ambition beckoning me on, nor did I want a wife and children, being, I must suppose, a natural celibate. In fact there was only one ambition which through these busy

years had held the lure of blue and far-off hills to me, and that was to get back to Polearn, and live once more isolated from the world with the sea and the gorse-clad hills for play-fellows, and the secrets that lurked there for exploration. The spell of it had been woven about my heart, and I can truly say that there had hardly passed a day in all those years in which the thought of it and the desire for it had been wholly absent from my mind. Though I had been in frequent communication with my uncle there during his lifetime, and, after his death, with his widow who still lived there, I had never been back to it since I embarked on my profession, for I knew that if I went there, it would be a wrench beyond my power to tear myself away again. But I had made up my mind that when once I had provided for my own independence, I would go back there not to leave it again. And yet I did leave it again, and now nothing in the world would induce me to turn down the lane from the road that leads from Penzance to the Land's End, and see the sides of the combe rise steeply above the roofs of the village and hear the gulls chiding as they fish in the bay. One of the things invisible, of the dark powers, leaped into light, and I saw it with my eyes.

The house where I had spent those three years of boyhood had been left for life to my aunt, and when I made known to her my intention of coming back to Polearn, she suggested that, till I found a suitable house or found her proposal unsuitable, I should come to live with her.

"The house is too big for a lone old woman," she wrote, "and I have often thought of quitting and taking a little cottage sufficient for me and my requirements. But come and share it, my dear, and if you find me troublesome, you or I can go. You may want solitude—most people in Polearn do—and will leave me. Or else I will leave you: one of the main reasons of my stopping here all these years was a feeling that I must

not let the old house starve. Houses starve, you know, if they are not lived in. They die a lingering death; the spirit in them grows weaker and weaker, and at last fades out of them. Isn't this nonsense to your London notions? . . ."

Naturally I accepted with warmth this tentative arrangement, and on an evening in June found myself at the head of the lane leading down to Polearn, and once more I descended into the steep valley between the hills. Time had stood still apparently for the combe, the dilapidated signpost (or its successor) pointed a rickety finger down the lane, and a few hundred yards farther on was the white box for the exchange of letters. Point after remembered point met my eye, and what I saw was not shrunk, as is often the case with the revisited scenes of childhood, into a smaller scale. There stood the post-office, and there the church and close beside the vicarage, and beyond, the tall shrubberies which separated the house for which I was bound from the road, and beyond that again the grey roofs of the quarry-house, damp and shining with the moist evening wind from the sea. All was exactly as I remembered it, and, above all, that sense of seclusion and isolation. Somewhere above the treetops climbed the lane which joined the main road to Penzance, but all that had become immeasurably distant. The years that had passed since last I turned in at the well-known gate faded like a frosty breath, and vanished in this warm, soft air. There were law-courts somewhere in memory's dull book which, if I cared to turn the pages, would tell me that I had made a name and a great income there. But the dull book was closed now, for I was back in Polearn, and the spell was woven around me again.

And if Polearn was unchanged, so too was Aunt Hester, who met me at the door. Dainty and china-white she had always been, and the years had not aged but only refined her. As we sat and talked after dinner she spoke of all that had

happened in Polearn in that score of years, and yet somehow the changes of which she spoke seemed but to confirm the immutability of it all. As the recollection of names came back to me, I asked her about the quarry-house and Mr. Dooliss, and her face gloomed a little as with the shadow of a cloud on a spring day.

“Yes, Mr. Dooliss,” she said, “poor Mr. Dooliss, how well I remember him, though it must be ten years and more since he died. I never wrote to you about it, for it was all very dreadful, my dear, and I did not want to darken your memories of Polearn. Your uncle always thought that something of the sort might happen if he went on in his wicked, drunken ways, and worse than that, and though nobody knew exactly what took place, it was the sort of thing that might have been anticipated.”

“But what more or less happened, Aunt Hester?” I asked.

“Well, of course, I can’t tell you everything, for no-one knew it. But he was a very sinful man, and the scandal about him at Newlyn was shocking. And then he lived, too, in the quarry-house. . . . I wonder if by any chance you remember a sermon of your uncle’s when he got out of the pulpit and explained that panel in the altar-rails, the one, I mean, with the horrible creature rearing itself up outside the lych-gate?”

“Yes, I remember it perfectly,” said I.

“Ah. It made an impression on you, I suppose, and so it did on all who heard him, and that impression got stamped and branded on us all when the catastrophe occurred. Somehow Mr. Dooliss got to hear about your uncle’s sermon, and in some drunken fit he broke into the church and smashed the panel to atoms. He seems to have thought that there was some magic in it, and that if he destroyed that he would get rid of the terrible fate that was threatening him. For I must tell you that before he committed that dreadful sacrilege he

had been a haunted man: he hated and feared darkness, for he thought that the creature on the panel was on his track, but that as long as he kept lights burning it could not touch him. But the panel, to his disordered mind, was the root of his terror, and so, as I said, he broke into the church and attempted—you will see why I said ‘attempted’—to destroy it. It certainly was found in splinters next morning, when your uncle went into church for matins, and knowing Mr. Dooliss’s fear of the panel, he went across to the quarry-house afterwards and taxed him with its destruction. The man never denied it; he boasted of what he had done. There he sat, though it was early morning, drinking his whisky.

“‘I’ve settled your Thing for you,’ he said, ‘and your sermon too. A fig for such superstitions.’

“Your uncle left him without answering his blasphemy, meaning to go straight into Penzance and give information to the police about this outrage to the church, but on his way back from the quarry-house he went into the church again, in order to be able to give details about the damage, and there in the screen was the panel, untouched and uninjured. And yet he had himself seen it smashed, and Mr. Dooliss had confessed that the destruction of it was his work. But there it was, and whether the power of God had mended it or some other power, who knows?”

This was Polearn indeed, and it was the spirit of Polearn that made me accept all Aunt Hester was telling me as attested fact. It had happened like that. She went on in her quiet voice.

“Your uncle recognised that some power beyond police was at work, and he did not go to Penzance or give information about the outrage, for the evidence of it had vanished.”

A sudden spate of scepticism swept over me.

“There must have been some mistake,” I said. “It hadn’t been broken. . . .”

She smiled.

“Yes, my dear, but you have been in London so long,” she said. “Let me, anyhow, tell you the rest of my story. That night, for some reason, I could not sleep. It was very hot and airless; I dare say you will think that the sultry conditions accounted for my wakefulness. Once and again, as I went to the window to see if I could not admit more air, I could see from it the quarry-house, and I noticed the first time that I left my bed that it was blazing with lights. But the second time I saw that it was all in darkness, and as I wondered at that, I heard a terrible scream, and the moment afterwards the steps of someone coming at full speed down the road outside the gate. He yelled as he ran, ‘Light, light!’ he called out. ‘Give me light, or it will catch me!’ It was very terrible to hear that, and I went to rouse my husband, who was sleeping in the dressing-room across the passage. He wasted no time, but by now the whole village was aroused by the screams, and when he got down to the pier he found that all was over. The tide was low, and on the rocks at its foot was lying the body of Mr. Dooliss. He must have cut some artery when he fell on those sharp edges of stone, for he had bled to death, they thought, and though he was a big burly man, his corpse was but skin and bones. Yet there was no pool of blood round him, such as you would have expected. Just skin and bones as if every drop of blood in his body had been sucked out of him!”

She leaned forward.

“You and I, my dear, know what happened,” she said, “or at least can guess. God has His instruments of vengeance on those who bring wickedness into places that have been holy. Dark and mysterious are His ways.”

Now what I should have thought of such a story if it had been told me in London I can easily imagine. There was such an obvious explanation: the man in question had been a

drunkard, what wonder if the demons of delirium pursued him? But here in Polearn it was different.

“And who is in the quarry-house now?” I asked. “Years ago the fisher-boys told me the story of the man who first built it and of his horrible end. And now again it has happened. Surely no one has ventured to inhabit it once more?”

I saw in her face, even before I asked that question, that somebody had done so.

“Yes, it is lived in again,” said she, “for there is no end to blindness. . . . I don’t know if you remember him. He was tenant of the vicarage many years ago.”

“John Evans,” said I.

“Yes. Such a nice fellow he was too. Your uncle was pleased to get so good a tenant. And now—” She rose.

“Aunt Hester, you shouldn’t leave your sentences unfinished,” I said.

She shook her head.

“My dear, that sentence will finish itself,” she said. “But what a time of night! I must go to bed, and you too, or they will think we have to keep lights burning here through the dark hours.”

Before getting into bed I drew my curtains wide and opened all the windows to the warm tide of the sea air that flowed softly in. Looking out into the garden I could see in the moonlight the roof of the shelter, in which for three years I had lived, gleaming with dew. That, as much as anything, brought back the old days to which I had now returned, and they seemed of one piece with the present, as if no gap of more than twenty years sundered them. The two flowed into one like globules of mercury uniting into a softly shining globe of mysterious lights and reflections. Then, raising my eyes a little, I saw against the black hill-side the windows of the quarry-house still alight.

Morning, as is so often the case, brought no shattering of my illusion. As I began to regain consciousness, I fancied that I was a boy again waking up in the shelter of the garden, and though, as I grew more widely awake, I smiled at the impression, that on which it was based I found to be indeed true. It was sufficient now as then to be here, to wander again on the cliffs, and hear the popping of the ripened seed-pods on the gorse-bushes; to stray along the shore to the bathing-cove, to float and drift and swim in the warm tide, and bask on the sand, and watch the gulls fishing, to lounge on the pier-head with the fisher-folk, to see in their eyes and hear in their quiet speech the evidence of secret things not so much known to them as part of their instincts and their very being. There were powers and presences about me; the white poplars that stood by the stream that babbled down the valley knew of them, and showed a glimpse of their knowledge sometimes, like the gleam of their white under leaves; the very cobbles that paved the street were soaked in it. . . . All that I wanted was to lie there and grow soaked in it too; unconsciously, as a boy, I had done that, but now the process must be conscious. I must know what stir of forces, fruitful and mysterious, seethed along the hill-side at noon, and sparkled at night on the sea. They could be known, they could even be controlled by those who were masters of the spell, but never could they be spoken of, for they were dwellers in the innermost, grafted into the eternal life of the world. There were dark secrets as well as these clear, kindly powers, and to these no doubt belonged the *negotium perambulans in tenebris* which, though of deadly malignity, might be regarded not only as evil, but as the avenger of sacrilegious and impious deeds. . . . All this was part of the spell of Polearn, of which the seeds had long lain dormant in me. But now they were sprouting, and who knew what strange flower would unfold in their stems?

It was not long before I came across John Evans. One morning, as I lay on the beach, there came shambling across the sand a man stout and middle-aged with the face of Silenus. He paused as he drew near and regarded me from narrow eyes.

“Why, you’re the little chap that used to live in the parson’s garden,” he said. “Don’t you recognise me?”

I saw who it was when he spoke: his voice, I think, instructed me, and recognising it, I could see the features of the strong, alert, young man in this gross caricature.

“Yes, you’re John Evans,” I said. “You used to be very kind to me: you used to draw pictures for me.”

“So I did, and I’ll draw you some more. Been bathing? That’s a risky performance. You never know what lives in the sea, nor what lives on the land for that matter. Not that I heed them. I stick to work and whisky. God! I’ve learned to paint since I saw you, and drink too for that matter. I live in the quarry-house, you know, and it’s a powerful thirsty place. Come and have a look at my things if you’re passing. Staying with your aunt, are you? I could do a wonderful portrait of her. Interesting face; she knows a lot. People who live at Polearn get to know a lot, though I don’t take much stock in that sort of knowledge myself.”

I do not know when I have been at once so repelled and interested. Behind the mere grossness of his face there lurked something which while it appalled, yet fascinated me. His thick lisping speech had the same quality. And his paintings, what would they be like? . . .

“I was just going home,” I said. “I’ll gladly come in, if you’ll allow me.”

He took me through the untended and overgrown garden into the house which I had never yet entered. A great grey cat was sunning itself in the window, and an old woman was laying lunch in a corner of the cool hall into which the door

opened. It was built of stone, and the carved mouldings let into the walls, the fragments of gargoyles and sculptured images, bore testimony of the truth of its having been built out of the demolished church. In one corner was an oblong and carved wooden table littered with a painter's apparatus and stacks of canvases leaned against the walls.

He jerked his thumb towards a head of an angel that was built into the mantelpiece and giggled.

"Quite a sanctified air," he said, "so we tone it down for the purposes of ordinary life by a different sort of art. Have a drink? No? Well, turn over some of my pictures while I put myself to rights."

He was justified in his own estimate of his skill: he could paint (and apparently he could paint anything), but never have I seen pictures so inexplicably hellish. There were exquisite studies of trees, and you knew something lurked in the flickering shadows. There was a drawing of his cat sunning itself in the window, even as I had just now seen it, and yet it was no cat but some beast of awful malignity. There was a boy stretched naked on the sands, not human, but some evil thing which had come out of the sea. Above all there were pictures of his garden overgrown and jungle-like, and you knew that in the bushes were presences ready to spring out on you. . . .

"Well, do you like my style?" he said as he came up, glass in hand. (The tumbler of spirits that he held had not been diluted.) "I try to paint the essence of what I see, not the mere husk and skin of it, but its nature, where it comes from and what gave it birth. There's much in common between a cat and a fuchsia-bush if you look at them closely enough. Everything came out of the slime of the pit, and it's all going back there. I should like to do a picture of you some day. I'd hold the mirror up to Nature, as the old lunatic said."

After this first meeting I saw him occasionally throughout

the months of that wonderful summer. Often he kept to his house and to his painting for days together, and then perhaps some evening I would find him lounging on the pier, always alone, and every time we met the repulsion and interest grew, for every time he seemed to have gone farther along the path of secret knowledge towards some evil shrine where complete initiation awaited him. . . . And then suddenly the end came.

I had met him thus one evening on the cliffs while the October sunset still burned in the sky, but over it with amazing rapidity there spread from the west a great blackness of cloud such as I have never seen for denseness. The light was sucked from the sky, the dusk fell in ever thicker layers. He suddenly became conscious of this.

"I must get back as quick as I can," he said. "It will be dark in a few minutes, and my servant is out. The lamps will not be lit."

He stepped out with extraordinary briskness for one who shambled and could scarcely lift his feet, and soon broke out into a stumbling run. In the gathering darkness I could see that his face was moist with the dew of some unspoken terror.

"You must come with me," he panted, "for so we shall get the lights burning the sooner. I cannot do without light."

I had to exert myself to the full to keep up with him, for terror winged him, and even so I fell behind, so that when I came to the garden gate, he was already half-way up the path to the house. I saw him enter, leaving the door wide, and found him fumbling with matches. But his hand so trembled that he could not transfer the light to the wick of the lamp.

"But what's the hurry about?" I asked.

Suddenly his eyes focused themselves on the open door behind me, and he jumped from his seat beside the table which had once been the altar of God, with a gasp and a scream.

"No, no!" he cried. "Keep it off! . . ."

I turned and saw what he had seen. The Thing had entered and now was swiftly sliding across the floor towards him, like some gigantic caterpillar. A stale phosphorescent light came from it, for though the dusk had grown to blackness outside, I could see it quite distinctly in the awful light of its own presence. From it too there came an odour of corruption and decay, as from slime that has long lain below water. It seemed to have no head, but on the front of it was an orifice of puckered skin which opened and shut and slavered at the edges. It was hairless, and slug-like in shape and in texture. As it advanced its forepart reared itself from the ground, like a snake about to strike, and it fastened on him. . . .

At that sight, and with the yells of his agony in my ears, the panic which had struck me relaxed into a hopeless courage, and with palsied, impotent hands I tried to lay hold of the Thing. But I could not: though something material was there, it was impossible to grasp it; my hands sunk in it as in thick mud. It was like wrestling with a nightmare.

I think that but a few seconds elapsed before all was over. The screams of the wretched man sank to moans and mutterings as the Thing fell on him: he panted once or twice and was still. For a moment longer there came gurglings and sucking noises, and then it slid out even as it had entered. I lit the lamp which he had fumbled with, and there on the floor he lay, no more than a rind of skin in loose folds over projecting bones.

THE MONSTER OF CAKAUDROVE

A. W. REED and INEZ HAMES

In which a huge, lizard-like monster comes daily out of the sea to devour one of the villagers of Cakaudrove. The monster's scales are so thick no spear or knife can penetrate them . . .

A NUMBER of villagers from the coast of Cakaudrove had spent a long day at sea, fishing. It had been a hot and tiring day, and they were wearied with their labours. They were still a long way from shore, and when one of them suggested spending the night on a small island and returning to the mainland the next morning, the others gladly agreed.

There was a full moon that night, and the beach shone like silver, except where the exhausted fishermen lay in the black shadows of the trees. Suddenly they were awakened by a prolonged scream. They started up to their feet and looked at each other in terror. Someone shouted, "A monster! Look!"

They saw a huge, lizard-like creature, its scales winking in the moonlight, rear up and up until it towered above the trees. With horror they saw the legs of a man dangling from its fanged mouth. The monster lowered itself to the ground, slithered across the sand, and plunged into the sea. The water foamed round the repulsive body as it disappeared slowly beneath the waves.



For a moment they were speechless and immobile. Then, as one man, they turned and rushed in panic to the shelter of the bush.

Only one of their number remained: a boy, who had slept soundly through all the disturbance. In the morning he was surprised to find that the men were no longer there, but a swift glance assured him that their canoe was still on the beach. Thinking they had gone into the bush to find food, he ran across the sand and plunged into the sea for his daily swim.

The rest of the crew were returning to the place where their sleep had been so frightfully disturbed, when they heard another high-pitched scream. They broke through the screen of bushes in time to see the gigantic lizard's teeth crunching through the boy's body. Then the monster sank out of sight.

Some of them lined the beach, while others paddled backwards and forwards, peering down into the clear water, their spears beside them ready to be thrust into the creature that had killed two of their party. They spent the morning anxiously searching and waiting, but saw no sign of the monster, and came to the conclusion that its hunger was satisfied and that it had gone away.

Before nightfall they had sailed back to their own village on the mainland. As it grew dark they gathered round in the grass houses and discussed the matter at length over the yaqona bowls. Many were the speculations that were made that night, and it was agreed that the visitation had been made by a god in the form of a monster, to punish them for some crime or breach of tabu of which they had been unaware.

Both men and women went about their everyday tasks quietly, as a malignant, brooding silence fell over the village. In the late afternoon one of the women was busy washing dalo roots in a saltwater lagoon at some distance from the beach. She was absorbed in her task and did not notice a huge shape

gliding through the rushes that lined the edge of the lagoon. The long neck extended, the lizard's mouth opened wide, and the woman was swallowed whole. A small boy gave the alarm, and the men snatched up their spears and formed a long line to block the monster from the sea.

The lizard blinked its eyes and turned its head slowly from side to side. Seeing there was no way of escaping the spears it lumbered forward, crushing the reeds and leaving a slimy trail into which the water seeped and gurgled. Soon it was standing on the sandy beach and the spears were rattling against its scales like hailstones and bouncing off harmlessly.

Day after day the sea lizard returned and claimed another victim, until nearly a dozen people had lost their lives. The beach and the lagoon were deserted, and the villagers stayed huddled in their houses, not daring to venture out lest they should be seen by the monster.

"This is intolerable!" said an old man. "Why should grown men and women have to spend their lives like crabs huddled in their holes?"

"But what can we do, old man? No spear can pierce its hide. No knife can penetrate its scales. We are lost. We are dead. We are as good as buried in the belly of the monster."

"We are still men, and we can act like men. The gods have given us fingers on our hands and brains in our skulls. They expect us to use them, instead of putting our heads in our hands like frightened children. Listen to me."

They drew closer and listened to the plan he put before them. Their eyes brightened and sleep was sounder that night than it had been for a long while.

The old man had observed the spot where the monster emerged from the sea each time it came ashore. The path to the village led from this point past a large vesi tree. On the old man's instructions a rope was passed over a stout branch

and hung in a wide noose which was concealed by the undergrowth. Many strong men hid in the bushes holding on to the end of the rope, and waited to hear the shout that would tell them to tighten it.

When these preparations were complete, the old man sauntered along the beach, looking constantly at the water from under his bushy eyebrows. Presently the waters swirled and the long, hideous snout of the monster broke from the waves. The old man turned and ran along the path that led to the village. He had a good start, but he had not reckoned on the speed with which the lizard could move on dry land. Once he stumbled over a root and fell headlong. He could hear the monster breathing close behind him, but he scrambled to his feet again and raced onwards.

The ground shook under the tread of the four-footed monster, which was gaining on him quickly. At last the vesi tree came in sight. He sprang through the noose, gave a feeble cry, and collapsed on the path.

As the monster pounced, the noose was drawn tight. The rope tightened round its neck and foreleg; though it thrashed and struggled till the tree swayed and groaned with the strain, it could not break free. Carefully avoiding the flailing legs and tail, the men watched their chance and worked sharp spear points between the scales, hammering the heads and shafts home through the tough hide and belabouring it with clubs.

At long last the monster quivered and lay dead. The women and children and the old men and old women came out to see it. With great labour they hacked off its limbs and roasted them on the fire.

Many satisfied people lay down to sleep that night, after singing the praises of the brave old man who had saved them from the ghastly sea-lizard; but there were still one or two who whispered to each other in dark corners, and said that

evil would come to the village because Samulayo, the Killer of Souls, must surely have sent his servant from the unearthly village of Nabagatai to compass their death.

THE SPHINX

EDGAR ALLAN POE

In which the writer is terrified by the appearance of a hideous monster with a death's-head on its breast. The monster has a neck seventy feet long and as thick as an elephant's body; an immense quantity of shaggy hair; and enormous wings thickly covered with metal scales. Can this horror be an omen of death . . . or something less sinister?

DURING the dread reign of the cholera in New York, I had accepted the invitation of a relative to spend a fortnight with him in the retirement of his cottage on the banks of the Hudson. He had here all the ordinary means of summer amusement. And with rambling in the woods, sketching, boating, fishing, bathing, music and books we should have passed the time pleasantly enough, but for the fearful intelligence which reached us every morning from the populous city. Not a day elapsed which did not bring us news of the decease of some acquaintance. Then, as the fatality increased, we learned to expect daily the loss of some friend. At length we trembled at the approach of every messenger. The very air from the south seemed to us redolent with death. That palsying thought, indeed, took entire possession of my soul. I could neither speak, think, nor dream of anything else. My host was of a less excitable temperament, and, although

greatly depressed in spirits, exerted himself to sustain my own. His richly philosophical intellect was not at any time affected by unrealities. To the substances of terror he was sufficiently alive, but of its shadows he had no apprehension.

His endeavours to arouse me from the condition of abnormal gloom into which I had fallen were frustrated in great measure by certain volumes which I had found in his library. These were of a character to force into germination whatever seeds of hereditary superstition lay latent in my bosom. I had been reading these books without his knowledge, and thus he was often at a loss to account for the forcible impressions which had been made upon my fancy.

A favourite topic with me was the popular belief in omens—a belief which at this one epoch of my life I was almost seriously disposed to defend. On this subject we had long and animated discussions. He maintained the utter groundlessness of faith in such matters; I contended that a popular sentiment, arising with absolute spontaneity—that is to say, without apparent traces of suggestion—had in it unmistakable elements of truth.

The fact is that soon after my arrival at the cottage, there had occurred to me an incident so entirely inexplicable, and which had in it so much of the portentous character, that I might well have been excused for regarding it as an omen. It appalled, and at the same time so confounded and bewildered me, that many days elapsed before I could make up my mind to communicate the circumstance to my friend.

Near the close of an exceedingly warm day I was sitting, book in hand, at an open window commanding, through a long vista of the riverbanks, a view of a distant hill. Its nearer face had been denuded by a landslide of the principal portion of its trees. My thoughts had long been wandering from the volume before me to the gloom and desolation of the neighbouring city. Lifting my eyes from the page, I glanced at the naked

face of the hill. There my eyes perceived an object—it was a living monster of hideous conformation, which very rapidly made its way from the summit to the bottom of the hill, disappearing finally in the dense forest below. When I first saw this creature I doubted my own sanity—or at least the evidence of my own eyes, and many minutes passed before I succeeded in convincing myself that I was neither mad nor in a dream. Yet when I describe the monster (which I distinctly saw, and calmly surveyed through the whole period of its progress) my readers, I fear, will feel even more difficulty in being convinced of these points than I did.

Estimating the size of the creature by comparison with the diameter of the large trees near which it passed—the few giants of the forest which had escaped the fury of the landslide—I concluded it to be far larger than any ship in existence. I say ship, because the shape of the monster suggested the idea.

The mouth of the animal was situated at the extremity of a proboscis some sixty or seventy feet in length, and about as thick as the body of an ordinary elephant. Near the root of this trunk was an immense quantity of black shaggy hair—more than could have been supplied by the coats of a score of buffaloes; and projecting from this hair downwardly and laterally, sprang two gleaming tusks not unlike those of the wild boar, but of infinitely greater dimension. Extending forward, parallel with the proboscis and on each side of it was a gigantic staff, thirty or forty feet in length, formed seemingly of pure crystal, and in shape a perfect prism. It reflected in the most gorgeous manner the rays of the declining sun. The trunk was fashioned like a wedge, with the apex to the earth.

From it there were outspread two pairs of wings—each wing nearly one hundred yards in length—one pair being placed above the other, and all thickly covered with metal scales;

each scale was apparently some ten or twelve feet in diameter. I observed that the upper and lower tiers of wings were connected by a strong chain. But the chief peculiarity of this horrible thing, was the representation of a *death's-head*, which covered nearly the whole surface of its breast, and which was as accurately traced in glaring white upon the dark ground of the body, as if it had been carefully designed by an artist.

I regarded this terrific animal, and especially the device on its breast, with a feeling of horror and awe, with a sentiment of forthcoming evil, which I found it impossible to quell by any effort of the reason. Then I perceived the huge jaws at the extremity of the proboscis suddenly expand themselves, and from them there proceeded a sound so loud and so expressive of woe, that it struck upon my nerves like a knell, and as the monster disappeared at the foot of the hill, I fell fainting to the floor.

Upon recovering, my first impulse of course was to inform my friend of what I had seen and heard—and I can scarcely explain what feeling of repugnance operated, in the end, to prevent me.

At length, one evening, some three or four days after the occurrence, we were sitting together in the room in which I had seen the apparition. I occupied the same seat at the same window; he lounged on a sofa near at hand. The association of the place and time impelled me to give him an account of the phenomenon. He heard me to the end, at first laughing heartily, then lapsing into an excessively grave demeanour, as if my insanity was a thing beyond suspicion. At this instant I again had a distinct view of the monster, to which, with a shout of absolute terror, I now directed his attention. He looked eagerly, but maintained that he saw nothing although I designated minutely the course of the creature, as it made its way down the naked face of the hill.

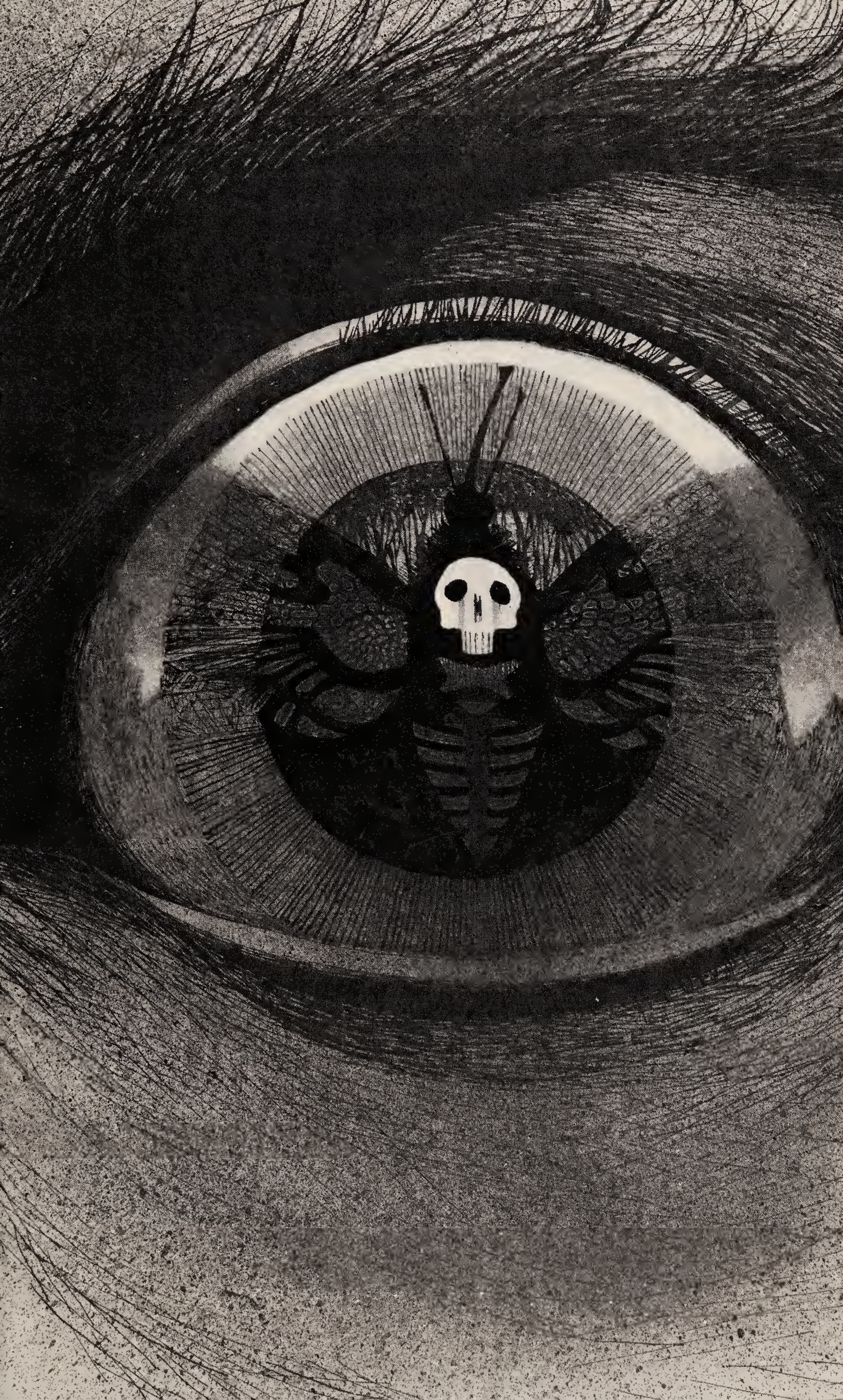
I was now immeasurably alarmed, for I considered the vision either as an omen of my death, or worse, as the forerunner of an attack of mania. I threw myself passionately back in my chair, and for some moments buried my face in my hands. When I uncovered my eyes, the apparition was no longer visible.

My host, however, had in some degree resumed the calmness of his demeanour, and questioned me very rigorously in respect to the conformation of the visionary creature. When I had fully satisfied him on the matter, he sighed deeply, as if relieved of some intolerable burden, and went on to talk with what I thought a cruel calmness of various points of speculative philosophy, which had heretofore been a subject of discussion between us. I remember his insisting very particularly upon the idea that the principal source of error in all human investigations lay in the liability of the understanding to underrate or to overvalue the importance of an object, through improper measurement of its propinquity.

“For example,” he said, “to estimate properly the influence of democratic ideas on mankind, one must take into account the time required for the thorough dissemination of those ideas—or, in other words, the *distance* from the present to the point at which such thorough dissemination may be accomplished. Yet can you tell me one writer on the subject of government who has ever thought this particular branch of the subject worthy of discussion at all?”

He here paused for a moment, stepped to a bookcase, and brought forth one of the ordinary synopses of natural history. Requesting me then to exchange seats with him that he might better distinguish the fine print of the volume, he took my armchair at the window, and opening the book, resumed his discourse very much in the same tone as before.

“But for your exceeding minuteness,” he said, “in describ-



ing the monster, I might never have had it in my power to demonstrate to you what it was. In the first place, let me read to you a schoolboy account of the genus *sphinx*, of the family *crepuscularia*, of the order *lepidoptera*, of the class *insecta*. The account runs thus :

Four membraneous wings covered with little coloured scales of a metallic appearance; mouth forming a rolled proboscis, produced by an elongation of the jaws, upon the sides of which are found the rudiments of mandibles and downy palpi; the inferior wings retained by the superior by a stiff hair; antennae in the form of an elongated club, prismatic, abdomen pointed. The death's head, or sphinx moth has occasioned much terror among the vulgar, at times, by the melancholy kind of cry which it utters, and the insignia of death on its corselet.

Here he closed the book and leaned forward in the chair, placing himself accurately in the position which I had occupied at the moment of beholding the monster.

“Ah, here it is!” he presently exclaimed. “It is re-ascending the face of the hill, and a very remarkable looking creature I admit it to be. Still it is by no means so large or so distant as you imagined it. For the fact is that, as it wiggles its way up a thread which some spider has spun across the window, I find it to be about a sixteenth of an inch in its entire length, and also about a sixteenth of an inch distant from the pupil of my eye.”

THE VAMPIRES OF TEMPASSUK

OWEN RUTTER

In which the Illanuns of Tempassuk can turn themselves into evil spirits while they are still alive and prey upon the newly dead . . .

VAMPIRISM is a strange and very ghastly superstition, which, even today, is prevalent among the nations of Eastern Europe. Those who turn vampires are said usually to have been persons who have committed suicide, met sudden deaths or been notorious evil-livers, and most stories of vampires have much in common. As a rule the vampire appears at night, soon after burial, to persons with whom he was acquainted in his lifetime, and by sucking their blood nourishes the earthly body which rests within the grave. On the grave being opened the corpse, even after a lapse of years, is found fresh and rosy as in the days when it was alive; but when a stake is driven through the heart, or the heart torn out and the body burnt, nothing more is ever seen of the vampire. The place at which the vampire usually sucks the blood of its victim is the throat, and it leaves behind a blue mark like that of a mole; in one case it is recorded that a woman, who had been the victim of a vampire, was found with this blue mark, streaked with blood on the neck under the right ear, a finger long.

In these cases it is the souls of the dead who are believed to return to prey upon the living, but in the Tempassuk district of Borneo there is a race of men called Illanuns, with a sinister reputation for being able to turn themselves into evil spirits while they are still alive, and so prey upon the newly dead. They too may be called vampires for want of a better word. They are both feared and hated by their neighbours, who dare not stay in an Illanun village for a single night, and if a stranger comes seeking shelter to a house on the outskirts of the Illanun country, the inmates will go off secretly and set light to some cocks' feathers or the shavings of buffalo-horns to test him. For they believe that no vampire can withstand the smoke that rises from either of these charms, and that once it reaches his nostrils he will flee out of the house as if pursued.

The Illanuns were not always vampires, although their forebears were pirates and cut-throats from time immemorial, roving the seas in search of victims. They were devoid of any feelings of pity, and were accustomed to look upon acts of cruelty with indifference from their childhood's days, but the origin of their taste for human flesh came about in the following way:

Long ago the Illanuns had amongst them a learned man called Indog, who was their priest and teacher. Every day thirty Illanun boys went to him to be taught the Koran, but their thoughts even in those early years were turned upon war and piracy, and only one of them, who was named Amat, could be found to learn. This boy, the youngest of them all, outstripped the others in knowledge, and while he was praised daily by the holy Indog the rest were only rated for being idle pigs.

At length they became so jealous of little Amat that they determined they would have no more of him. They had been brought up to look upon bloodshed as a little thing, and one

evening they gathered together in the forest and held a secret council.

“This Amat is the cause of all the insults which are heaped upon us by Indog daily,” cried Sabtu, their leader. “The time has come when we must make away with him.”

“Truly spoken, Sabtu,” said another, “but how is it to be done?”

“The next time that Indog sends us out to collect firewood for the hearth,” replied Sabtu, “let us fall upon Amat and kill him as we would kill a deer.”

This proposal was hailed with shouts of acclamation by the bloodthirsty little boys, and they returned to their homes with thoughts of murder in their hearts. A few days later, Indog, according to his custom, sent them into the jungle to collect firewood. The industrious Amat was among the party, and as he was bending down to tie with a strand of creeper the bundle of sticks he had collected, Sabtu, cutting-knife in hand, crept up behind him and, leaping suddenly upon him, dealt him a slashing blow and brought him to the ground. As he fell, Sabtu’s comrades rushed forward and made an end of the unfortunate boy.

Then arose a difficulty. Amat was dead, but not done with yet.

“How are we to dispose of the body?” asked Sabtu.

“Bury it in the jungle,” suggested one.

“No,” said Sabtu, “for then, sooner or later, someone would surely come upon the grave.”

“Burn it,” said another.

“Then, sooner or later, someone would come upon the remains,” declared Sabtu. “No, my brothers, we must not leave a single trace of Amat for anyone to find. There is one way only.”

“What is that?” came the question in chorus from the others.

“We must cook and eat him,” said Sabtu.

Their leader’s scheme seemed the only one whereby all signs of their crime would be removed. Accordingly the boys made a great fire, roasted poor Amat and ate him, bones and all, so that not a vestige of his mangled body remained to tell the tale of how he had met his fate. It was the Illanun boys’ first taste of human flesh, but they found it good and smacked their lips. Then they went back to the house of Indog, the whole twenty-nine of them, carrying their bundles of firewood upon their backs.

On their return, Indog, not seeing his favourite, asked at once:

“Where is Amat? You are ever late, but he is always the first back though he brings the heaviest load.”

“We have not seen him, O teacher,” replied Sabtu. “He left the forest with his bundle before we did, and should be here by now.”

But even as the lying Sabtu finished speaking, a small clear voice they all knew to be that of Amat cried:

“Alas, holy Indog, here am I!”

On hearing these words Indog looked round in surprise, the boys in terror. But no one could be certain whence the voice of Amat came.

“Where are you, little Amat?” asked Indog.

“Here in the belly of Sabtu am I!” piped the small voice; and then like an echo came a voice from the insides of the guilty ones, and twenty-eight times were the words repeated, “Here am I!”

It did not take the holy Indog long to realize what had been his favourite’s fate. In his righteous anger he took his great staff and set upon the murderers and belaboured them, calling

down upon their heads curses and imprecations most terrible to hear. But so wholly evil were they become that, as each one sped through the doorway of the house, he assumed the shape of a goblin and flew up into the jungle trees.

Ever afterwards, both they and their descendants retained this strange power of turning themselves into weird ghastly forms at night, filled with the unholy desire for human flesh. Often in the evenings you can hear them screeching as they call to one another, but if their voices sound near by you may be sure that in reality they are far away, whilst if you seem to hear them calling in the distance it is certain that they are close at hand. Should you chance to hear their voices you must cry aloud:

“Ah, Spirit of Evil, I know you come from the pupils of Indog, of holy Indog!”

And at the sound of that name they will grow afraid and fly away.

But the vampires, although nowadays they seldom dare to attack the living, do not scruple to prey upon the dead. The folk who live near the villages in which the Illanuns dwell watch their dead for many days, so ravenous are these ghouls for human flesh. Every scrap of a dead body they will devour, save only the tongue. That alone they will not eat, for they know that, if they did so, they would perish as perished their kinsmen who consumed unwittingly the tongue of Ausop in years gone by.

Ausop was an old Bajau man, who dwelt with his seven sons in the Tempassuk district. In course of time he fell ill and died. His sons guarded the body until the burial had taken place in the village cemetery upon the hillside, and then on the same night, according to the custom, Lajim, the eldest son,

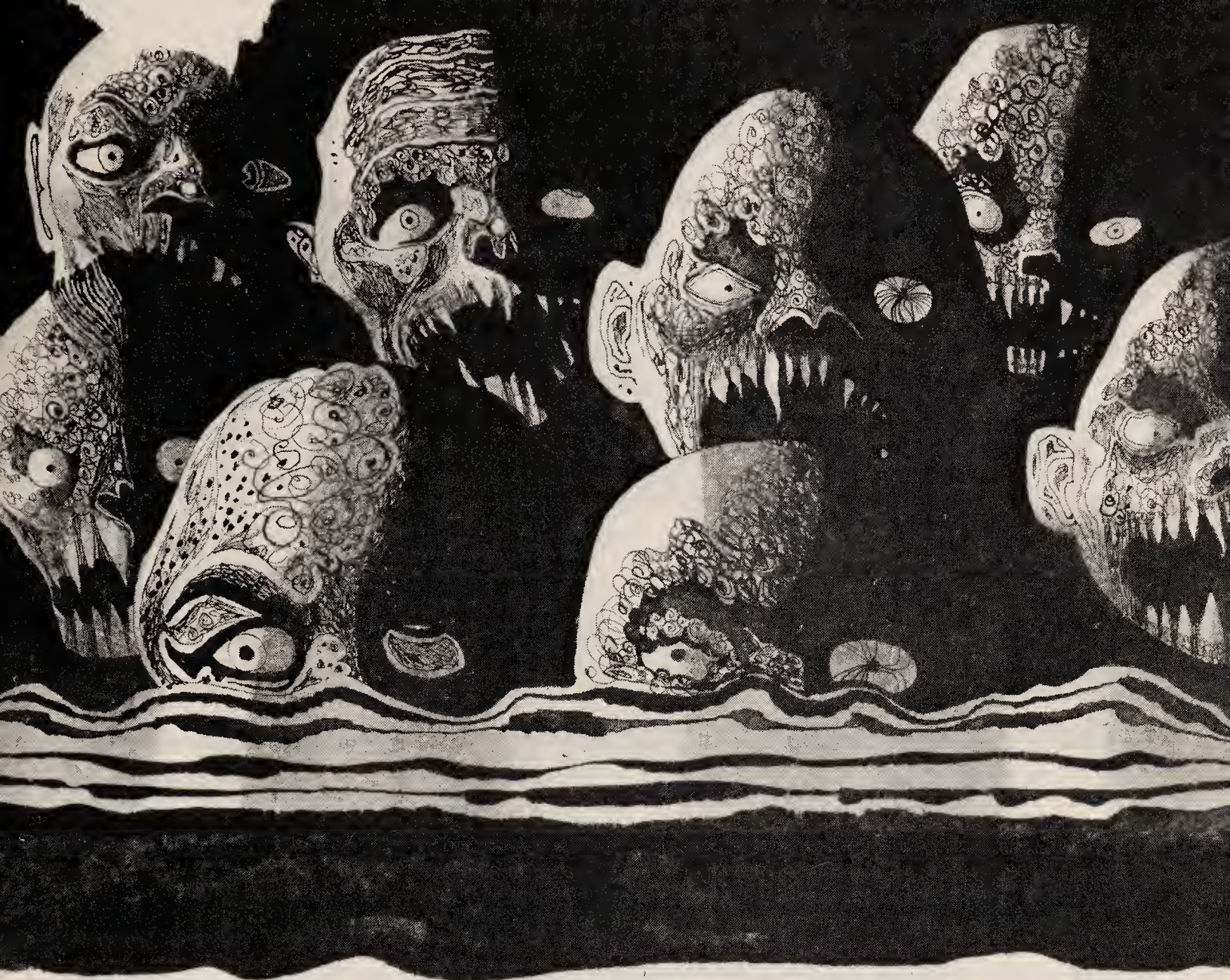


entered upon a lonely vigil beside his father's grave.

He had not been watching long before a band of Illanun vampires, in their goblin forms, came circling and wheeling above the grave. Much as Lajim revered his father it was all he could do to stay at his post and protect the newly buried corpse, and in the morning he swore he dared not face another night. On the second night, Hassan, Ausop's second son, remained beside the grave and suffered even worse terrors than his brother, for the vampires became more daring than before, and began to scratch away the earth which covered the old man's bones.

So it went on for six nights. Every night the vampires came nearer to their prey, and every morning the son whose turn it had been to keep the lonely vigil vowed that he dared not remain beside the grave again.

On the seventh night, it was the turn of little Kassim, the



youngest of Ausop's seven sons. His brothers, mindful of what they themselves had suffered, and of the fears by which they had been beset, tried to dissuade the boy from his ill-omened task.

"It were better that you should remain safely at home with us," said Lajim, "for tonight no human power can keep these ghouls from snatching our father's remains from their resting-place, and if you are so foolhardy as to rouse them to anger, it may be that you will not see the dawn."

"Then that would only be my fate," answered Kassim stoutly, "for take my turn I must. Even if I cannot save our father from his dreadful enemies at least I may be able to avenge him."

So just as the moon was rising, Kassim made his way to the hillside where the lonely graveyard stood, and hid himself behind some bushes which were growing near the newly

heaped mound of earth which marked his father's grave. He had not long to wait. Soon the vampires came screaming through the air until Kassim, peering from his hiding-place, counted a score of them clustering about the grave. Their forms were other than mortal, for they had no lower limbs, and long cruel talons took the place of hands. Screeching at one another, they tore at the earth which hid the corpse of Ausop; then Kassim's heart grew sick within him as he beheld them drag forth with unholy glee the remains of his father's body, and he crouched still lower behind the leaves that sheltered him.

But the vampires were far too full of their work to notice him. Some hurried hither and thither collecting sticks and leaves, others lighted a fire and fetched water they had brought with them for their feast, whilst the rest chopped up old Ausop's body into little pieces—all save the tongue, the eating of which to vampires means destruction. That they flung away into the jungle, and none noticed Kassim creep from his hiding-place to find it, as they gathered round the bubbling pot and made ready for the banquet that had been delayed so long.

As soon as their prey had been cooked to their liking they fell to, and having gorged themselves they set aside what remained in the pot for a morning meal. Then they laid themselves down to sleep, tired out by their orgy. Thereupon Kassim drew his knife from its sheath and cut his father's tongue into little pieces; bearing them in the hollows of his hands, he stole out from his hiding-place until he came to the vampires' pot, and, having dropped them in, mixed them with the other remains of the father he had loved. Then with tears streaming down his cheeks, he went back to the bushes and resumed his watch.

Before dawn was come the vampires were astir again, eager

to prepare a morning meal before they should seek their homes and change back into their human forms. The fire was soon rekindled; once more the water bubbled in the pot. Each vampire seized his share of the remains and began to devour it greedily. But no sooner had he swallowed the last mouthful than he fell prostrate upon the ground. Unwittingly he had eaten of the forbidden thing which Kassim had mixed within the pot.

On seeing that his stratagem had been successful, Kassim crawled out of the bushes and ran home to rouse his brothers.

“Come, my brothers, come!” he cried, triumph getting the better of his grief, “and I will show you the carcasses of our father’s enemies!”

Wonderingly they followed him. As they reached the spot the first rays of the sun were lighting up the carved posts and tombstones of the lonely graveyard, and there before their father’s opened grave they beheld the bodies of twenty dead Illanuns stretched upon the ground in human form.

IN THE AVU OBSERVATORY

H. G. WELLS

In which a monstrous black creature with sharp little teeth attacks Woodhouse in the Avu observatory . . . could it be the Big Colugo of which the Dyaks talk?

THE observatory at Avu, in Borneo, stands on the spur of the mountain. To the north rises the old crater, black at night against the unfathomable blue of the sky. From the little circular building with its mushroom dome the slopes plunge steeply downward into the black mysteries of the tropical forest beneath. The little house in which the observer and his assistant live is about fifty yards from the observatory, and beyond this are the huts of their native attendants.

Thaddy, the chief observer, was down with a slight fever. His assistant, Woodhouse, paused for a moment in silent contemplation of the tropical night before commencing his solitary vigil. The night was very still. Now and then voices and laughter came from the native huts, or the cry of some strange animal was heard from the midst of the mystery of the forest. Nocturnal insects appeared in ghostly fashion out of the darkness, and fluttered around his light. He thought, perhaps, of all the possibilities of discovery that still lay in the black tangle beneath him; to the naturalist the virgin

forests of Borneo are still a wonderland full of strange questions and half-suspected discoveries. Woodhouse carried a small lantern in his hand, and its yellow glow contrasted vividly with the infinite series of tints between lavender-blue and black in which the landscape was painted. His hands and face were smeared with ointment against the attacks of the mosquitoes.

Even in these days of celestial photography, work done in a purely temporary structure, and with only the most primitive appliances in addition to the telescope, still involves a very large amount of cramped and motionless watching. He sighed as he thought of the physical fatigues before him, stretched himself, and entered the observatory.

The reader is probably familiar with the structure of an ordinary astronomical observatory. The building is usually cylindrical in shape, with a very light hemispherical roof capable of being turned around from the interior. The telescope is supported on a stone pillar in the centre. A clockwork arrangement compensates for the earth's rotation, and allows a star once found to be continuously observed. Besides this, there is a compact tracery of wheels and screws about its point of support by which the astronomer adjusts it. There is, of course, a slit in the movable roof which follows the eye of the telescope in its survey of the heavens. The observer sits or lies on a sloping wooden arrangement, which he can wheel to any part of the observatory as the position of the telescope may require. Within it is advisable to have things as dark as possible, in order to enhance the brilliance of the stars observed.

The lantern flared as Woodhouse entered his circular den, and the general darkness fled into black shadows behind the big machine, from which it presently seemed to creep back over the whole place again as the light waned. The slit was a profound transparent blue, in which six stars shone with tropical brilliance, and their light lay, a pallid gleam, along

the black tube of the instrument. Woodhouse shifted the roof, and then proceeding to the telescope, turned first one wheel and then another, the great cylinder slowly swinging into a new position. Then he glanced through the finder, the little companion telescope, moved the roof a little more, made some further adjustments, and set the clockwork in motion. He took off his jacket, for the night was very hot, and pushed into position the uncomfortable seat to which he was condemned for the next four hours. Then with a sign he resigned himself to his watch upon the mysteries of space.

There was no sound now in the observatory, and the lantern waned steadily. Outside there was the occasional cry of some animal in alarm or pain, or calling to its mate, and the intermittent sounds of the Malay and Dyak servants. Presently one of the men began a queer chanting song, in which the others joined at intervals. After this it would seem that they turned in for the night, for no further sound came from their direction, and the whispering stillness became more and more profound.

The clockwork ticked steadily. The shrill hum of a mosquito exploring the place grew shriller in indignation at Woodhouse's ointment. Then the lantern went out and all the observatory was black.

Woodhouse shifted his position presently, when the slow movement of the telescope had carried it beyond the limits of his comfort.

He was watching a little group of stars in the Milky Way, in one of which his chief had seen or fancied a remarkable colour variability. It was not a part of the regular work for which the establishment existed, and for that reason perhaps Woodhouse was deeply interested. He must have forgotten things terrestrial. All his attention was concentrated upon the great blue circle of the telescope field—a circle powdered, so it seemed, with an innumerable multitude of stars, and all

luminous against the blackness of its setting. As he watched he seemed to himself to become incorporeal, as if he too were floating in the ether of space. Infinitely remote was the faint red spot he was observing.

Suddenly the stars were blotted out. A flash of blackness passed, and they were visible again.

"Queer," said Woodhouse. "Must have been a bird."

The thing happened again, and immediately after that the great tube shivered as though it had been struck. Then the dome of the observatory resounded with a series of thundering blows. The stars seemed to sweep aside as the telescope—which had been unclamped—swung around and away from the slit in the roof.

"Great Scott!" cried Woodhouse. "What's this?"

Some huge vague black shape, with a flapping something like a wing, seemed to be struggling in the aperture of the roof. In another moment the slit was clear again, and the luminous haze of the Milky Way shone warm and bright.

The interior of the roof was perfectly black, and only a scraping sound marked the whereabouts of the unknown creature.

Woodhouse had scrambled from the seat to his feet. He was trembling violently and in a perspiration with the suddenness of the occurrence. Was the thing, whatever it was, inside or out? It was big, whatever else it might be. Something shot across the skylight, and the telescope swayed. He started violently and put his arm up. It was in the observatory, then, with him. It was clinging to the roof, apparently. What the devil was it? Could it see him?

He stood for perhaps a minute in a state of stupefaction. The beast, whatever it was, clawed at the interior of the dome, and the something flapped almost into his face, and he saw the momentary gleam of starlight on a skin like oiled leather.

His water bottle was knocked off his little table with a smash.

The sense of some strange bird-creature hovering a few yards from his face in the darkness was indescribably unpleasant to Woodhouse. As his thought returned he concluded that it must be some night bird or large bat. At any risk he would see what it was, and pulling a match from his pocket, he tried to strike it on the telescope seat. There was a smoking streak of phosphorescent light, the match flared for a moment, and he saw a vast wing sweeping toward him, a gleam of grey-brown fur, and then he was struck in the face and the match knocked out of his hand. The blow was aimed at his temple, and a claw tore sideways down to his cheek. He reeled and fell, and he heard the extinguished lantern smash. Another blow followed as he fell. He was partly stunned, he felt his own warm blood stream out upon his face. Instinctively he felt his eyes had been struck at, and turning over on his face to protect them, he tried to crawl under the protection of the telescope.

He was struck again on the back, and heard his shirt rip, and then the thing hit the roof of the observatory. He edged as far as he could between the wooden seat and the eyepiece of the instrument, and turned his body around so that only his feet were exposed. With these he could at least kick. He was still in a mystified state. The strange beast banged about in the darkness, and presently clung to the telescope, making it sway and the gear rattle. Once it flapped near him, and he kicked out madly and felt a soft body with his feet. He was horribly scared now. It must be a big thing to swing the telescope like that. He saw for a moment the outline of a head black against the starlight, with sharply-pointed upstanding ears and a crest between them. It seemed to him to be as big as a mastiff's. Then he began to bawl out as loudly as he could for help.



At that the thing came down upon him again. As it did so his hand touched something beside him on the floor. He kicked out, and the next moment his ankle was gripped and held by a row of keen teeth. He yelled again, and tried to free his leg by kicking with the other. Then he realized he had the broken water bottle at his hand. Snatching it he struggled into a sitting posture, and feeling in the darkness toward his foot, gripped a velvety ear, like the ear of a big cat. He had seized the water bottle by its neck and brought it down with a shivering crash upon the head of the strange beast. He repeated the blow, and then stabbed and jabbed with the jagged end of it in the darkness where he judged the face might be.

The small teeth relaxed their hold, and at once Woodhouse pulled his leg free and kicked hard. He felt the sickening feel of fur and bone giving under his boot. There was a tearing bite at his arm, and he struck over it at the face, as he judged, and the damp fur.

There was a pause; then he heard the sound of claws and the dragging of a heavy body away from him over the observatory floor. Then there was silence, broken only by his own sobbing breathing, and a sound like licking. Everything was black except the parallelogram of the blue skylight with the luminous dust of stars, against which the end of the telescope now appeared in silhouette. He waited, as it seemed, an interminable time.

Was the thing coming on again? He felt in his trouser pocket for some matches, and found one remaining. He tried to strike this, but the floor was wet, and it spat and went out. He cursed. He could not see where the door was situated. In his struggle he had quite lost his bearings. The strange beast, disturbed by the splutter of the match, began to move again. "Time!" called Woodhouse, with a sudden gleam of mirth, but the thing was not coming at him again. He must have hurt it, he

thought, with the broken bottle. He felt a dull pain in his ankle. Probably he was bleeding there. He wondered if it would support him if he tried to stand up. The night outside was very still. There was no sound of anyone moving. The sleepy fools had not heard those wings battering upon the dome, nor his shouts. It was no good wasting strength in shouting. The monster flapped its wings and startled him into a defensive attitude. He hit his elbow against the seat, and it fell over with a crash. He cursed this, and then he cursed the darkness.

Suddenly the oblong patch of starlight seemed to sway to and fro. Was he going to faint? It would never do to faint. He clenched his fists and set his teeth to hold himself together. Where had the door got to? It occurred to him he could get his bearings by the stars visible through the skylight. The patch of stars he saw was in Sagittarius and southeastward; the door was north—or was it north by west? He tried to think. If he could get the door open he might retreat. It might be the thing was wounded. The suspense was beastly. “Look here!” he said, “if you don’t come on, I shall come at you.”

Then the thing began clambering up the side of the observatory, and he saw its black outline gradually blot out the skylight. Was it in retreat? He forgot about the door, and watched as the dome shifted and creaked. Somehow he did not feel very frightened or excited now. He felt a curious sinking sensation inside him. The sharply defined patch of light, with the black form moving across it, seemed to be growing smaller and smaller. That was curious. He began to feel very thirsty, and yet he did not feel inclined to get anything to drink. He seemed to be sliding down a long funnel.

He felt a burning sensation in his throat, and then he perceived it was broad daylight, and that one of the Dyak servants was looking at him with a curious expression. Then there was the top of Thaddy’s face upside down. Funny fellow, Thaddy,

to go about like that! Then he grasped the situation better, and perceived that his head was on Thaddy's knee, and Thaddy was giving him brandy. And then he saw the eyepiece of the telescope with a lot of red smears on it. He began to remember.

"You've made this observatory in a pretty mess," said Thaddy.

The Dyak boy was beating up an egg in brandy. Woodhouse took this and sat up. He felt a sharp twinge of pain. His ankle was tied up; so were his arm and the side of his face. The smashed glass, red-stained, lay about the floor, the telescope seat was overturned, and by the opposite wall was a dark pool. The door was open, and he saw the grey summit of the mountain against a brilliant background of blue sky.

"Pah!" said Woodhouse. "Who's been killing calves here? Take me out of it."

Then he remembered the Thing, and the fight he had had with it.

"What *was* it?" he said to Thaddy—"The Thing I fought with?"

"*You* know that best," said Thaddy. "But, anyhow, don't worry yourself now about it. Have some more to drink."

Thaddy, however, was curious enough, and it was a hard struggle between duty and inclination to keep Woodhouse quiet until he was decently put away in bed, and had slept upon the copious dose of meat extract Thaddy considered advisable.

They then talked it over together. "It was," said Woodhouse, "more like a big bat than anything else in the world. It had sharp, short ears and soft fur, and its wings were leathery. Its teeth were little, but devilish sharp, and its jaw could not have been very strong or else it would have bitten through my ankle."

"It has pretty nearly," said Thaddy.

“It seemed to me to hit out with its claws pretty freely. That is about as much as I know about the beast. Our conversation was intimate, so to speak, and yet not confidential.”

“The Dyak chaps talk about a Big Colugo, a Klang-utang—whatever that may be. It does not often attack man, but I suppose you made it nervous. They say there is a Big Colugo and a Little Colugo, and a something else that sounds like gobble. They all fly about at night. For my own part I know there are flying foxes and flying lemurs about here, but none of them are very big beasts.”

“There are more things in heaven and earth,” said Woodhouse—and Thaddy groaned at the quotation—“and more particularly in the forests of Borneo, than are dreamt of in our philosophies. On the whole, if the Borneo fauna is going to disgorge any more of its novelties upon me, I should prefer that it did so when I was not occupied in the observatory at night and alone.”

THE WATER MONSTER

as retold by

JACYNTH HOPE-SIMPSON

In which Beowulf goes to the rescue of Hrothgar, mighty king of the Danes. Each night some of Hrothgar's warriors are murdered by Grendel, an accursed monster who is jealous of their merrymaking in the banqueting hall . . . but Beowulf has more to contend with than he expected!

PART ONE

HROTHGAR was a mighty king of the Danes, who had won great glory in battle. Young warriors flocked to serve him, and he soon had a large troop of fighting men. He decided to build a great hall where all his men could feast together. He gave orders for this to be done. Soon, the hall was finished. It was the largest and finest building that anybody had ever seen. He called it Heorot. Feasts were held in the hall, and the sound of revelry could be heard from a long way off: the noise of talking and laughter, and the clear, sweet sound of the minstrel's song to the harp.

Everybody was glad to hear the warriors making merry, except for one. That was a creature called Grendel, an accursed monster who was doomed to live in the wilderness, cut off

from men. He was bitterly jealous of all the joys in which he could never take part. One night, he slunk out of his desolate lair, and crept to Heorot under cover of darkness. The warriors were all laughing and making merry. He waited, crouched outside the hall, until they grew quiet and settled down to sleep. Then he swooped. He picked up thirty sleeping men and carried them off to his lair to kill them. The cruel and greedy creature exulted in the murder that he had done.

In the morning, a great cry of lament rose up from Heorot, when the outrage was discovered. Hrothgar was overcome by grief.

There was only a short respite. One night later, the monster committed more murders. He was so deeply steeped in sin that he did not feel any regret or shame. Then the great hall became deserted at night, for nobody dared to sleep there any longer. For twelve long years, Grendel harried Hrothgar's men, raiding and killing them without any mercy. He lay in wait for them on the misty moors. At night he would take possession of Heorot. They could do nothing to drive him away. They made many plans, which proved useless, and some of the Danes, in their folly, sacrificed to heathen idols. It was all in vain.

The story of Hrothgar's sufferings became widely known. It was heard by a very brave warrior in a neighbouring country. He was famous as one of the strongest men in the world. He decided to travel over the sea to offer his help to Hrothgar. Although he was very dear to his own people, they did not try to stop him from going, because they knew how great Hrothgar's need was. He chose fourteen bold warriors to go with him.

A ship was got ready and they went down to the shore. The ship lay under the lee of the cliff, and the sea eddied round her. The armed warriors went on board, and they set off. The ship

breasted the sea like a water-bird, with the waves foaming round her prow. On the second day, they saw land, shining cliffs and broad headlands, and knew that they were at the end of their journey. They disembarked, and carried their war-gear over the gang-plank.

The mounted watchman, who was keeping guard over the cliffs, saw them coming. He saw the bright flash as the sunlight caught their shields. He was filled with apprehension as to who they could be, and rode quickly down to the shore. He brandished his huge spear.

“What armed men are you, who have come in a tall ship? I have kept guard on these cliffs for a long time, and I have never seen a warrior who looked more noble than one of you does. Tell me quickly who are you, and what you are doing here.”

The leader replied, “I have heard stories of a mysterious enemy, who does terrible slaughter in the dark nights, and brings unbearable shame and distress to your people. I have come to see if I can help you.”

“I accept what you say,” the coastguard replied gravely. “I will bring you to see our king, and I will tell my men to guard your newly-tarred ship as she lies on the beach.”

The warriors marched up the cliff path. The sunlight gleamed on their armour, and on their helmets which were covered with gold. The images of boars on their helmets gave them a fierce appearance, and their eyes glinted above their cheek-guards. They hurried on until they caught sight of Heorot, the greatest hall in the world.

“You can see your way now,” said the coastguard. “I must leave you and get back to my duties.”

They marched on towards the hall. Their coats of mail, made out of a mesh of iron rings, clinked as they walked. When they reached Heorot, they rested their shields against

the walls, and stacked their spears up together. As they were doing so, Hrothgar's herald came out to see them.

"Why have you come with all these weapons?" he asked. "You seem to be men of bold and adventurous spirits."

"My name is Beowulf," answered the leader. "I wish to speak with Hrothgar."

"I will ask him if you may do so," the herald promised.

He went in to the hall, where Hrothgar and his nobles were sitting, and approached the king formally.

"A lord from over the sea, called Beowulf, has come with his warriors. They would like to speak to you. I assure you that they all look like brave and noble men."

"I knew Beowulf when he was a youth," replied Hrothgar. "I have heard of his reputation since, from sea-farers who have visited his own country. He is said to be as strong in battle as thirty other men. Perhaps God, in his mercy, has sent him to help us against Grendel. Tell them all to come in."

The herald went back to Beowulf.

"King Hrothgar told me to welcome you. Come in to see him, but leave your spears and shields outside the hall."

Beowulf told some of his men to stay outside and guard their weapons. The rest went into the hall, splendid in their helmets and cunningly-made armour.

"Greetings, Hrothgar," he said. "I have heard the story of Grendel's terrible deeds in my own country. Sailors have told me that this noble hall has to stand empty and useless every night, as soon as the sun has set. I have come to ask you if I may try to rid your hall of this monster. I will cast aside my sword and shield, and fight him bare-handed. God's will be done! If I am doomed to fail, Grendel will feast on my blood-covered body in some lonely spot, gloating over my death."

Hrothgar answered, "Thank you for your offer of help, Beowulf. I am glad to recall that I was able to help your father

when I was a young man. It distresses me to tell you what Grendel has done to my people, and how my band of warriors is diminished. Many times, bold warriors have drunk a pledge that they would stay in the banqueting hall at night, and wait to fight Grendel with their terrible swords. Then, when daylight came, we would find the hall drenched with blood and my brave warriors taken away.” He forced himself to seem more cheerful, and said, “Come and join in our feast.”

A bench was cleared for Beowulf’s men, and the great cup of ale was carried to them. A minstrel sang in a clear voice. There was revelry in Heorot. Only one man was not cheerful. He was called Unferth and he was jealous of Beowulf’s fame.

“Are you the same Beowulf who held a swimming contest with Breca out in the open sea?” he asked in a mocking voice. “You risked your lives in the deep water, and Breca won. I don’t expect that you will have much luck with Grendel tonight.”

“You must have drunk a lot of beer before you dared to say that,” Beowulf retorted. “Breca and I swam together in the fierce waves for five nights on end. He could not swim fast enough to get away from me. Then the tossing seas and the fierce north wind separated us. I fought off sea monsters with my sword, and my covering of chain mail protected me from their bites. I killed nine of them. Then the bright sun rose, and the current bore me to the country of the Lapps. I have never heard any stories like this told about you, Unferth. If you had been as brave as you like to suggest, I do not believe that Grendel could have done so much damage in Heorot. He rejoices in killing, and takes no notice of you. But now I am going to show him what courage and strength really are.”

The feast went on until darkness came. Hrothgar knew that Grendel would now be plotting how to attack the hall. He wished Beowulf good luck in his vigil, and he and all his

warriors went off to rest, leaving the strangers to guard the hall. When he had gone, Beowulf stripped off his armour and handed it to one of his men.

“I am no less strong than the unarmed Grendel,” he said. “Let God judge between us.”

He lay down to sleep, and his warriors lay down around him. They thought of all the men who had died in that hall. None of them ever expected to see his homeland again. At last, all those who were supposed to guard the hall fell asleep, all except one.

Then Grendel came from the mist-covered moor, striding under the clouds. When he reached the hall, he tore open the fastenings of the door with his bare hands. He strode on to the beautiful coloured floor and his eyes darted angrily round, like a lurid flame. He saw all the warriors huddled together in sleep. His heart was filled with joy to think that, before it was daylight, he could suck the life out of their bodies and feast on them all. As a beginning, he seized hold of a sleeping warrior and bit deep into his body. He drank the blood in his veins, and then he gobbled him all up, even his hands and feet. Next, Grendel reached out his hand to a warrior who was lying as if he was sound asleep. Before he could take hold of him, his own hand was seized. He had never known such a strong handgrip. He wanted to flee back into the darkness, and slink home to his lair. As he pulled, the warrior stood up too. It was Beowulf. He gripped hold of Grendel's hand until he felt as if all the veins in his fingers would burst. Grendel tugged hard, and they swayed violently. They crashed into the sides of the hall. The benches were tugged from the walls, as they struggled together fiercely. If Heorot had not been so strongly built, they might have knocked it down.

The clatter was heard by all the Danes outside. Then a more terrible noise arose—Grendel wailing loudly. The other

warriors in the hall tried to attack Grendel with their swords, but their weapons were powerless against him. Beowulf hung on grimly. Suddenly, there was a horrible rending noise, and the monster's arm tore free from its socket. Grendel stumbled away, the gaping wound spurting with blood, to die in his own lair.

So, Beowulf cleansed Hrothgar's hall of the demon. The arm that he had wrenched off was left as a proof of this. People came from all the surrounding districts to stare at Grendel's arm, and nobody felt any shred of sympathy for him. The warriors rode to the lake where Grendel had had his lair. The water was turbulent and surging with blood from where the monster had died. They rode back joyfully, racing their bay horses on the sandy tracks, and praising Beowulf's daring.

At Heorot, Grendel's hand was displayed on the gold-covered roof. Hrothgar went in solemn procession to see it. He looked at the hand with its horrible claws that were as hard as steel, and thanked God that they had been saved from the monster. When Beowulf came back, he thanked him with great ceremony, and said that he would always look upon him as a son.

A banquet was prepared, and the hall hung with gold-embroidered tapestries to hide the damage where Grendel, in his struggle for life, had wrenched parts of the walls and doors apart. Everyone rejoiced and feasted. Hrothgar gave Beowulf valuable gifts of finely-wrought weapons and horses whose bridles were plated with gold. Mead and wine were drunk freely, and the bard played on his harp and sang a stirring, heroic song. Hrothgar gave Beowulf more gifts of gold and precious jewels.

When it was late, Hrothgar retired to his rest. All the warriors settled down in the hall for the night, except for



Beowulf who was taken elsewhere to sleep in state. Now, at last, Heorot was safe.

PART TWO

While they had been rejoicing, another creature brooded on revenge. This was Grendel's mother, who was doomed to live in terror-haunted waters and icy streams. When it was dark, she came to the hall and crept in. The warriors started up and grabbed hold of their swords. There was no time to put on their armour. Before they could do anything, she had seized one of the men and escaped with him. On her way, she snatched Grendel's blood-covered hand from the roof.

Cries and laments rose up from Heorot. When Hrothgar heard the news, he was overcome with sadness. The dead man had been one of his most valued advisers. He summoned Beowulf and told him the terrible news.

"I have heard that there were two huge demons who haunt the moors," he said. "So far as people can tell, one of them is a woman. The other, a man, was the dreadful monster named Grendel. They lived in a mysterious land of wolf-haunted slopes and windy headlands, of dangerous paths through the marshes, where the mountain stream plunges down into abysses of mist. Not far from here is a lake that is always shadowed by frost-covered trees. A terrible wonder is seen there every night, fire burns on the water. Nobody knows how deep the lake is. Even a hunted stag will turn and let the hounds tear him to pieces rather than try to save his life by plunging into that lake. If you dare to go and seek the monster out there, I will reward you again—if you return."

Beowulf answered, "Everyone must die sooner or later. The best we can do is to win glory while we can. I promise

you that Grendel's kinswoman will never escape me, even if she hides in the depths of the woods, or plunges into the ocean."

Horses were saddled and they all set out. They rode along narrow paths and up steep, rocky slopes. At last they found the place, trees hanging over steep cliffs with blood-stained water below, and a fierce torrent plunging down into it. A terrible sight met them: the head of their murdered companion was placed at the edge of the cliff. They all grieved to see it.

The warriors blew their horns. The water monsters who had been swimming in the lake or lying on the rocks, dived back under the water in alarm. One of them was not quick enough, and Beowulf shot him with an arrow. The other warriors dragged out his floating carcass with their barbed spears.

Then Beowulf made himself ready. He put on his mail and his shining helmet, that was covered with gold and engraved with figures of boars. Unferth, the man who had taunted him earlier, lent him a sword. It had often shed blood in battle; it had never failed.

"I will either win death or fame with this!" exclaimed Beowulf, and with that he dived into the lake. He went down and down in the surging water. At last, he began to come up again. Suddenly, a hand grabbed him. Its horrible claws could not harm him because of his strong covering of linked chain-mail. He tried to draw his sword to fight his enemy off. He could not reach it, because there were so many strange beasts swimming about in the water, trying to break through his armour with their sharp tusks.

With a last strong tug, the creature who had seized him dragged him away from the water-beasts. To his surprise, he found himself standing on dry land on the floor of a cave. In front of him was a curtain of rushing water. He had found Grendel's secret lair behind the waterfall. He saw the bright

gleam of a fire. By its light he could make out the huge shape of the woman monster who lived in the lake. He determined to kill her at once. His sword blade whistled through the air as he brought it crashing down, but the sword which had never failed in battle before, rebounded uselessly off her. Beowulf breathed deeply, and his resolution grew stronger. He tossed the sword to the ground, and vowed that he would trust to the strength of his hands, as he had against Grendel. He seized the creature by her shoulders to fling her angrily to the ground, but she clutched him so that he stumbled. Next moment, she was crouched on top of him as he lay on the ground. She drew her dagger and tried to pierce him to the heart, but his chain-mail saved him. He shifted his head and looked round. Suddenly he noticed a huge old sword hanging on the wall of the cave. He gave one jolt and broke free of the monster. He snatched up the sword, and, as she was trying to seize him again, hit her furiously. The blade bit sharply through her neck, and she crashed to the floor, with her head severed. Beowulf stood triumphantly, holding the blood-stained sword. He was out of breath from the fight, but he looked around resolutely. Then he noticed Grendel's dead body still lying there, with the terrible wound still gaping in his shoulder. He raised the sword and cut off Grendel's head with one stroke.

The warriors, who were waiting by the shores of the lake, saw a stream of blood surge up through the water. They told one another sadly that Beowulf must be dead. Hrothgar and his men returned to the court. Only Beowulf's own followers stayed there. They were wretched, and never expected to see their leader again.

Down in the hidden cave, Beowulf stood with the sword in his hand. He stared at it in amazement as it started to melt away, like icicles when a thaw comes. Grendel's blood was so

poisonous that it had destroyed the sword-blade. Only the hilt remained. He held the hilt in one hand, and seized Grendel's head in the other. He ignored all the treasures which had been hidden in the cave. Soon, he was swimming upwards. He swam on through the swirling eddies that were purged of evil now that the monster was killed. He came to land, swimming strongly, and rejoicing in the spoils that he carried. His warriors shouted for joy to see their lord safely again. They took off his armour. The water now was growing calm. Then they started home. It took four of them to carry Grendel's monstrous head, and, even so, they found it difficult. At last, they reached Heorot, marching bravely and in a war-like fashion bearing Grendel's head in triumph into the hall.

There was feasting, and rejoicing again, and Hrothgar gave Beowulf more costly gifts. Then he sailed back to his own country. Several years later, the king and his son both died, and Beowulf became king. He ruled wisely and justly for many years. In the end, he died as bravely as he had lived, fighting a dragon which had been terrorizing the countryside. The dragon was killed, but Beowulf himself received a wound from which he soon died.

His men built a huge funeral pyre on the cliffs, and burned his body on it. Dark smoke poured out of the pyre, and the roar of the flames mingled with the sound of women's voices weeping. Warriors on horseback rode round the pyre, lamenting their king. When the pyre was cold, they built a huge mound over it, and filled the mound with precious gifts and gold. The mound could be seen from far off at sea, forever to act as a landmark to sailors, and as a memorial to the bravest of kings.

THE HORROR OF THE HEIGHTS

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

In which Joyce-Armstrong investigates the strange disappearances of some airmen. Seven miles up in his monoplane something whizzes past Joyce-Armstrong in a trail of smoke and explodes in a cloud of steam . . . the air is full of long ragged wisps like cigarette smoke . . . and above him is a fleet of objects like enormous pink jellyfish with green tentacles. Worst of all, floating downwards came a purple patch of vapour with a white projection like a vulture's beak—could this monster be the cause of the mysterious deaths?

THE idea that the extraordinary narrative which has been called the Joyce-Armstrong Fragment is an elaborate practical joke evolved by some unknown person, cursed by a perverted and sinister sense of humour, has now been abandoned by all who have examined the matter. The most macabre and imaginative of plotters would hesitate before linking his morbid fancies with the unquestioned and tragic facts which reinforce the statement. Though the assertions contained in it are amazing and even monstrous, it is none the less forcing itself upon the general intelligence that they are true, and that we must readjust our ideas to the new situation. This world of ours appears to be separated by a slight and precarious margin

of safety from a most singular and unexpected danger. I will endeavour in this narrative, which reproduces the original document in its necessarily somewhat fragmentary form, to lay before the reader the whole of the facts up to date, prefacing my statement by saying that, if there be any who doubt the narrative of Joyce-Armstrong, there can be no question at all as to the facts concerning Lieutenant Myrtle, R.N., and Mr. Hay Connor, who undoubtedly met their end in the manner described.

The Joyce-Armstrong Fragment was found in the field which is called Lower Haycock, lying one mile to the westward of the village of Withyham, upon the Kent and Sussex border. It was on the fifteenth of September last that an agricultural labourer, James Flynn, in the employment of Mathew Dodd, farmer, of the Chauntry Farm, Withyham, perceived a briar pipe lying near the footpath which skirts the hedge in Lower Haycock. A few paces farther on he picked up a pair of broken binocular glasses. Finally, among some nettles in the ditch, he caught sight of a flat, canvas-backed book, which proved to be a note-book with detachable leaves, some of which had come loose and were fluttering along the base of the hedge. These he collected, but some, including the first, were never recovered, and leave a deplorable hiatus in this all-important statement. The note-book was taken by the labourer to his master, who in turn showed it to Dr. J. H. Atherton, of Hartfield. This gentleman at once recognized the need for an expert examination, and the manuscript was forwarded to the Aero Club in London, where it now lies.

The first two pages of the manuscript are missing. There is also one torn away at the end of the narrative, though none of these affect the general coherence of the story. It is conjectured that the missing opening is concerned with the record of Mr. Joyce-Armstrong's qualifications as an aeronaut, which can be

gathered from our sources and are admitted to be unsurpassed among the air-pilots of England. For many years he has been looked upon as among the most daring and the most intellectual of flying men, a combination which has enabled him to both invent and test several new devices, including the common gyroscope attachment which is known by his name.

The main body of the manuscript is written neatly in ink, but the last few lines are in pencil and are so ragged as to be hardly legible—exactly, in fact, as they might be expected to appear if they were scribbled off hurriedly from the seat of a moving aeroplane. There are, it may be added, several stains, both on the last page and on the outside cover which have been pronounced by the Home Office experts to be blood—probably human and certainly mammalian. The fact that something closely resembling the organism of malaria was discovered in this blood, and that Joyce-Armstrong is known to have suffered from intermittent fever, is a remarkable example of the new weapons which modern science has placed in the hands of our detectives.

And now a word as to the personality of the author of this epoch-making statement. Joyce-Armstrong, according to the few friends who really knew something of the man, was a poet and a dreamer, as well as a mechanic and an inventor. He was a man of considerable wealth, much of which he had spent in the pursuit of his aeronautical hobby. He had four private aeroplanes in his hangars near Devizes, and is said to have made no fewer than one hundred and seventy ascents in the course of last year. He was a retiring man with dark moods, in which he would avoid the society of his fellows. Captain Dangerfield, who knew him better than anyone, says that there were times when his eccentricity threatened to develop into something more serious. His habit of carrying a shot-gun with him in his aeroplane was one manifestation of it.

Another was the morbid effect which the fall of Lieutenant Myrtle had upon his mind. Myrtle, who was attempting the height record, fell from an altitude of something over thirty thousand feet. Horrible to narrate, his head was entirely obliterated, though his body and limbs preserved their configuration. At every gathering of airmen, Joyce-Armstrong, according to Dangerfield, would ask, with an enigmatic smile: "And where, pray, is Myrtle's head?"

On another occasion after dinner, at the mess of the Flying School on Salisbury Plain, he started a debate as to what will be the most permanent danger which airmen will have to encounter. Having listened to successive opinions as to air-pockets, faulty construction, and over-banking, he ended by shrugging his shoulders and refusing to put forward his own views, though he gave the impression that they differed from any advanced by his companions.

It is worth remarking that after his own complete disappearance it was found that his private affairs were arranged with a precision which may show that he had a strong premonition of disaster. With these essential explanations I will now give the narrative exactly as it stands, beginning at page three of the blood-soaked notebook:

"Nevertheless, when I dined at Rheims with Coselli and Gustav Raymond I found that neither of them was aware of any particular danger in the higher layers of the atmosphere. I did not actually say what was in my thoughts, but I got so near to it that if they had any corresponding idea they could not have failed to express it. But then they are two empty, vainglorious fellows with no thought beyond seeing their silly names in the newspaper. It is interesting to note that neither of them had ever been much beyond the twenty-thousand-foot level. Of course, men have been higher than this both in

balloons and in the ascent of mountains. It must be well above that point that the aeroplane enters the danger zone—always presuming that my premonitions are correct.

“Aeroplaning has been with us now for more than twenty years, and one might well ask: Why should this peril be only revealing itself in our day? The answer is obvious. In the old days of weak engines, when a hundred horse-power Gnome or Green was considered ample for every need, the flights were very restricted. Now that three hundred horse-power is the rule rather than the exception, visits to the upper layers have become easier and more common. Some of us can remember how, in our youth, Garros made a world-wide reputation by attaining nineteen thousand feet, and it was considered a remarkable achievement to fly over the Alps. Our standard now has been immeasurable raised, and there are twenty high flights for one in former years. Many of them have been undertaken with impunity. The thirty-thousand-foot level has been reached time after time with no discomfort beyond cold and asthma. What does this prove? A visitor might descend upon this planet a thousand times and never see a tiger. Yet tigers exist, and if he chanced to come down into a jungle he might be devoured. There are jungles of the upper air, and there are worse things than tigers which inhabit them. I believe in time they will map these jungles accurately out. Even at the present moment I could name two of them. One of them lies over the Pau-Biarritz district of France. Another is just over my head as I write here in my house in Wiltshire. I rather think there is a third in the Homburg-Wiesbaden district.

“It was the disappearance of the airmen that first set me thinking. Of course, everyone said that they had fallen into the sea, but that did not satisfy me at all. First, there was Verrier in France; his machine was found near Bayonne, but

they never got his body. There was the case of Baxter also, who vanished, though his engine and some of the iron fixings were found in a wood in Leicestershire. In that case, Dr. Middleton, of Amesbury, who was watching the flight with a telescope, declares that just before the clouds obscured the view he saw the machine, which was at an enormous height, suddenly rise perpendicularly upwards in a succession of jerks in a manner that he would have thought to be impossible. That was the last seen of Baxter. There was a correspondence in the papers, but it never led to anything.

“There were several other similar cases, and then there was the death of Hay Connor. What a cackle there was about an unsolved mystery of the air, and what columns in the halfpenny papers, and yet how little was ever done to get to the bottom of the business! He came down in a tremendous vol-plané from an unknown height. He never got off his machine and died in his pilot’s seat. Died of what? ‘Heart disease,’ said the doctors. Rubbish! Hay Connor’s heart was as sound as mine is. What did Venables say? Venables was the only man who was at his side when he died. He said that he was shivering and looked like a man who had been badly scared. ‘Died of fright,’ said Venables, but could not imagine what he was frightened about. Only said one word to Venables, which sounded like ‘Monstrous.’ They could make nothing of that at the inquest. But I could make something of it. Monsters! That was the last word of poor Harry Hay Connor. And he *did* die of fright, just as Venables thought.

“And then there was Myrtle’s head. Do you really believe—does anybody really believe—that a man’s head could be driven clean into his body by the force of a fall? Well, perhaps it may be possible, but I, for one, have never believed that it was so with Myrtle. And the grease upon his clothes—‘all slimy with grease,’ said somebody at the inquest. Queer that

nobody got thinking after that! I did—but, then, I had been thinking for a good long time. I've made three ascents—how Dangerfield used to chaff me about my shot-gun—but I've never been high enough. Now, with this new, light Paul Veroner machine and its one hundred and seventy-five Robur, I should easily touch the thirty thousand tomorrow. I'll have a shot at the record. Maybe I shall have a shot at something else as well. Of course, it's dangerous. If a fellow wants to avoid danger he had best keep out of flying altogether and subside finally into flannel slippers and a dressing-gown. But I'll visit the air-jungle tomorrow—and if there's anything there I shall know it. If I return, I'll find myself a bit of a celebrity. If I don't, this note-book may explain what I am trying to do, and how I lost my life in doing it. But no drivel about accidents or mysteries, if *you* please.

“I chose my Paul Veroner monoplane for the job. There's nothing like a monoplane when real work is to be done. Beaumont found that out in very early days. For one thing it doesn't mind damp, and the weather looks as if we should be in the clouds all the time. It's a bonny little model and answers my hand like a tender-mouthed horse. The engine is a ten-cylinder rotary Robur working up to one hundred and seventy-five. It has all the modern improvements—enclosed fuselage, high-curved landing skids, brakes, gyroscopic steadiers, and three speeds, worked by an alteration of the angle of the planes upon the Venetian-blind principle. I took a shot-gun with me and a dozen cartridges filled with buck-shot. You should have seen the face of Perkins, my old mechanic, when I directed him to put them in. I was dressed like an Arctic explorer, with two jerseys under my overalls, thick socks inside my padded boots, a storm-cap with flaps, and my talc goggles. It was stifling outside the hangars, but I was going for the summit of the Himalayas, and had to dress for the part.

Perkins knew there was something on and implored me to take him with me. Perhaps I should if I were using the biplane, but a monoplane is a one-man show—if you want to get the last foot of life out of it. Of course, I took an oxygen bag; the man who goes for the altitude record without one will either be frozen or smothered—or both.

“I had a good look at the planes, the rudder-bar, and the elevating lever before I got in. Everything was in order so far as I could see. Then I switched on my engine and found that she was running sweetly. When they let her go she rose almost at once upon the lowest speed. I circled my home field once or twice just to warm her up, and then, with a wave to Perkins and the others, I flattened out my planes and put her on her highest. She skimmed like a swallow down wind for eight or ten miles until I turned her nose up a little and she began to climb in a great spiral for the cloud-bank above me. It’s all important to rise slowly and adapt yourself to the pressure as you go.

“It was a close, warm day for an English September, and there was the hush and heaviness of impending rain. Now and then there came sudden puffs of wind from the south-west—one of them so gusty and unexpected that it caught me napping and turned me half-round for an instant. I remember the time when gusts and whirls and air-pockets used to be things of danger—before we learned to put an overmastering power into our engines. Just as I reached the cloud-banks, with the altimeter marking three thousand, down came the rain. My word, how it poured! It drummed upon my wings and lashed against my face, blurring my glasses so that I could hardly see. I got down on to a low speed, for it was painful to travel against it. As I got higher it became hail, and I had to turn tail to it. One of my cylinders was out of action—a dirty plug, I should imagine, but still I was rising steadily with plenty of

power. After a bit the trouble passed, whatever it was, and I heard the full, deep-throated purr—the ten singing as one. That's where the beauty of our modern silencers comes in. We can control our engines by ear. How they squeal and squeak and sob when they are in trouble! All those cries for help were wasted in the old days, when every sound was swallowed up by the monstrous racket of the machine. If only the early aviators could come back to see the beauty and perfection of the mechanism which have been bought at the cost of their lives!

“About nine-thirty I was nearing the clouds. Down below me, all blurred and shadowed with rain, lay the vast expanse of Salisbury Plain. Half a dozen flying machines were doing hackwork at the thousand-foot level, looking like little black swallows against the green background. I dare say they were wondering what I was doing up in cloud land. Suddenly a grey curtain drew across beneath me and the wet folds of vapours were swirling round my face. It was clammily cold and miserable. But I was above the hail-storm, and that was something gained. The cloud was as dark and thick as a London fog. In my anxiety to get clear, I cocked her nose up until the automatic alarm-bell rang, and I actually began to slide backwards. My sopped and dripping wings had made me heavier than I thought, but presently I was in lighter cloud, and soon had cleared the first layer. There was a second—opal-coloured and fleecy—at a great height above my head, a white, unbroken ceiling above, and a dark, unbroken floor below, with the monoplane labouring upwards upon a vast spiral between them. It is deadly lonely in these cloud-spaces. Once a great flight of some small waterbirds went past me, flying very fast to the westwards. The quick whir of their wings and their musical cry were cheery to my ear. I fancy that they were teal, but I am a wretched zoologist. Now that we humans have

become birds we must really learn to know our brethren by sight.

“The wind down beneath me whirled and swayed the broad cloud-plain. Once a great eddy formed in it, a whirlpool of vapour, and through it, as down a funnel, I caught sight of the distant world. A large white biplane was passing at a vast depth beneath me. I fancy it was the morning mail service betwixt Bristol and London. Then the drift swirled inwards again and the great solitude was unbroken.

“Just after ten I touched the lower edge of the upper cloud-stratum. It consisted of fine diaphanous vapour drifting swiftly from the westward. The wind had been steadily rising all this time and it was now blowing a sharp breeze—twenty-eight an hour by my gauge. Already it was very cold, though my altimeter only marked nine thousand. The engines were working beautifully, and we went droning steadily upwards. The cloud-bank was thicker than I had expected, but at last it thinned out into a golden mist before me, and then in an instant I had shot out from it, and there was an unclouded sky and a brilliant sun above my head—all blue and gold above, all shining silver below, one vast, glimmering plain as far as my eyes could reach. It was a quarter past ten o’clock, and the barograph needle pointed to twelve thousand, eight hundred. Up I went and up, my ears concentrated upon the deep purring of my motor, my eyes busy always with the watch, the revolution indicator, the petrol lever, and the oil pump. No wonder aviators are said to be a fearless race. With so many things to think of there is no time to trouble about oneself. About this time I noted how unreliable is the compass when above a certain height from earth. At fifteen thousand feet mine was pointing east and a point south. The sun and the wind gave me my true bearings.

“I had hoped to reach an eternal stillness in these high

altitudes, but with every thousand feet of ascent the gale grew stronger. My machine groaned and trembled in every joint and rivet as she faced it, and swept away like a sheet of paper when I banked her on the turn, skimming down wind at a greater pace, perhaps, than ever mortal man has moved. Yet I had always to turn again and tack up in the wind's eye, for it was not merely a height record that I was after. By all my calculations it was above little Wiltshire that my air-jungle lay, and all my labour might be lost if I struck the outer layers at some farther point.

“When I reached the nineteen-thousand-foot level, which was about midday, the wind was so severe that I looked with some anxiety to the stays of my wings, expecting momentarily to see them snap or slacken. I even cast loose the parachute behind me, and fastened its hook into the ring of my leathern belt, so as to be ready for the worst. Now was the time when a bit of scamped work by the mechanic is paid for by the life of the aeronaut. But she held together bravely. Every cord and strut was humming and vibrating like so many harp-strings, but it was glorious to see how, for all the beating and the buffeting, she was still the conqueror of Nature and the mistress of the sky. There is surely something divine in man himself that he should rise so superior to the limitations which Creation seemed to impose—rise, too, by such unselfish, heroic devotion as this air-conquest has shown. Talk of human degeneration! When has such a story as this been written in the annals of our race?

“These were the thoughts in my head as I climbed that monstrous, inclined plane with the wind sometimes beating in my face and sometimes whistling behind my ears, while the cloud-land beneath me fell away to such a distance that the folds and hummocks of silver had all smoothed out into one flat, shining plain. But suddenly I had a horrible and

unprecedented experience. I have known before what it is to be in what our neighbours have called a *tourbillon*, but never on such a scale as this. That huge, sweeping river of wind of which I have spoken had as it appears, whirlpools within it which were as monstrous as itself. Without a moment's warning I was dragged suddenly into the heart of one. I spun around for a minute or two with such velocity that I almost lost my senses, and then fell suddenly, left wing foremost, down the vacuum funnel in the centre. I dropped like a stone, and lost nearly a thousand feet. It was only my belt that kept me in my seat, and the shock and breathlessness left me hanging half-insensible over the side of the fuselage. But I am always capable of a supreme effort—it is my one great merit as an aviator. I was conscious that the descent was slower. The whirlpool was a cone rather than a funnel, and I had come to the apex. With a terrific wrench, throwing my weight all to one side, I levelled my planes and brought her head away from the wind. In an instant I had shot out of the eddies and was skimming down the sky.

“Then, shaken but victorious, I turned her nose up and began once more my steady grind on the upward spiral. I took a large sweep to avoid the danger-spot of the whirlpool, and soon I was safely above it. Just after one o'clock I was twenty-one thousand feet above the sea-level. To my great joy I had topped the gale, and with every hundred feet of ascent the air grew stiller. On the other hand, it was very cold, and I was conscious of that peculiar nausea which goes with rarefaction of the air. For the first time I unscrewed the mouth of my oxygen bag and took an occasional whiff of the glorious gas. I could feel it running like a cordial through my veins, and I was exhilarated almost to the point of drunkenness. I shouted and sang as I soared upwards into the cold, still outer world.

“It is very clear to me that the insensibility which came

upon Glaisher, and in a lesser degree upon Coxwell, when, in 1862, they ascended in a balloon to the height of thirty thousand feet, was due to the extreme speed with which a perpendicular ascent is made. Doing it at an easy gradient and accustoming oneself to the lessened barometric pressure by slow degrees, there are no such dreadful symptoms. At the same great height I found that even without my oxygen inhaler I could breathe without undue distress. It was bitterly cold, however, and my thermometer was at zero, Fahrenheit. At one-thirty I was nearly seven miles above the surface of the earth, and still ascending steadily. I found, however, that the rarefied air was giving markedly less support to my planes, and that my angle of ascent had to be considerably lowered in consequence. It was already clear that even with my light weight and strong engine-power there was a point in front of me where I should be held. To make matters worse, one of my sparking-plugs was in trouble again and there was intermittent misfiring in the engine. My heart was heavy with the fear of failure.

“It was about that time that I had a most extraordinary experience. Something whizzed past me in a trail of smoke and exploded with a loud, hissing sound, sending forth a cloud of steam. For the instant I could not imagine what had happened. Then I remembered that the earth is for ever being bombarded by meteor stones, and would be hardly inhabitable were they not in nearly every case turned to vapour in the outer layers of the atmosphere. Here is a new danger for the high-altitude man, for two others passed me when I was nearing the forty-thousand-foot mark. I cannot doubt that at the edge of the earth’s envelope the risk would be a very real one.

“My barograph needle marked forty-one thousand three hundred when I became aware that I could go no farther.

Physically, the strain was not as yet greater than I could bear, but my machine had reached its limit. The attenuated air gave no firm support to the wings, and the least tilt developed into side-slip, while she seemed sluggish on her controls. Possibly, had the engine been at its best, another thousand feet might have been within our capacity, but it was still misfiring, and two out of the ten cylinders appeared to be out of action. If I had not already reached the zone for which I was searching then I should never see it upon this journey. But was it not possible that I had attained it? Soaring in circles like a monstrous hawk upon the forty-thousand-foot level I let the monoplane guide herself, and with my Mannheim glass I made a careful observation of my surroundings. The heavens were perfectly clear; there was no indication of those dangers which I had imagined.

“I have said that I was soaring in circles. It struck me suddenly that I would do well to take a wider sweep and open up a new air-tract. If the hunter entered an earth-jungle he would drive through it if he wished to find his game. My reasoning had led me to believe that the air-jungle which I had imagined lay somewhere over Wiltshire. This should be to the south and west of me. I took my bearings from the sun, for the compass was hopeless and no trace of earth was to be seen—nothing but the distant, silver cloud-plain. However, I got my direction as best I might and kept her head straight to the mark. I reckoned that my petrol supply would not last for more than another hour or so, but I could afford to use it to the last drop, since a single magnificent volplané could at any time take me to the earth.

“Suddenly I was aware of something new. The air in front of me had lost its crystal clearness. It was full of long, ragged wisps of something which I can only compare to very fine cigarette-smoke. It hung about in wreaths and coils, turning

and twisting slowly in the sunlight. As the monoplane shot through it, I was aware of a faint taste of oil upon my lips, and there was a greasy scum upon the woodwork of the machine. Some infinitely fine organic matter appeared to be suspended in the atmosphere. There was no life there. It was inchoate and diffuse, extending for many square acres and then fringing off into the void. No, it was not life. But might it not be the remains of life? Above all, might it not be the food of life, of monstrous life, even as the humble grease of the ocean is the food for the mighty whale? The thought was in my mind when my eyes looked upward and I saw the most wonderful vision that ever man has seen. Can I hope to convey it to you even as I saw it myself last Thursday?

“Conceive a jelly-fish such as sails in our summer seas, bell-shaped and of enormous size—far larger, I should judge, than the dome of St. Paul’s. It was of a light pink colour veined with a delicate green, but the whole fabric so tenuous that it was but a fairy outline against the dark blue sky. It pulsed with a delicate and regular rhythm. From it there depended two long, drooping, green tentacles, which swayed slowly backwards and forwards. This gorgeous vision passed gently with noiseless dignity over my head, as light and fragile as a soap-bubble, and drifted upon its stately way.

“I had half-turned my monoplane, that I might look after this beautiful creature, when, in a moment, I found myself amidst a perfect fleet of them, of all sizes, but none so large as the first. Some were quite small, but the majority about as big as an average balloon, and with much the same curvature at the top. There was in them a delicacy of texture and colouring which reminded me of the finest Venetian glass. Pale shades of pink and green were the prevailing tints, but all had a lovely iridescence where the sun shimmered through their dainty forms. Some hundreds of them drifted past me,

a wonderful fairy squadron of strange, unknown argosies of the sky—creatures whose forms and substance were so attuned to these pure heights that one could not conceive anything so delicate within actual sight or sound of earth.

“But soon my attention was drawn to a new phenomenon—the serpents of the outer air. These were long, thin, fantastic coils of vapour-like material, which turned and twisted with great speed, flying round and round at such a pace that the eyes could hardly follow them. Some of these ghost-like creatures were twenty or thirty feet long, but it was difficult to tell their girth, for their outline was so hazy that it seemed to fade away into the air around them. These air-snakes were of a very light grey or smoke colour, with some darker lines within, which gave the impression of a definite organism. One of them whisked past my very face, and I was conscious of a cold, clammy contact, but their composition was so unsubstantial that I could not connect them with any thought of physical danger, any more than the beautiful bell-like creatures which had preceded them. There was no more solidity in their frames than in the floating spume from a broken wave.

“But a more terrible experience was in store for me. Floating downwards from a great height there came a purplish patch of vapour, small as I saw it first, but rapidly enlarging as it approached me, until it appeared to be hundreds of square feet in size. Though fashioned of some transparent, jelly-like substance, it was none the less of much more definite outline and solid consistence than anything which I had seen before. There were more traces, too, of a physical organization, especially two vast, shadowy, circular plates upon either side, which may have been eyes, and a perfectly solid white projection between them which was as curved and cruel as the beak of a vulture.

“The whole aspect of this monster was formidable and

threatening, and it kept changing its colour from a very light mauve to a dark, angry purple so thick that it cast a shadow as it drifted between my monoplane and the sun. On the upper curve of its huge body there were three great projections which I can only describe as enormous bubbles, and I was convinced as I looked at them that they were charged with some extremely light gas which served to buoy up the misshapen and semi-solid mass in the rarefied air. The creature moved swiftly along, keeping pace easily with the monoplane, and for twenty miles or more it formed my horrible escort, hovering over me like a bird of prey which is waiting to pounce. Its method of progression—done so swiftly that it was not easy to follow—was to throw out a long, glutinous streamer in front of it, which in turn seemed to draw forward the rest of the writhing body. So elastic and gelatinous was it that never for two successive minutes was it the same shape, and yet each change made it more threatening and loathsome than the last.

“I knew that it meant mischief. Every purple flush of its hideous body told me so. The vague, goggling eyes which were turned always upon me were cold and merciless in their viscid hatred. I dipped the nose of my monoplane downwards to escape it. As I did so, as quick as a flash there shot out a long tentacle from this mass of floating blubber, and it fell as light and sinuous as a whip-lash across the front of my machine. There was a loud hiss as it lay for a moment across the hot engine, and it whisked itself into the air again, while the huge, flat body drew itself together as if in sudden pain. I dipped to a vol-piqué, but again a tentacle fell over the monoplane and was shorn off by the propeller as easily as it might have cut through a smoke wreath. A long, gliding, sticky, serpent-like coil came from behind and caught me round the waist, dragging me out of the fuselage. I tore at it, my fingers sinking into the smooth, glue-like surface, and for an instant I



disengaged myself, but only to be caught round the boot by another coil, which gave me a jerk that tilted me almost on to my back.

“As I fell over I blazed off both barrels of my gun, though, indeed, it was like attacking an elephant with a pea-shooter to imagine that any human weapon could cripple that mighty bulk. And yet I aimed better than I knew, for, with a loud report, one of the great blisters upon the creature’s back exploded with the puncture of the buck-shot. It was very clear that my conjecture was right, and that these vast, clear bladders were distended with some lifting gas, for in an instant the huge, cloud-like body turned sideways, writhing desperately to find its balance, while the white beak snapped and gaped in horrible fury. But already I had shot away on the steepest glide that I dared to attempt, my engine still full on, the flying propeller and the force of gravity shooting me downwards like an aerolite. Far behind me, I saw a dull, purplish smudge growing swiftly smaller and merging into the blue sky behind it. I was safe out of the deadly jungle of the outer air.

“Once out of danger I throttled my engine, for nothing tears a machine to pieces quicker than running on full power from a height. It was a glorious, spiral vol-plané from nearly eight miles of altitude—first, to the level of the silver cloud-bank, then to that of the storm-cloud beneath it, and finally, in beating rain, to the surface of the earth. I saw the Bristol Channel beneath me as I broke from the clouds, but, having still some petrol in my tank, I got twenty miles inland before I found myself stranded in a field half a mile from the village of Ashcombe. There I got three tins of petrol from a passing motor-car, and at ten minutes past six that evening I alighted gently in my own home meadow at Devizes, after such a journey as no mortal upon earth has ever yet taken and lived to tell the tale. I have seen the beauty and I have seen the horror of

the heights—and greater beauty or greater horror than that is not within the ken of man.

“And now it is my plan to go once again before I give my results to the world. My reason for this is that I must surely have something to show by way of proof before I lay such a tale before my fellow-men. It is true that others will soon follow and will confirm what I have said, and yet I should wish to carry conviction from the first. Those lovely iridescent bubbles of the air should not be hard to capture. They drift slowly upon their way, and the swift monoplane could intercept their leisurely course. It is likely enough that they would dissolve in the heavier layers of the atmosphere, and that some small heap of amorphous jelly might be all that I should bring to earth with me. And yet something there would surely be, by which I could substantiate my story. Yes, I will go, even if I run a risk by doing so. These purple horrors would not seem to be numerous. It is probable that I shall not see one. If I do I shall dive at once. At the worst there is always the shot-gun and my knowledge of . . .”

Here a page of the manuscript is unfortunately missing. On the next page is written, in large, straggling writing:—

“Forty-three thousand feet. I shall never see earth again. They are beneath me, three of them. God help me; it is a dreadful death to die!”

Such in its entirety is the Joyce-Armstrong Statement. Of the man nothing has since been seen. Pieces of his shattered monoplane have been picked up in the preserves of Mr. Budd-Lushington upon the borders of Kent and Sussex, within a few miles of the spot where the note-book was discovered. If the unfortunate aviator's theory is correct that this air-

jungle, as he called it, existed only over the south-west of England, then it would seem that he had fled from it at the full speed of his monoplane, but had been overtaken and devoured by these horrible creatures at some spot in the outer atmosphere above the place where the grim relics were found. The picture of that monoplane skimming down the sky, with the nameless terrors flying as swiftly beneath it and cutting it off always from the earth while they gradually closed in upon their victim, is one upon which a man who valued his sanity would prefer not to dwell. There are many, I am aware, who still jeer at the facts which I have here set down, but even they must admit that Joyce-Armstrong has disappeared, and I would commend to them his own words: "This note-book may explain what I am trying to do, and how I lost my life in doing it. But no drivel about accidents or mysteries, if *you* please."

GABRIEL- ERNEST

SAKI

In which Van Cheele finds a wild-looking young boy living in his woods. Recently there have been strange occurrences in the neighbourhood: poultry missing from the farms; hares growing unaccountably scarcer in the woods; lambs carried off bodily from the hills; even a child missing from the mill. Van Cheele is oddly disturbed when his aunt takes the boy into their home—and it is not long before his fears are justified!

“**T**HERE is a wild beast in your woods,” said the artist Cunningham, as he was being driven to the station. It was the only remark he had made during the drive, but as Van Cheele had talked incessantly his companion’s silence had not been noticeable.

“A stray fox or two and some resident weasels. Nothing more formidable,” said Van Cheele. The artist said nothing.

“What did you mean about a wild beast?” said Van Cheele later, when they were on the platform.

“Nothing. My imagination. Here is the train,” said Cunningham.

That afternoon, Van Cheele went for one of his frequent rambles through his woodland property. He had a stuffed

bittern in his study, and knew the names of quite a number of wild flowers, so his aunt had possibly some justification in describing him as a great naturalist. At any rate, he was a great walker. It was his custom to take mental notes of everything he saw during his walks, not so much for the purpose of assisting contemporary science as to provide topics for conversation afterwards. When the bluebells began to show themselves in flower he made a point of informing every one of the fact; the season of the year might have warned his hearers of the likelihood of such an occurrence, but at least they felt that he was being absolutely frank with them.

What Van Cheele saw on this particular afternoon was, however, something far removed from his ordinary range of experience. On the shelf of smooth stone overhanging a deep pool in the hollow of an oak coppice a boy of about sixteen lay asprawl, drying his wet brown limbs luxuriously in the sun. His wet hair, parted by a recent dive, lay close to his head and his light-brown eyes, so light that there was an almost tigerish gleam in them, were turned towards Van Cheele with a certain lazy watchfulness. It was an unexpected apparition, and Van Cheele found himself engaged in the novel process of thinking before he spoke. Where on earth could this wild-looking boy hail from? The miller's wife had lost a child some two months ago, supposed to have been swept away by the mill-race, but that had been a mere baby, not a half-grown lad.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded.

"Obviously, sunning myself," replied the boy.

"Where do you live?"

"Here, in these woods."

"You can't live in the woods," said Van Cheele.

"They are very nice woods," said the boy, with a touch of patronage in his voice.

"But where do you sleep at night?"

"I don't sleep at night; that's my busiest time."

Van Cheele began to have an irritated feeling that he was grappling with a problem that was eluding him.

"What do you feed on?" he asked.

"Flesh," said the boy, and he pronounced the word with slow relish, as though he were tasting it.

"Flesh! What flesh?"

"Since it interests you, rabbits, wild-fowl, hares, poultry, lambs in their season, children when I can get any; they're usually too well locked in at night, when I mostly do my hunting. It's quite two months since I tasted child-flesh."

Ignoring the chaffing nature of the last remark, Van Cheele tried to draw the boy on the subject of possible poaching operations.

"You're talking through your hat when you speak of feeding on hares." (Considering the nature of the boy's toilet, the simile was hardly an apt one.) "Our hillside hares aren't easily caught."

"At night I hunt on four feet," was the somewhat cryptic response.

"I suppose you mean that you hunt with a dog?" hazarded Van Cheele.

The boy rolled slowly over on to his back, and laughed a weird low laugh, that was pleasantly like a chuckle and disagreeably like a snarl.

"I don't fancy any dog would be very anxious for my company, especially at night."

Van Cheele began to feel that there was something positively uncanny about the strange-eyed, strange-tongued youngster.

"I can't have you staying in these woods," he declared authoritatively.

"I fancy you'd rather have me here than in your house," said the boy.

The prospect of this wild, nude animal in Van Cheele's primly-ordered house was certainly an alarming one.

"If you don't go I shall have to make you," said Van Cheele.

The boy turned like a flash, plunged into the pool, and in a moment had flung his wet and glistening body half-way up the bank where Van Cheele was standing. In an otter the movement would not have been remarkable; in a boy, Van Cheele found it sufficiently startling. His foot slipped as he made an involuntary backward movement, and he found himself almost prostrate on the slippery weed-grown bank, with those tigerish yellow eyes not very far from his own. Almost instinctively, he half-raised his hand to his throat. The boy laughed again, a laugh in which the snarl had nearly driven out the chuckle, and then, with another of his astonishing lightning movements, plunged out of view into a yielding tangle of weed and fern.

"What an extraordinary wild animal!" said Van Cheele as he picked himself up. And then he recalled Cunningham's remark, "There's a wild beast in your woods."

Walking slowly homeward, Van Cheele began to turn over in his mind various local occurrences which might be traceable to the existence of this astonishing young savage.

Something had been thinning the game in the woods lately, poultry had been missing from the farms, hares were growing unaccountably scarcer, and complaints had reached him of lambs being carried off bodily from the hills. Was it possible that this wild boy was really hunting the countryside in company with some clever poacher dog? He had spoken of hunting "four-footed" by night, but then, again, he had hinted strangely at no dog caring to come near him, "especially at night." It was certainly puzzling. And then, as Van Cheele ran his mind over the various depredations that had been committed during the last month or two, he came suddenly

to a dead stop, alike in his walk and his speculations. The child missing from the mill two months ago—the accepted theory was that it had tumbled into the mill-race and been swept away; but the mother had always declared she had heard a shriek on the hill side of the house, in the opposite direction from the water. It was unthinkable, of course, but he wished that the boy had not made that uncanny remark about child-flesh eaten two months ago. Such dreadful things should not be said even in fun.

Van Cheele, contrary to his usual wont, did not feel disposed to be communicative about his discovery in the wood. His position as a parish councillor and justice of the peace seemed somehow compromised by the fact that he was harbouring a personality of such doubtful repute on his property; there was even a possibility that a heavy bill for damages for raided lambs and poultry might be laid at his door. At dinner that night he was quite unusually silent.

“Where’s your voice gone to?” said his aunt. “One would think you had seen a wolf.”

Van Cheele, who was not familiar with the old saying, thought the remark rather foolish; if he *had* seen a wolf on his property his tongue would have been extraordinarily busy with the subject.

At breakfast next morning Van Cheele was conscious that his feeling of uneasiness regarding yesterday’s episode had not wholly disappeared, and he resolved to go by train to the neighbouring cathedral town, hunt up Cunningham, and learn from him what he had really seen that had prompted the remark about a wild beast in the woods. With this resolution taken, his usual cheerfulness partially returned, and he hummed a bright little melody as he sauntered to the morning-room for his customary cigarette. As he entered the room the melody made way abruptly for a pious invocation. Gracefully



asprawl on the ottoman, in an attitude of almost exaggerated repose, was the boy of the woods. He was drier than when Van Cheele had last seen him, but no other alteration was noticeable in his toilet.

And with a view to minimising that catastrophe Van Cheele hastily obscured as much of his unwelcome guest as possible under the folds of a *Morning Post*. At that moment his aunt entered the room.

"This is a poor boy who has lost his way—and lost his memory. He doesn't know who he is or where he comes from," explained Van Cheele desperately, glancing apprehensively at the waif's face to see whether he was going to add inconvenient candour to his other savage propensities.

Miss Van Cheele was enormously interested.

"Perhaps his underlinen is marked," she suggested.

"He seems to have lost most of that, too," said Van Cheele, making frantic little grabs at the *Morning Post* to keep it in its place.

A naked homeless child appealed to Miss Van Cheele as warmly as a stray kitten or derelict puppy would have done.

"We must do all we can for him," she decided, and in a very short time a messenger, dispatched to the rectory, where a page-boy was kept, had returned with a suit of pantry clothes and the necessary accessories of shirt, shoes, collar, etc. Clothed, clean and groomed, the boy lost none of his uncanniness in Van Cheele's eyes, but his aunt found him sweet.

"We must call him something till we know who he really is," she said. "Gabriel-Ernest, I think; those are nice suitable names."

Van Cheele agreed, but he privately doubted whether they were being grafted on to a nice suitable child. His misgivings were not diminished by the fact that his staid and elderly spaniel had bolted out of the house at the first incoming of the boy, and now obstinately remained shivering and yapping at the farther end of the orchard, while the canary, usually as vocally industrious as Van Cheele himself, had put itself on an allowance of frightened cheeps. More than ever, he was

resolved to consult Cunningham without loss of time.

As he drove off to the station his aunt was arranging that Gabriel-Ernest should help her to entertain the infant members of her Sunday-school class at tea that afternoon.

Cunningham was not at first disposed to be communicative.

“My mother died of some brain trouble,” he explained, “so you will understand why I am averse to dwelling on anything of an impossibly fantastic nature that I may see or think that I have seen.”

“But what *did* you see?” persisted Van Cheele.

“What I thought I saw was something so extraordinary that no really sane man could dignify it with the credit of having actually happened. I was standing, the last evening I was with you, half-hidden in the hedgegrowth by the orchard gate, watching the dying glow of the sunset. Suddenly I became aware of a naked boy, a bather from some neighbouring pool, I took him to be, who was standing out on the bare hillside also watching the sunset. His pose was so suggestive of some wild faun of Pagan myth that I instantly wanted to engage him as a model, and in another moment I think I should have hailed him. But just then the sun dipped out of view, and all the orange and pink slid out of the landscape, leaving it cold and grey. And at the same moment an astonishing thing happened—the boy vanished too!”

“What, vanished away into nothing?” asked Van Cheele excitedly.

“No; that is the dreadful part of it,” answered the artist; “on the open hillside where the boy had been standing a second ago, stood a large wolf, blackish in colour, with gleaming fangs and cruel, yellow eyes. You may think—”

But Van Cheele did not stop for anything as futile as thought. Already he was tearing at top speed towards the station. He dismissed the idea of a telegram. “Gabriel-Ernest

is a werewolf” was a hopelessly inadequate effort at conveying the situation, and his aunt would think it was a code message to which he had omitted to give her the key.

His one hope was that he might reach home before sundown. The cab which he chartered at the other end of the railway journey bore him with what seemed exasperating slowness along the country roads, which were pink and mauve with the flush of the sinking sun. His aunt was putting away some unfinished jam and cakes when he arrived.

“Where is Gabriel-Ernest?” he almost screamed.

“He is taking the little Toop child home,” said his aunt.

“It was getting so late, I thought it wasn’t safe to let it go back alone. What a lovely sunset, isn’t it?”

But Van Cheele, although not oblivious of the glow in the western sky, did not stay to discuss its beauties. At a speed for which he was scarcely geared, he raced along the narrow lane that led to the home of the Toops. On one side ran the swift current of the mill-stream, on the other rose the stretch of bare hillside. A dwindling rim of red sun showed still on the skyline, and the next turning must bring him in view of the ill-assorted couple he was pursuing. Then the colour went suddenly out of things, and a grey light settled itself with a quick shiver over the landscape. Van Cheele heard a shrill wail of fear, and stopped running.

Nothing was ever seen again of the Toop child or Gabriel-Ernest, but the latter’s discarded garments were found lying in the road, so it was assumed that the child had fallen into the water, that the boy had stripped and jumped in, in a vain endeavour to save it. Van Cheele and some workmen who were near by at the time testified to having heard a child scream loudly just near the spot where the clothes were found. Mrs. Toop, who had eleven other children, was decently resigned to her bereavement, but Miss Van Cheele sincerely mourned

her lost foundling. It was on her initiative that a memorial brass was put up in the parish church to "Gabriel-Ernest, an unknown boy, who bravely sacrificed his life for another."

Van Cheele gave way to his aunt in most things, but he flatly refused to subscribe to the Gabriel-Ernest memorial.

MOXON'S MASTER

AMBROSE BIERCE

In which Moxon invents a human automaton. But what is a machine? Can it become a murdering monster . . . ?

“**A**RE you serious? — do you really believe that a machine thinks?”

I got no immediate reply; Moxon was apparently intent upon the coals in the grate, touching them deftly here and there with the fire-poker till they signified a sense of his attention by a brighter glow. For several weeks I had been observing in him a growing habit of delay in answering even the most trivial of commonplace questions. His air, however, was that of preoccupation rather than deliberation: one might have said that he had “something on his mind.”

Presently he said:

“What is a ‘machine’? The word has been variously defined. Here is one definition from a popular dictionary: ‘Any instrument or organization by which power is applied and made effective, or a desired effect produced.’ Well, then, is not a man a machine? And you will admit that he thinks—or thinks he thinks.”

"If you do not wish to answer my question," I said, rather testily, "why not say so?—all that you say is mere evasion. You know well enough that when I saw 'machine' I do not mean a man, but something that man has made and controls."

"When it does not control him," he said, rising abruptly and looking out of a window, whence nothing was visible in the blackness of a stormy night. A moment later he turned about and with a smile said:

"I beg your pardon; I had no thought of evasion. I considered the dictionary man's unconscious testimony suggestive and worth something in the discussion. I can give your question a direct answer easily enough: I do believe that a machine thinks about the work that it is doing."

That was direct enough, certainly. It was not altogether pleasing, for it tended to confirm a sad suspicion that Moxon's devotion to study and work in his machine-shop had not been good for him. I knew, for one thing, that he suffered from insomnia, and that is no light affliction. Had it affected his mind? His reply to my question seemed to me then evidence that it had; perhaps I should think differently about it now. I was younger then, and among the blessings that are not denied to youth is ignorance. Incited by that great stimulant to controversy, I said:

"And what, pray, does it think with—in the absence of a brain?"

The reply, coming with less than his customary delay, took his favourite form of counter-interrogation:

"With what does a plant think—in the absence of a brain?"

"Ah, plants also belong to the philosopher class! I should be pleased to know some of their conclusions; you may omit the premises."

"Perhaps," he replied, apparently unaffected by my foolish irony, "you may be able to infer their convictions from their

acts. I will spare you the familiar examples of the sensitive mimosa, the several insectivorous flowers and those whose stamens bend down and shake their pollen upon the entering bee in order that he may fertilize their distant mates. But observe this. In an open spot in my garden I planted a climbing vine. When it was barely above the surface I set a stake into the soil a yard away. The vine at once made for it, but as it was about to reach it after several days I removed it a few feet. The vine at once altered its course, making an acute angle, and again made for the stake. This manoeuvre was repeated several times, but finally, as if discouraged, the vine abandoned the pursuit and ignoring further attempts to divert it travelled to a small tree, further away, which it climbed.

“Roots of the eucalyptus will prolong themselves incredibly in search of moisture. A well-known horticulturist relates that one entered an old drain pipe and followed it until it came to a break, where a section of the pipe had been removed to make way for a stone wall that had been built across its course. The root left the drain and followed the wall until it found an opening where a stone had fallen out. It crept through and following the other side of the wall back to the drain, entered the unexplored part and resumed its journey.

“And all this?”

“Can you miss the significance of it? It shows the consciousness of plants. It proves that they think.”

“Even if it did—what then? We were speaking, not of plants, but of machines. They may be composed partly of wood—wood that has no longer vitality—or wholly of metal. Is thought an attribute of the mineral kingdom?”

“How else do you explain the phenomena, for example, of crystallization?”

“I do not explain them.”

“Because you cannot without affirming what you wish to

deny, namely, intelligent co-operation among the constituent elements of the crystals. When soldiers form lines, or hollow squares, you call it reason. When wild geese in flight take the form of a letter V you say instinct. When the homogenous atoms of a mineral, moving freely in solution, arrange themselves into shapes mathematically perfect, or particles of frozen moisture into the symmetrical and beautiful forms of snowflakes, you have nothing to say. You have not even invented a name to conceal your heroic unreason."

Moxon was speaking with unusual animation and earnestness. As he paused I heard in an adjoining room known to me as his "machine-shop," which no one but himself was permitted to enter, a singular thumping sound, as of some one pounding upon a table with an open hand. Moxon heard it at the same moment and, visibly agitated, rose and hurriedly passed into the room whence it came. I thought it odd that any one else should be in there, and my interest in my friend—with doubtless a touch of unwarrantable curiosity—led me to listen intently, though, I am happy to say, not at the keyhole. There were confused sounds, as of a struggle or scuffle; the floor shook. I distinctly heard hard breathing and a hoarse whisper which said "Damn you!" Then all was silent, and presently Moxon reappeared and said, with a rather sorry smile:

"Pardon me for leaving you so abruptly. I have a machine in there that lost its temper and cut up rough."

Fixing my eyes steadily upon his left cheek, which was traversed by four parallel excoriations showing blood, I said:

"How would it do to trim its nails?"

I could have spared myself the jest; he gave it no attention, but seated himself in the chair that he had left and resumed the interrupted monologue as if nothing had occurred:

"Doubtless you do not hold with those (I need not name

them to a man of your reading) who have taught that all matter is sentient, that every atom is a living, feeling, conscious being. *I do.* There is no such thing as dead, inert matter: it is all alive; all instinct with force, actual and potential; all sensitive to the same forces in its environment and susceptible to the contagion of higher and subtler ones residing in such superior organisms as it may be brought into relation with, as those of man when he is fashioning it into an instrument of his will. It absorbs something of his intelligence and purpose—more of them in proportion to the complexity of the resulting machine and that of its work.

“Do you happen to recall Herbert Spencer’s definition of ‘Life’? I read it thirty years ago. He may have altered it afterward, for anything I know, but in all that time I have been unable to think of a single word that could profitably be changed or added or removed. It seems to me not only the best definition, but the only possible one.

“‘Life,’ he said, ‘is a definite combination of heterogeneous changes, both simultaneous and successive, in correspondence with external coexistences and sequences.’”

“That defines the phenomenon,” I said, “but gives no hint of its cause.”

“That,” he replied, “is all that any definition can do. As Mill points out, we know nothing of cause except as an antecedent—nothing of effect except as a consequent. Of certain phenomena, one never occurs without another, which is dissimilar: the first in point of time we call cause, the second, effect. One who had many times seen a rabbit pursued by a dog, and had never seen rabbits and dogs otherwise, would think the rabbit the cause of the dog.

“But I fear,” he added, laughing naturally enough, “that my rabbit is leading me a long way from the track of my legitimate quarry: I’m indulging in the pleasure of the chase

for its own sake. What I want you to observe is that in Herbert Spencer's definition of 'life' the activity of a machine if included—there is nothing in the definition that is not applicable to it. According to this sharpest of observers and deepest of thinkers, if a man during his period of activity is alive, so is a machine when in operation. As an inventor and constructor of machines I know that to be true."

Moxon was silent for a long time, gazing absently into the fire. It was growing late and I thought it time to be going, but somehow I did not like the notion of leaving him in that isolated house, all alone except for the presence of some person of whose nature my conjectures could go no further than that it was unfriendly, perhaps malign. Leaning toward him and looking earnestly into his eyes while making a motion with my hand through the door of his workshop, I said:

"Moxon, whom have you in there?"

Somewhat to my surprise he laughed lightly and answered without hesitation:

"Nobody; the incident that you have in mind was caused by my folly in leaving a machine in action with nothing to act upon, while I undertook the interminable task of enlightening your understanding. Do you happen to know that Consciousness is the creature of Rhythm?"

"O bother them both!" I replied, rising and laying hold of my overcoat. "I'm going to wish you good night; and I'll add the hope that the machine which you inadvertently left in action will have her gloves on the next time you think it needful to stop her."

Without waiting to observe the effect of my shot I left the house.

Rain was falling, and the darkness was intense. In the sky beyond the crest of a hill toward which I groped my way along precarious plank sidewalks and across miry, unpaved streets I

could see the faint glow of the city's lights, but behind me nothing was visible but a single window of Moxon's house. It glowed with what seemed to me a mysterious and fateful meaning. I knew it was an uncurtained aperture in my friend's "machine-shop," and I had little doubt that he had resumed the studies interrupted by his duties as my instructor in mechanical consciousness and the fatherhood of Rhythm. Odd, and in some degree humorous, as his convictions seemed to me at that time, I could not wholly divest myself of the feeling that they had some tragic relation to his life and character—perhaps to his destiny—although I no longer entertained the notion that they were the vagaries of a disordered mind. Whatever might be thought of his views, his exposition of them was too logical for that. Over and over, his last words came back to me: "Consciousness is the creature of Rhythm." Bald and terse as the statement was, I now found it infinitely alluring. At each recurrence it broadened in meaning and deepened in suggestion. Why, here (I thought) is something upon which to found a philosophy. If consciousness is the product of rhythm all things *are* conscious, for all have motion, and all motion is rhythmic. I wondered if Moxon knew the significance and breadth of his thought—the scope of this momentous generalization; or had he arrived at his philosophic faith by the tortuous and uncertain road of observation?

That faith was then new to me, and all Moxon's expounding had failed to make me a convert; but now it seemed as if a great light shone about me, like that which fell upon Saul of Tarsus; and out there in the storm and darkness and solitude I experienced what Lewes calls "The endless variety and excitement of philosophic thought." I exulted in a new sense of knowledge, a new pride of reason. My feet seemed hardly to touch the earth; it was as if I were uplifted and borne through the air by invisible wings.

Yielding to an impulse to seek further light from him whom I now recognized as my master and guide, I had unconsciously turned about, and almost before I was aware of having done so found myself again at Moxon's door. I was drenched with rain, but felt no discomfort. Unable in my excitement to find the doorbell I instinctively tried the knob. It turned and, entering, I mounted the stairs to the room that I had so recently left. All was dark and silent; Moxon, as I had supposed, was in the adjoining room—the "machine-shop." Groping along the wall until I found the communicating door I knocked loudly several times, but got no response, which I attributed to the uproar outside, for the wind was blowing a gale and dashing the rain against the thin walls in sheets. The drumming upon the shingle roof spanning the unceiled room was loud and incessant.

I had never been invited into the machine-shop—had, indeed, been denied admittance, as had all others, with one exception, a skilled metal worker, of whom no one knew anything except that his name was Haley and his habit silence. But in my spiritual exaltation, discretion and civility were alike forgotten and I opened the door. What I saw took all philosophical speculation out of me in short order.

Moxon sat facing me at the farther side of a small table upon which a single candle made all the light that was in the room. Opposite him, his back toward me, sat another person. On the table between the two was a chessboard; the men were playing. I knew little of chess, but as only a few pieces were on the board it was obvious that the game was near its close. Moxon was intensely interested—not so much, it seemed to me, in the game as in his antagonist, upon whom he had fixed so intent a look that, standing though I did directly in the line of his vision, I was altogether unobserved. His face was ghastly white, and his eyes glittered like diamonds. Of his antagonist I had

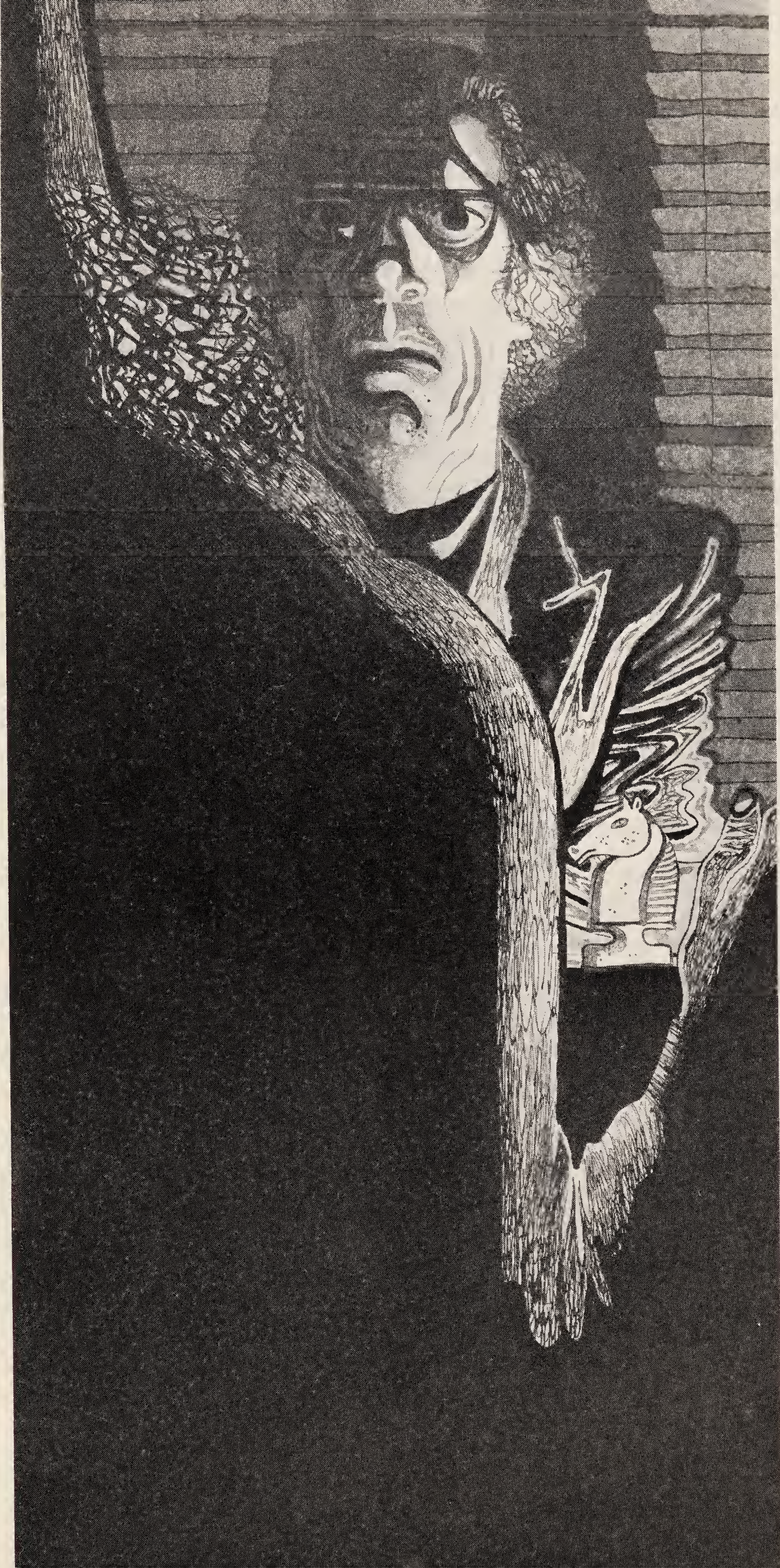
only a back view, but that was sufficient; I should not have cared to see his face.

He was apparently not more than five feet in height, with proportions suggesting those of a gorilla—a tremendous breadth of shoulders, thick, short neck and broad, squat head, which had a tangled growth of black hair and was topped with a crimson fez. A tunic of the same colour, belted tightly to the waist, reached the seat—apparently a box—upon which he sat; his legs and feet were not seen. His left forearm appeared to rest in his lap; he moved his pieces with his right hand, which seemed disproportionately long.

I had shrunk back and now stood a little to one side of the doorway and in shadow. If Moxon had looked farther than the face of his opponent he could have observed nothing now, except that the door was open. Something forbade me either to enter or to retire, a feeling—I know not how it came—that I was in the presence of an imminent tragedy and might serve my friend by remaining. With a scarcely conscious rebellion against the indelicacy of the act I remained.

The play was rapid. Moxon hardly glanced at the board before making his moves, and to my unskilled eye seemed to move the piece most convenient to his hand, his motions in doing so being quick, nervous and lacking in precision. The response of his antagonist, while equally prompt in the inception, was made with a slow, uniform, mechanical and, I thought, somewhat theatrical movement of the arm, that was a sore trial to my patience. There was something unearthly about it all, and I caught myself shuddering. But I was wet and cold.

Two or three times after moving a piece the stranger slightly inclined his head, and each time I observed that Moxon shifted his king. All at once the thought came to me that the man was dumb. And then that he was a machine—an auto-



maton chessplayer! Then I remembered that Moxon had once spoken to me of having invented such a piece of mechanism, though I did not understand that it had actually been constructed. Was all his talk about the consciousness and intelligence of machines merely a prelude to eventual exhibition of this device—only a trick to intensify the effect of its mechanical action upon me in my ignorance of its secret?

A fine end, this, of all my intellectual transports—my “endless variety and excitement of philosophic thought!” I was about to retire in disgust when something occurred to hold my curiosity. I observed a shrug of the thing’s great shoulders, as if it were irritated: and so natural was this—so entirely human—that in my new view of the matter it startled me. Nor was that all, for a moment later it struck the table sharply with its clenched hand. At that gesture Moxon seemed even more startled than I: he pushed his chair a little backward, as in alarm.

Presently Moxon, whose play it was, raised his hand high above the board, pounced upon one of his pieces like a sparrowhawk and with the exclamation “checkmate!” rose quickly to his feet and stepped behind his chair. The automaton sat motionless.

The wind had now gone down, but I heard, at lessening intervals and progressively louder, the rumble and roll of thunder. In the pauses between I now became conscious of a low humming or buzzing which, like the thunder, grew momentarily louder and more distinct. It seemed to come from the body of the automaton, and was unmistakably a whirring of wheels. It gave me the impression of a disordered mechanism which had escaped the repressive and regulating action of some controlling part—an effect such as might be expected if a pawl should be jostled from the teeth of a ratchet-wheel.

But before I had time for much conjecture as to its nature my attention was taken by the strange motions of the automaton itself. A slight but continuous convulsion appeared to have possession of it. In body and head it shook like a man with palsy or an ague chill, and the motion augmented every moment until the entire figure was in violent agitation. Suddenly it sprang to its feet and with a movement almost too quick for the eye to follow shot forward across table and chair, with both arms thrust forth to their full length—the posture and lunge of a diver. Moxon tried to throw himself backward out of reach, but he was too late: I saw the horrible thing's hands close upon his throat, his own clutch its wrists. Then the table was overturned, the candle thrown to the floor and extinguished, and all was black dark.

But the noise of the struggle was dreadfully distinct, and most terrible of all were the raucous, squawking sounds made by the strangled man's efforts to breathe. Guided by the infernal hubbub, I sprang to the rescue of my friend, but had hardly taken a stride in the darkness when the whole room blazed with a blinding white light that burned into my brain and heart and memory a vivid picture of the combatants on the floor, Moxon underneath, his throat still in the clutch of those iron hands, his head forced backward, his eyes protruding, his mouth wide open and his tongue thrust out; and—horrible contrast—upon the painted face of his assassin an expression of tranquil and profound thought, as in the solution of a problem in chess! This I observed, then all was blackness and silence.

Three days later I recovered consciousness in a hospital. As the memory of that tragic night slowly evolved in my ailing brain I recognized in my attendant Moxon's confidential workman, Haley. Responding to a look he approached, smiling.

"Tell me about it," I managed to say, faintly—"all about it."

“Certainly,” he said; “you were carried unconscious from a burning house—Moxon’s. Nobody knows how you came to be there. You may have to do a little explaining. The origin of the fire is a bit mysterious, too. My own notion is that the house was struck by lightning.”

“And Moxon?”

“Buried yesterday—what was left of him.”

Apparently this reticent person could unfold himself on occasion. When imparting shocking intelligence to the sick he was affable enough. After some moments of the keenest mental suffering I ventured to ask another question:

“Who rescued me?”

“Well, if that interests you—I did.”

“Thank you, Mr. Haley, and may God bless you for it. Did you rescue, also, that charming product of your skill, the automaton chess-player that murdered its inventor?”

The man was silent a long time, looking away from me. Presently he turned and gravely said:

“Do you know that?”

“I do,” I replied, “I saw it done.”

That was many years ago. If asked today I should answer less confidently.

THE OUTSIDER

H. P. LOVECRAFT

In which the Outsider escapes from his prison in a frantic longing for light and is drawn towards the open window of a castle. Inside are a brightly dressed crowd, making merry. But when the Outsider appears they scream with fright and flee in panic from the room, stumbling against the furniture in their haste to escape. What horror have they seen?

That night the Baron dreamt of many a woe;
And all his warrior-guests, with shade and form
Of witch, and demon, and large coffin-worm,
Were long be-nightmared.

—KEATS

UNHAPPY is he to whom the memories of childhood bring only fear and sadness. Wretched is he who looks back upon lone hours in vast and dismal chambers with brown hangings and maddening rows of antique books, or upon awed watches in twilight groves of grotesque, gigantic, and vine-encumbered trees that silently wave twisted branches far aloft. Such a lot the gods gave to me—to me, the dazed, the disappointed; the barren, the broken. And yet I am strangely

content and cling desperately to those sere memories, when my mind momentarily threatens to reach beyond that to *the other*.

I know not where I was born, save that the castle was infinitely old and infinitely horrible, full of dark passages and having high ceilings where the eye could find only cobwebs and shadows. The stones in the crumbling corridors seemed always hideously damp, and there was an accursed smell everywhere, as of the piled-up corpses of dead generations. It was never light, so that I used sometimes to light candles and gaze steadily at them for relief, nor was there any sun outdoors, since the terrible trees grew high above the topmost accessible tower. There was one black tower which reached above the trees into the unknown outer sky, but that was partly ruined and could not be ascended save by a well-nigh impossible climb up the sheer wall, stone by stone.

I must have lived years in this place, but I can not measure the time. Beings must have cared for my needs, yet I can not recall any person except myself, or anything alive but the noiseless rats and bats and spiders. I think that whoever nursed me must have been shockingly aged, since my first conception of a living person was that of something mockingly like myself, yet distorted, shrivelled, and decaying like the castle. To me there was nothing grotesque in the bones and skeletons that strewed some of the stone crypts deep down among the foundations. I fantastically associated these things with everyday events, and thought them more natural than the coloured pictures of living beings which I found in many of the mouldy books. From such books I learned all that I know. No teacher urged or guided me, and I do not recall hearing any human voice in all those years—not even my own; for although I had read of speech, I had never thought to try to speak aloud. My aspect was a matter equally unthought of, for there were no mirrors

in the castle, and I merely regarded myself by instinct as akin to the youthful figures I saw drawn and painted in the books. I felt conscious of youth because I remembered so little.

Outside, across the putrid moat and under the dark mute trees, I would often lie and dream for hours about what I read in the books; and would longingly picture myself amidst gay crowds in the sunny world beyond the endless forest. Once I tried to escape from the forest, but as I went farther from the castle the shade grew denser and the air more filled with brooding fear; so that I ran frantically back lest I lose my way in a labyrinth of nighted silence.

So through endless twilights I dreamed and waited, though I knew not what I waited for. Then in the shadowy solitude my longing for light grew so frantic that I could rest no more, and I lifted entreating hands to the single black ruined tower that reached above the forest into the unknown outer sky. And at last I resolved to scale that tower, fall though I might; since it were better to glimpse the sky and perish, than to live without ever beholding day.

In the dank twilight I climbed the worn and aged stone stairs till I reached the level where they ceased, and thereafter clung perilously to small footholds leading upward. Ghastly and terrible was that dead, stairless cylinder of rock; black, ruined, and deserted, and sinister with startled bats whose wings made no noise. But more ghastly and terrible still was the slowness of my progress; for climb as I might, the darkness overhead grew no thinner, and a new chill as of haunted and venerable mould assailed me. I shivered as I wondered why I did not reach the light, and would have looked down had I dared. I fancied that night had come suddenly upon me, and vainly groped with one free hand for a window embrasure, that I might peer out and above, and try to judge the height I had attained.

All at once, after an infinity of awesome, sightless crawling up that concave and desperate precipice, I felt my head touch a solid thing, and knew I must have gained the roof, or at least some kind of floor. In the darkness I raised my free hand and tested the barrier, finding it stone and immovable. Then came a deadly circuit of the tower, clinging to whatever holds the slimy wall could give; till finally my testing hand found the barrier yielding, and I turned upward again, pushing the slab or door with my head as I used both hands in my fearful ascent. There was no light revealed above, and as my hands went higher I knew that my climb was for the nonce ended; since the slab was the trap-door of an aperture leading to a level stone surface of greater circumference than the lower tower, no doubt the floor of some lofty and capacious observation chamber. I crawled through carefully, and tried to prevent the heavy slab from falling back into place, but failed in the latter attempt. As I lay exhausted on the stone floor I heard the eery echoes of its fall, but hoped when necessary to pry it up again.

Believing I was now at a prodigious height, far above the accursed branches of the wood, I dragged myself up from the floor and fumbled about for windows, that I might look for the first time upon the sky, and the moon and stars of which I had read. But on every hand I was disappointed; since all that I found were vast shelves of marble, bearing odious oblong boxes of disturbing size. More and more I reflected, and wondered what hoary secrets might abide in this high apartment so many eons cut off from the castle below. Then unexpectedly my hands came upon a doorway, where hung a portal of stone, rough with strange chiselling. Trying it, I found it locked; but with a supreme burst of strength I overcame all obstacles and dragged it open inward. As I did so there came to me the purest ecstasy I have ever known; for shining tranquilly through an

ornate grating of iron, and down a short stone passageway of steps that ascended from the newly found doorway, was the radiant full moon, which I had never before seen save in dreams and in vague visions I dared not call memories.

Fancying now that I had attained the very pinnacle of the castle, I commenced to rush up the few steps beyond the door; but the sudden veiling of the moon by a cloud caused me to stumble, and I felt my way more slowly in the dark. It was still very dark when I reached the grating—which I tried carefully and found unlocked, but which I did not open for fear of falling from the amazing height to which I had climbed. Then the moon came out.

Most demoniacal of all shocks is that of the abysmally unexpected and grotesquely unbelievable. Nothing I had before undergone could compare in terror with what I now saw; with the bizarre marvels that sight implied. The sight itself was as simple as it was stupefying, for it was merely this: instead of a dizzying prospect of treetops seen from a lofty eminence, there stretched around me on the level through the grating nothing less than *the solid ground*, decked and diversified by marble slabs and columns, and overshadowed by an ancient stone church, whose ruined spire gleamed spectrally in the moonlight.

Half unconscious, I opened the grating and staggered out upon the white gravel path that stretched away in two directions. My mind, stunned and chaotic as it was, still held the frantic craving for light; and not even the fantastic wonder which had happened could stay my course. I neither knew nor cared whether my experience was insanity, dreaming, or magic; but was determined to gaze on brilliance and gaiety at any cost. I knew not who I was or what I was, or what my surroundings might be; though as I continued to stumble along I became conscious of a kind of fearsome latent memory

that made my progress not wholly fortuitous. I passed under an arch out of that region of slabs and columns, and wandered through the open country; sometimes following the visible road, but sometimes leaving it curiously to tread across meadows where only occasional ruins bespoke the ancient presence of a forgotten road. Once I swam across a swift river where crumbling, mossy masonry told of a bridge long vanished.

Over two hours must have passed before I reached what seemed to be my goal, a venerable ivied castle in a thickly wooded park, maddeningly familiar, yet full of perplexing strangeness to me. I saw that the moat was filled in, and that some of the well-known towers were demolished; whilst new wings existed to confuse the beholder. But what I observed with chief interest and delight were the open windows—gorgeously ablaze with light and sending forth sound of the gayest revelry. Advancing to one of these I looked in and saw an oddly dressed company, indeed; making merry, and speaking brightly to one another. I had never, seemingly, heard human speech before and could guess only vaguely what was said. Some of the faces seemed to hold expressions that brought up incredibly remote recollections, others were utterly alien.

I now stepped through the low window into the brilliantly lighted room, stepping as I did so from my single bright moment of hope to my blackest convulsion of despair and realization. The nightmare was quick to come, for as I entered, there occurred immediately one of the most terrifying demonstrations I had ever conceived. Scarcely had I crossed the sill when there descended upon the whole company a sudden and unheralded fear of hideous intensity, distorting every face and evoking the most horrible screams from nearly every throat. Flight was universal, and in the clamour and panic several fell in a swoon and were dragged away by their madly

fleeing companions. Many covered their eyes with their hands, and plunged blindly and awkwardly in their race to escape, overturning furniture and stumbling against the walls before they managed to reach one of the many doors.

The cries were shocking; and as I stood in the brilliant apartment alone and dazed, listening to their vanishing echoes, I trembled at the thought of what might be lurking near me unseen. At a casual inspection the room seemed deserted, but when I moved toward one of the alcoves I thought I detected a presence there—a hint of motion beyond the golden-arched doorway leading to another and somewhat similar room. As I approached the arch I began to perceive the presence more clearly; and then, with the first and last sound I ever uttered—a ghastly ululation that revolted me almost as poignantly as its noxious cause—I beheld in full, frightful vividness the inconceivable, indescribable, and unmentionable monstrosity which had by its simple appearance changed a merry company to a herd of delirious fugitives.

I can not even hint what it was like, for it was a compound of all that is unclean, uncanny, unwelcome, abnormal, and detestable. It was the ghoulish shape of decay, antiquity, and desolation; the putrid, dripping eidolon of unwholesome revelation, the awful baring of that which the merciful earth should always hide. God knows it was not of this world—or no longer of this world—yet to my horror I saw in its eaten-away and bone-revealing outlines a leering, abhorrent travesty on the human shape; and in its mouldy, disintegrating apparel an unspeakable quality that chilled me even more.

I was almost paralyzed, but not too much so to make a feeble effort toward flight; a backward stumble which failed to break the spell in which the nameless, voiceless monster held me. My eyes, bewitched by the glassy orbs which stared loathsomely into them, refused to close; though they were mercifully





blurred, and showed the terrible object but indistinctly after the first shock. I tried to raise my hand to shut out the sight, yet so stunned were my nerves that my arm could not fully obey my will. The attempt, however, was enough to disturb my balance; so that I had to stagger forward several steps to avoid falling. As I did so I became suddenly and agonizingly aware of the *nearness* of the carrion thing, whose hideous hollow breathing I half fancied I could hear. Nearly mad, I found myself yet able to throw out a hand to ward off the fetid apparition which pressed so close; when in one cataclysmic second of cosmic nightmarishness and hellish accident *my fingers touched the rotting outstretched paw of the monster beneath the golden arch.*

I did not shriek, but all the fiendish ghouls that ride the night-wind shrieked for me as in that same second there crashed down upon my mind a single and fleeting avalanche of soul-annihilating memory. I knew in that second all that had been; I remembered beyond the frightful castle and the trees, and recognized the altered edifice in which I now stood; I recognized, most terrible of all, the unholy abomination that stood leering before me as I withdrew my sullied fingers from its own.

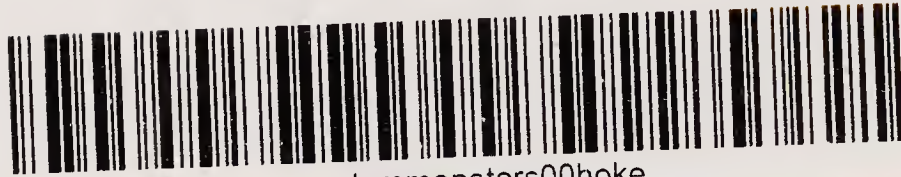
But in the cosmos there is balm as well as bitterness, and that balm is nepenthe. In the supreme horror of that second I forgot what had horrified me, and the burst of black memory vanished in a chaos of echoing images. In a dream I fled from that haunted and accursed pile, and ran swiftly and silently in the moonlight. When I returned to the churchyard place of marble and went down the steps I found the stone trap-door immovable; but I was not sorry, for I had hated the antique castle and the trees. Now I ride with the mocking and friendly ghouls on the night wind, and play by day amongst the catacombs of Nephren-Ka in the sealed and unknown valley

of Hadoth by the Nile. I know that light is not for me, save that of the moon over the rock tombs of Neb, nor any gaiety save the unnamed feasts of Nitokris beneath the Great Pyramid; yet in my new wildness and freedom I almost welcome the bitterness of alienage.

For although nepenthe has calmed me, I know always that I am an outsider; a stranger in this century and among those who are still men. This I have known ever since I stretched out my fingers to the abomination within that great gilded frame; stretched out my fingers and touched *a cold and unyielding surface of polished glass.*

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Helen Hoke is an extremely popular writer and compiler of children's books. Her collections include humor, the supernatural, the weird, and the incredible.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Charles Keeping has illustrated over one hundred books, many of which are for young readers. He has won the Kate Greenaway Medal and has also made many films for children's television.

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