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# The MAN WITH A THOUSAND LEGS

by  
FRANK BELKNAP LONG

"It wrenched the little vessel from the trough of the wave and lifted it violently in the air."

## 1. *Statement of Horace Randall, Psychanalyst*

**S**OMEONE rapped loudly on the door of my bedroom. It was past midnight but I had been unable to sleep and I welcomed the disturbance.

"Who's there?" I asked.

"A young man what insists on being admitted, sir," replied the raucous voice of my housekeeper. "A young man—and very thin and pale he is, sir—what says he's business what won't wait. 'He's in bed,' I says, but then he says as how you're the only doctor what can help him now. He says as how he hasn't slept or ate for a week, and he ain't nothing but a boy, sir!"

"Tell him he can come in," I re-

plied as I slid into my dressing gown and reached for a cigar.

The door opened to admit a thin shaft of light and a young man so incredibly emaciated that I stared at him in horror. He was six feet tall and extremely broad-shouldered, but I don't think he weighed one hundred pounds. As he approached me he staggered and leaned against the wall for support. His eyes fairly blazed. It was obvious that some tremendous idea swayed him. I gently indicated a chair and he collapsed into it.

For a moment he sat and surveyed me. When I offered him a cigar he brushed it aside with a gesture of contempt.

"Why should I poison my body with such things?" he snapped. "To-

bacco is for weaklings and children."

I studied him curiously. He was apparently an extraordinary young man. His forehead was high and broad, his nose was curved like a simitar, and his lips were so tightly compressed that only a thin line indicated his mouth.

I waited for him to speak, but silence enveloped him like a rubber jacket. "I shall have to break the ice somehow," I reflected; and then suddenly I heard myself asking: "You have something to tell me—some confession, perhaps, that you wish to make to me?"

My question aroused him. His shoulders jerked, and he leaned forward, gripping both arms of his chair. "I have been robbed of my birthright," he said. "I am a man of genius, and once, for a brief moment, I had power—tremendous power. Once I projected my personality before vast multitudes of people, and every word that I uttered increased my fame and flattered my vanity."

He was trembling and shaking so violently that I was obliged to rise and lay a restraining hand upon his shoulder. "Delusions of magnificence," I murmured, "undoubtedly induced by a malignant inferiority-complex."

"It is not that," he snapped. "I am a poet, an artist, and I have within me a tremendous force that must be expanded. The world has denied me self-expression through legitimate channels and now I am justified in hating the world. Let society beware!"

He threw back his head and laughed. His hilarity seemed to increase the tension that had somehow crept into the room.

"Call me a madman if you will," he exclaimed, "but I crave power. I can not rest until my name is on a million lips."

"A conservative course of treatment——" I began.

"I want no treatment," he shouted, and then, in a less agitated voice, "You would be surprized, perhaps, if I told you my name!"

"What is your name?" I asked.

"Arthur St. Amand," he replied, and stood up.

I was so astonished that I dropped my cigar. I may even add that I was momentarily awed. *Arthur St. Amand!*

"Arthur St. Amand," he repeated. "You are naturally amazed to discover that the pale, harassed and half-insane youth that you see before you was once called the peer of Newton and Leonardo Da Vinci. You are amazed to discover that the starving lad with an inferiority-complex was once feted by kings and praised by men whose lightest words will go thundering down Time. It is all so amazing and so uproariously funny, but the tragedy remains. Like Dr. Faustus I once looked upon the face of God, and now I'm less than any schoolboy."

"You are still very young," I gasped. "You can't be more than twenty-four."

"I am twenty-three," he said. "It was precisely three years ago that I published my brochure on etheric vibrations. For six months I lived in a blaze of glory. I was the marvelous boy of the scientific world, and then that Frenchman advanced his theory——"

"I suppose you mean Monsieur Paul Rondoli," I interrupted. "I recall the sensation his startling refutation made at the time. He completely eclipsed you in the popular mind, and later the scientific world declared you a fraud. Your star set very suddenly."

"But it will rise again," exclaimed my young visitor. "The world will

discuss me again, and this time I shall not be forgotten. I shall prove my theory. I shall demonstrate that the effect of etheric vibration on single cells is to change—to change——.” He hesitated and then suddenly shouted, “But no, I shall not tell you. I shall tell no one. I came here tonight to unburden my mind to you. At first I thought of going to a priest. It is necessary that I should confess to someone.

“When my thoughts are driven in upon themselves they become morose. I have an active and terrible brain, and I must speak out occasionally. I chose you because you are a man of intelligence and discrimination and you have heard many confessions. But I shall not discuss etheric vibrations with you. When you see *It* you will understand.”

He turned abruptly and walked out of the room and out of my house without once looking back. I never saw him again.

## 2. *Diary of Thomas Shiel, Novelist and Short-Story Writer*

**JULY 21.** This is my fourth day at the beach. I've already gained three pounds, and I'm so sunbaked that I frightened a little girl when I went swimming this morning. She was building sand castles and when she saw me she dropped her shovel and ran shrieking to her mother. “Horrible black man!” she shouted. I suppose she thought I was a genie out of the *Arabian Nights*. It's pleasant here—I've almost got the evil taste of New York out of my mouth. Elsie's coming down for the week-end.

**July 22.** The little girl I frightened yesterday has disappeared. The police are searching for her and it is generally believed that she has been kidnaped. The unfortunate occurrence has depressed everyone at

the beach. All bathing parties have been abandoned, and even the children sit about sad-eyed and dejected. No footprints were found on the sands near the spot where the child was last seen. . . .

**July 23.** Another child has disappeared, and this time the abductor left a clue. A young man's walking stick and hat were found near the scene of a violent struggle. The sand for yards around was stained with blood. Several mothers left the New Beach Hotel this morning with their children.

**July 24.** Elsie came this morning. A new crime occurred at the very moment of her arrival, and I scarcely had the heart to explain the situation to her. My paleness evidently frightened her. “What is the matter?” she asked; “you look ill.” “I am ill,” I replied. “I saw something dreadful on the beach this morning.” “Good heavens!” she exclaimed; “have they found one of the children?” It was a great relief to me that she had read about the children in the New York papers. “No,” I said. “They didn't find the children, but they found the body of a man and he didn't have a drop of blood in him. He had been drained dry. And all about his body the investigators found curious little mounds of yellowish slime—of ooze. When the sunlight struck this substance it glittered.” “Has it been examined under a microscope?” asked Elsie. “They are examining it now,” I explained. “We shall know the results by this evening.” “God pity us all,” said Elsie, and she staggered and nearly fell. I was obliged to support her as we entered the hotel.

**July 25.** Two curious developments. The chemist who examined the jellyish substance found near the body on the beach declares that it is living protoplasm, and he has sent it to the Department of Health for

classification by one of their expert biologists. And a deep pool some eight yards in diameter has been discovered in a rock fissure about a mile from the New Beach Hotel, which evidently harbors some queer denizens. The water in this pool is as black as ink and strongly saline. The pool is eight or ten feet from the ocean, but it is affected by the tides and descends a foot every night and morning. This morning one of the guests of the hotel, a young lady named Clara Phillips, had come upon the pool quite by accident, and being fascinated by its sinister appearance had decided to sketch it. She had seated herself on the rim of the rock fissure and was in the act of sketching in several large boulders and a strip of beach when something made a curious noise beneath her. "Gulp," it said. "Gulp!" She gave a little cry and jumped up just in time to escape a long golden tentacle which slithered toward her over the rocks. The tentacle protruded from the very center of the pool, out of the black water, and it filled her with unutterable loathing. She stepped quickly forward and stamped upon it, and her attack was so sudden that the thing was unable to flip away from her and escape back into the water. And Miss Phillips was an amazingly strong young woman. She ground the end of the tentacle into a bloody pulp with her heel. Then she turned and ran. She ran as she had not run since her "prep" school days. But as she raced across the soft beach she fancied she could hear a monstrous, lumbering something pursuing her. It is to her credit that she did not look back.

And this is the story of little Harry Doty. I offered him a beautiful new dime, but he told it to me gratis. I give it in his own words.

"Yes sir, I've always knowed about that pool. I used to fish for crabs and sea-cucumbers and big,

purple anemones in it, sir. But up until last week I allus knowed what I'd bring up. Onct or twice I used to get somethin' a bit out o' the ordinary, such as a bleedin'-tooth shell or a headless worm with green suckers in its tail and lookin' like the devil on a Sunday outin' or a knowin'-lookin' skate what ud glare and glare at me, sir. But never nothin' like this thing, sir. I caught it on the top o' its head and it had the most human-lookin' eyes I ever saw. They were blue and soulless, sir. It spat at me, and I throws down my line and beats it. I beats it, sir. Then I hears it come lumbering after me over the beach. It made a funny gulpin' noise as if it was a-lickin' its chops."

**J**ULY 26. Elsie and I are leaving tomorrow. I'm on the verge of a lethal collapse. Elsie stutters whenever she tries to talk. I don't blame her for stuttering but I can't understand why she wants to talk at all after what we've seen. . . There are some things that can only be expressed by silence.

The local chemist got a report this morning from the Board of Health. The stuff found on the beach consisted of hundreds of cells very much like the cells that compose the human body. And yet they weren't human cells. The biologists were completely mystified by them, and a small culture is now on its way to Washington, and another is being sent to the American Museum of Natural History.

This morning the local authorities investigated the curious black pool in the rocks. Elsie and I and most of the other vacationists were on hand to watch operations. Thomas Wilshire, a member of the New Jersey constabulary, threw a plummet line into the pool and we all watched it eagerly as it paid out. "A hun-

dred feet," murmured Elsie as the police looked at one another in amazement. "It probably went into the sea," someone exclaimed. "I don't think the pool itself is that deep." Thomas Wilshire shook his head. "There's queer things in that pool," he said. "I don't like the looks of it."

The diver was a bristling, brave little man with some obscure nervous affliction that made him tremble violently. "You'll have to go down at once," said Wilshire. The diver shook his head and shuffled his feet.

"Get him into his suit, boys!" ordered Wilshire, and the poor wretch was lifted bodily upon strong shoulders and transformed into a loathsome, goggle-eyed monster.

In a moment he had advanced to the pool and vanished into its sinister black depths. Two men worked valiantly at the pumps, while Wilshire nodded sleepily and scratched his chin. "I wonder what he'll find," he mused. "Personally, I don't think he's got much chance of ever coming up. I wouldn't be in his shoes for all the money in the United States mint."

After several minutes the rubber tubing began to jerk violently. "The poor lad!" muttered Wilshire. "I knew he didn't have a chance. Pull, boys, pull!"

The tubing was rapidly pulled in. There was nothing attached to it, but the lower portion was covered with glittering golden slime. Wilshire picked up the severed end and examined it casually. "Neatly clipped," he said. "The poor devil!"

The rest of us looked at one another in horror. Elsie grew so pale that I thought she was about to faint. Wilshire was speaking again: "We've made one momentous discovery," he said. We crammed eagerly forward. Wilshire paused for the fraction of a second, and a faint smile of triumph curled his

lips. "There's something in that pool," he finished. "Our friend's life has not been given in vain."

I had an absurd desire to punch his fat, triumphant face, and might have done so, but a scream from the others quelled the impulse.

"Look," cried Elsie. She was pointing at the black surface of the pool. It was changing color. Slowly it was assuming a reddish hue; and then a hellish something shot up and bobbed for a moment on its surface. "A human arm!" groaned Elsie and hid her face in her hands. Wilshire whistled softly. Two more objects joined the first and then something round which made Elsie stare and stare through the spaces between her fingers.

"Come away!" I commanded. "Come away at once." I seized her by the arm and was in the act of forcefully leading her from the edge of that dreadful charnel, for charnel it had become, when I was arrested by a shout from Wilshire.

"Look at it! Look at it!" he yelled. "That's the horrid thing. God, it isn't human!"

We both turned back and stared. There are blasphemies of creation that can not be described, and the thing which rose up to claim the escaping fragments of its dismantled prey was of that order. I remember vaguely, as in a nightmare of Tartarus, that it had long golden arms which shone and sparkled in the sunlight, and a monstrous curved beak below two piercing black eyes in which I saw nothing but unutterable malice.

The idea of standing there and watching it munch the fragmentary remains of the poor little diver was intolerable to me, and in spite of the loud protests of Wilshire, who wanted us, I suppose, to try and do something about it, I turned and ran, literally dragging Elsie with me. This was, as it turned out, the wisest

thing that I could have done, because the thing later emerged from the pool and nearly got several of the vacationists. Wilshire fired at it twice with a pistol, but the thing flopped back into the water apparently unharmed and submerged triumphantly.

### 3. *Statement of Henry Greb, Prescription Druggist*

I USUALLY shut up shop at 10 o'clock, but at closing time that evening I was leaning over the counter reading a ghost story, and it was so extremely interesting that I couldn't walk out on it. My nose was very close to the page and I didn't notice anything that was going on about me when suddenly I happened to look up and there he was standing and watching me.

I've seen some pale people in my time (most people that come with prescriptions are pale) and I've seen some skinny people, but I never have seen anyone as thin and pale as the young man that stood before me.

"Good heavens!" I said, and shut the book.

The young man's lips were twisted into a sickly smile. "Sorry to bother you," he says. "But I'm in a bad way. I'm in desperate need of medical attention!"

"What can I do to help you?" I says.

He looks at me very solemnly, as if he were making up his mind whether he could trust me. "This is really a case for a physician," he says.

"It's against the law for us to handle such cases," I told him.

Suddenly he held out his hand. I gasped. The fingers were smashed into a bloody pulp, and blood was running down his wrist. "Do something to stop the bleeding," he says. "I'll see a physician later."

Well, I got out some gauze and bound the hand up as best I could. "See a doctor at once," I told him. "Blood-poisoning will set in if you're not careful. Luckily, none of the bones are fractured."

He nodded, and for a moment his eyes flashed. "Damn that woman!" he muttered. "Damn her!"

"What's that?" I asked, but he had got himself together again and merely smiled. "I'm all upset," he said. "Didn't know just what I was saying—you must pardon me. By the way, I've got a little gash on my scalp which you might look at."

He removed his cap and I noticed that his hair was dripping wet. He parted it with his hand and revealed a nasty abrasion about an inch wide. I examined it carefully.

"Your friend wasn't very careful when he cast that plug," I says at length. "I never believe in fly-fishing when there's two in the boat. A friend of mine lost an eye that way."

"It was made by a fish-hook," he confessed. "You're something of a Sherlock Holmes, aren't you?"

I brushed aside his compliment with a careless gesture and turned for the bottle of carbolic acid which rested on the shelf behind me. It was then that I heard something between a growl and a gulp from the young man.

I wheeled abruptly, and caught him in the act of springing upon me. He was foaming at the mouth and his eyes bulged. I reached forward and seized him by the shoulders and in a moment we engaged in a desperate struggle upon the floor. He bit and scratched and kicked at me; and I was obliged to silence him by pummeling his face. It was at that moment that I noticed a peculiar fishy odor in the room, as if a breeze from the sea had entered through the open door.

For several moments I struggled and fought and strained and then



something seemed to give suddenly beneath me. The young man slipped from my grasp and made for the door. I endeavored to follow, but I stumbled over something slippery and fell flat upon my face.

When I got up, the young man was gone, and in my hand I held something so weird that I could scarcely believe that it was real, and later I flung it from me with a cry of disgust. It was a reddish, rubbery substance about five inches long, and its under edge was lined with little golden suckers that opened and closed while I stared at them.

I was still laboring under a fearful strain when Harry Morton entered the shop. He was trembling violently, and I noticed that he gazed fearfully behind him as he approached the counter.

"What's the best thing you have for highfalutin'-actin' nerves?" he asks.

"Bromides," I says. "I can mix you some. But what's the trouble with your nerves, Harry?"

"Hallucinations," he groans. "Them, and other things."

"Tell me about it," I says.

"I was leanin' 'gainst a lamp-post," he says, "and I sees a big, lumbering yellowish thing walkin' along the street like a man. It wasn't natural, Henry. I'm not superstitious, but that there thing wasn't natural. And then it flops into the gutter and runs like a streak of lightnin'. It made a funny noise, too. It said 'Gulp'."

I mixed the bromides and handed him the glass over the counter. "I understand, Harry," I says. "But don't go about blowing your head off. No one would believe you."

#### 4. *Statement of Helen Bowan*

I WAS sitting on the porch knitting when a young man with a bag stops in front of the house and looks

up at me. "Good morning, madam," he says, "have you a room with bath?"

"Look at the sign, young man," I says to him. "I've a nice light room on the second floor that should just suit you."

Up he comes and smiles at me. But as soon as I saw him close I didn't like him. He was so terribly thin, and his hand was bandaged, and he looked as if he had been in a fight.

"How much do you want for the room?" he asks.

"Twelve dollars," I told him. I wanted to get rid of him and I thought the high rate would scare him off, but his hand goes suddenly into his pocket and he brings out a roll of bills, and begins counting them. I gets up very quickly and bows politely to him and takes his grip away from him, and rushes into the hall with it. I didn't want to lose a prospect like that. Cousin Hiram has a game which he plays with shells, and I knew that the young man would be Cousin Hiram's oyster.

I takes him upstairs and shows him the room and he seems quite pleased with it. But when he sees the bathtub he begins jumping up and down like a schoolboy, and clapping his hands and acting so odd that I begins to suspect that he is going out of his mind. "It's just the right size!" he shouts. "I hope you won't mind my keeping it filled all day. I bathe quite often. But I must have some salt to put into it. I can't bathe in fresh water!"

"He's certainly a queer one," I thought, "but I ain't complaining. It isn't often Hiram and I land a fish as rich as this one."

Finally he calms down and pushes me out of the room. "Everything's all right," he says. "But I don't want to be disturbed. When you get the salt, put it down in the hall and knock on the door. Under no cir-

cumstances must anyone enter this room."

He closed the door in my face and I heard the key grate in the lock. I didn't like it, and I didn't like the sounds that began to come from behind that door. First I heard a great sigh as if somehow he had got something disagreeable off his chest, and then I heard a funny gulping sound that I didn't like. He didn't waste any time in turning on the water either. I heard a great splashing and wallowing, and then, after about fifteen minutes, everything became as quiet as death.

We didn't hear anything more from him until that evening, when I sent Lizzie up with the salt. At first she tried the door, but it was locked, and she was obliged to put the bag down in the hall. But she didn't go away. She squeezed up close against the wall and waited. After about ten minutes the door opened slowly and a long, thin arm shot out and took in the bag. Lizzie said that the arm was yellow and dripping wet, and the thinnest arm she had ever seen. "But he's a thin young man, Lizzie," I explains to her. "That may be," she says, "but I never saw a human being with an arm like that before!"

Later, along about 10 o'clock I should say, I was sitting in the parlor sewing when I felt something wet land on my hand. I looked up and the ceiling was dripping red. I mean just what I say. The ceiling was all moist and dripping red.

I jumped up and ran out into the hall. I wanted to scream, but I bit my lips until the blood begins running down my chin and that makes me sober and determined. "That young man must go," I says to myself. "I can't have anything that isn't proper going on in this house."

I climbs the stairs looking as grim as death and pounds on the young man's door. "I won't stand for

whatever's going on in there!" I shouted. "Open that door."

I heard something flopping about inside, and then the young man speaking to himself in a very low voice. "Its demands are insatiable. The vile, hungry beast! Why doesn't it think of something besides its stomach? I didn't want it to come then. But it doesn't need the ray now. When its appetite is aroused it changes without the ray. God, but I had a hard time getting back! Longer and longer between!"

Suddenly he seemed to hear the pounding. His queer chattering stops and I hear the key turn in the lock. The door opens ever so slightly and his face looks out at me. He is horrible to look at. His cheeks are sunken and there are big horrid rings under his eyes. There is a bandage tied about his head.

"I want you to leave at once," I tells him. "There's queer things going on here and I can't stand for queer things. You've got to leave."

He sighed and nodded. "It's just as well perhaps," he says. "I was thinking of going anyway. There are rats here."

"Rats!" I gasped. But I wasn't really surprized. I knew there were rats in the house. They made life miserable for me. I was never able to get rid of them. Even the cats feared them.

"I can't stand rats," he continues. "I'm packing up—clearing out now." He shuts the door in my face and I hears him throwing his things into a bag. Then the door opens again and he comes out on the landing. He is terribly pale, and he leans against the wall to catch himself, and then he starts descending the stairs.

I watches him as he goes down, and when he reaches the first landing he staggers and leans against the wall. Then he seems to grow shorter and he goes down the last flight three steps at a time. Then he makes

a running leap toward the door. I never saw anyone get through a door so quick, and I begins to suspect that he's done something that he's ashamed of.

So I turns about and goes into the room. When I looks at the floor I nearly faints. It's all slippery and wet, and seven dead rats are lying on their backs in the center of the room. And they are the palest-looking rats I've ever seen. Their noses and tails are pure white and they looks as if they didn't have a drop of blood in them. And then I goes into the alcove and looks at the bathtub. I won't tell you what I see there. But you remember what I says about the ceiling downstairs? I says it was dripping red, and the alcove wasn't so very different.

I gets out of that room as quick as I can, and I shuts and locks the door; and then I goes downstairs and telephones to Cousin Hiram. "Come right over, Hiram," I says. "Something terrible has been here!"

##### 5. *Statement of Walter Noyes, Lighthouse Keeper*

I WAS pretty well done up. I'd been polishing the lamps all afternoon, and there were callouses on my hands as big as hen's eggs. I went up into the tower and shut myself in and got out a book that I'd been reading off and on for a week. It was a translation of the *Arabian Nights* by a fellow named Lang. Imaginative stuff like that is a great comfort to a chap when he's shut up by himself away off on the rim of the world, and I always enjoyed reading about Schemselnihar and Deryabar and the young King of the Black Isles.

I was reading the first part of *The King of the Black Isles* and had reached the sentence: "And then the youth drew away his robe and the Sultan perceived with horror that he

was a man only to his waist, and from thence to his feet he had been changed into marble," when I happened to look toward the window.

An icy south wind was driving the rain furiously against the panes, and at first I saw nothing but a translucent glitter on the wet glass and vaguely beyond that the gleaming turmoil of dark, enormous waves. Then a dazzling and indescribable shape flattened itself against the window and blotted out the black sea and sky. I gasped and jumped up.

"A monstrous squid!" I muttered. "The storm must have blown it ashore. That tentacle will smash the glass if I don't do something."

I reached for my slicker and hat and in a moment I was descending the spiral stairway three steps at a time. Before emerging into the storm I armed myself with a revolver and the contents of a tumbler of strong Jamaica rum.

I paused for a moment in the doorway and stared about me. But from where I stood I could see nothing but the tall gray boulders fringing the southern extremity of the island and a stretch of heaving and rolling water. The rain beat against my face and nearly blinded me, and a deep murmur arose from the intolerable wash of the waves. Before me lay only a furious and tortured immensity; behind my back was the warmth and security of my miniature castle, a mellow pipe and a book of valiant stories—but I couldn't ignore the menace of the loathsome shape that had pressed itself against the glass.

I descended three short steps to the rocks and made my way rapidly toward the rear of the lighthouse. Drops of rain more acrid than tears ran down my cheeks and into my mouth and dripped from the corners of my mustache. The overpowering darkness clung like a leech to my clothes. I hadn't gone twenty paces

before I came upon a motionless figure.

At first I saw nothing but the head and shoulders of a well-shaped man; but as I drew cautiously nearer I collided with something that made me cry out in terror. A hideous tentacle shot out and wound itself about my leg.

With a startled cry I turned and attempted to run. But out of the macrocarpus darkness leaped another slimy arm, and another. My fingers tightened on the revolver in my pocket. I whipped it out and opened fire on the writhing brutes.

The report of my gun echoed from the surrounding boulders. A sudden, shrill scream of agony broke the comparative quiet that followed. Then there came a voluble, passionate pleading. "Don't shoot again! Please don't! I'm done up. I was done up when I came here, and I wanted help! I didn't intend to harm you. Before God, I didn't intend that *they* should attack you. But I can't control 'em now. They're too much for me. *It's* too much for me. Pity me!"

For a moment I was too dazed to think. I stared stupidly at the smoking revolver in my hand and then my eyes sought the cataclysmic ocean. The enormous waves calmed me. Slowly I brought my eyes to bear on the thing before me.

But even as I stared at it my brain reeled again, and a deadly nausea came upon me.

"And then the youth drew away his robe and the Sultan perceived that he was a man only to his waist . . ."

Several feet from where I stood, a monstrous jelly spread itself loathsome over the dripping rocks, and from its veined central mass a thousand tentacles depended and writhed like the serpents on the head of Medusa. And growing from the middle of this obscenity was the

torso and head of a naked young man. His hair was matted and covered with sea-weed; and there were blood-stains upon his high, white forehead. His nose was so sharp that it reminded me of a sword and I momentarily expected to see it glitter in the dim, mysterious light. His teeth chattered so loudly that I could hear them from where I stood; and as I stared and stared at him he coughed violently and foamed at the lips.

"Whisky!" he muttered. "I'm all done up! I ran into a ship!"

I was unable to speak, but I believe I made some strange noises in my throat. The young man nodded hysterically.

"I knew you'd understand," he muttered. "I'm up against it, but I knew you'd help me pull through. A glass of whisky——"

"How did that thing get you?" I shrieked. I had found my voice at last, and was determined to fight my way back to sanity. "How did that thing get its loathsome coils on you?"

"It didn't get me," groaned the young man. "I'm *It!*"

"You're what?"

"A part of *It*," replied the young man.

"Isn't that thing swallowing you?" I screamed at him. "Aren't you going down into its belly at this moment?"

The young man sadly shook his head. "It's part of me," he said again, and then, more wildly, "I must have something to brace me up! I'm all in. I was swimming on the surface, and a ship came and cut off six of my legs. I'm weak from loss of blood, and I can't stand."

A lean hand went up and brushed the water from battered eyes. "A few of 'em are still lively," he said, "and I can't control 'em. They

nearly got you—but the others are all in. I can't walk on 'em."

With as much boldness as I could muster I raised my revolver and advanced upon the thing. "I don't know what you're talking about," I cried. "But I'm going to blow this monster to atoms."

"For heaven's sake, don't!" he shrieked. "That would be murder. We're a human being."

A flash of scarlet fire answered him. Almost unconsciously I had pressed upon the trigger, and now my weapon was speaking again. "I'll blow it to tatters!" I muttered between my teeth. "The vile, crawling devil!"

"Don't! don't!" shrieked the young man, and then an unearthly yell made the night obscene. I saw the thing before me quiver in all its folds, and then it suddenly rose up and towered above me. Blood spurted from its huge, bloated body, and a crimson shower descended upon me. High above me, a hundred feet in the air, I saw the pale, agonized face of the young man. He was screaming blasphemies. He appeared to be walking on stilts. "You can't kill me," he yelled. "I'm stronger than I thought. I'll win out yet."

I raised my revolver to fire again, but before I could take aim the thing swept by me and plunged into the sea. It was perhaps fortunate for me that I did not attempt to follow it. My knees gave beneath me and I fell flat upon my face. When I came to so far as to be able to speak I found myself between clean white sheets and staring into the puzzled blue eyes of a government inspector.

"You've had a nasty time of it, lad," he said. "We had to give you stimulants. Didja have a shock of a sort?"

"Of a sort, yes," I replied. "But it came out of the *Arabian Nights*."

## 6. *The Marvelous Boy*

[Curious Manuscript Found in a Bottle]

I WAS the marvelous boy. My genius amazed the world. A magnificent mind, a sublime destiny! My enemies . . . combined to ruin me. A punctured balloon . . .

A little box, and I put a dog under it. He changed . . . Jelly! Etheric vibration generates curious changes in living cells. . . . Process starts and nothing can stop it. Growth! Enormous growth! Keeps sending out shoots—legs! arms! Marvelous growth! Human being next. Put a little girl under it. She changed. Beautiful jellyfish! It kept getting larger. Fed it mice. Then I destroyed it.

So interesting. Must try it on myself. I know how to get back. Will-power. A child's will is too weak, but a man can get back. No actual change in cell-content.

A tremendous experience! I picked out a deep pool where I could hide. Hunger. Saw man on beach.

The police suspect. I must be more careful. Why didn't I take the body out to sea?

Horrible incident. Young lady artist. I almost caught her, but she stamped on a leg. Smashed it. Horrible pain. I certainly must be more careful.

Great humiliation. Little boy hooked me. But I gave him a scare. The varmint! I glared and glared at him. I tried to catch him, but he ran too fast. I wanted to eat him. He had very red cheeks. I hate women and children.

Of course they suspect. Little boys always babble. I wanted to eat him. But I gave them all a good scare, and I got a man. He came down after me in a diver's suit, but I got him. I took him to pieces. I mean that—lit-

grally to pieces. Then I let the fragments float up. I wanted to scare them. I think I did. They ran for their lives. The authorities are fools.

I got back. But it wasn't easy. The thing fought and fought. "I'm master!" I said, and it gulped. It gulped and gulped and gulped; and then I got back. But my hand was smashed and bleeding!

That fool clerk! Why did he take so long? But he didn't know how hungry his red face made me. The thing came back without the ray. I was standing before the counter and it came back. I sprang at him. I was lucky to get away.

Terrible trouble. I can't keep it from coming back. I wake up in the night, and find it spread out on the bed and all over the floor. Its arms writhe and writhe. And its demands are insatiable. Every waking moment it demands food. Sometimes it completely absorbs me. But now as I write the upper portion of my body is human.

This afternoon I moved to furnished room near beach. Salt water has become a necessity. Change comes on more rapidly now. I can't keep it off. My will is powerless. I filled the tub with water and put in some salt. Then I wallowed in it. Great comfort. Great relief. Hunger. Dreadful, insatiable hunger.

I am all beast, all animal. Rats. I have caught six rats. Delicious. Great comfort. But I've messed up the room. What if the old idiot downstairs should suspect?

She does suspect. Wants me to get out. I shall get out. There is only one refuge for me now. The sea! I shall go to the sea. I can't pretend I'm human any longer. I'm all animal, all beast. What a shock I must have given the old hag! I could hear her teeth chattering as she came up the stairs. All I could do to keep from springing at her.

Into the sea at last. Great relief, great joy. Freedom at last!

A ship. I ran head on into it. Six arms gone. Terrible agony. Flopped about for hours.

Land. I climbed over the rocks and collapsed. Then I managed to get back. Part of me got back. I called for help. A crazy fool came out of the lighthouse and stared at me. Five of my tentacles sprang at him. I couldn't control them. They got him about the leg. He lost his head. Got out a revolver and shot at them.

I got them under control. Tremendous effort. Pleaded with him, tried to explain. He would not listen. Shots—many shots. White-hot fire in my body—in my arms and legs. Strength returned to me. I rose up, and went back into the sea. I hate human beings. I am growing larger, and I shall make myself felt in the world.

ARTHUR ST. AMAND.

### 7. *The Salmon Fishermen*

[Statement of William Gamwell]

THERE were five of us in the boat: Jimmy Simms, Tom Snodgrass, Harry O'Brien, Bill Samson and myself. "Jimmy," I said, "we may as well open the lunch. I'm not particularly hungry, but the salmon all have their noses stuck in the mud!"

"They sure ain't biting," said Jimmy. "I never seen such a bum run of the lazy critters."

"Don't go complaining," Harry piped up. "We've only been here five hours."

We were drifting toward the east shore and I yelled to Bill to pull on the oars, but he ignored me.

"We'll drift in with the shipping," I warned. "By the way, what's that queer-looking tug with a broken smoke-stack?"

"It came in this morning," said Jim. "It looks like a rum-runner to me."

"They're taking an awful risk," Harry put in. "The revenue cutter's due by here any minute."

"There she is now," said Bill and pointed toward the flats.

Sure enough, there was the government boat, skirting the shore and looking like a lean wasp on the warpath. "She's heading the tug off as sure as you're born," said Bill. "I'll say we're in for a hot time!"

"Back water!" I shouted. "Do you want to get between 'em?"

Tom and Bill pulled sturdily on the oars and our boat swung out in the direction of the west shore; and then the current took us and carried us downstream.

A signal flag flashed for a moment on the deck of the cutter. Jimmy translated it for us. "'Stand to, or we'll fire,'" he exclaimed. "Now let's see what the tug's got to say to that!"

The tug apparently decided to ignore the command. It rose on a tremorless swell, and plunged doggedly forward. A vast black column ascended from its broken smokestack. "They're putting on steam!" cried Bill. "But they haven't a chance in the world."

"Not a chance," confirmed Tom. "One broadside will blow 'em to atoms."

Bill stood up and clapped his hands to his ears. The rest of us were nearly deafened by the thunderous report. "What did I tell you?" shouted Tom.

We look at the tug. The smokestack was gone and she was wallowing in a heavy swell. "That was only a single shot across her bows," said Bill. "But it did a lot of damage. Wait until they open fire with the big guns!"

We waited, expecting to see something interesting. But we saw some-

thing that nearly frightened us out of our shoes. Between the cutter and the tug a gigantic, yellowish obscenity shot up from the water and towered thirty feet in the air. It thrashed wildly about and made a horrible gulping noise. We could hear the frenzied shrieks of the men on the tug, and from the deck of the cutter someone yelled. "Look at it! Look at it! Oh, my God!"

"Mercy in heaven!" groaned Bill.

"We're in for it!" sobbed Tom.

For a moment the thing simply towered and vibrated between the two boats and then it made for the cutter. It had at least a thousand legs and they waved loathsomely in the sunlight. It had a hooked beak and a great mouth that opened and closed and gulped, and it was larger than a whale. It was horribly, hideously large. It towered to the mounting zenith, and in its mephitic, blasphemous immensity it dwarfed the two boats and all the tangled shipping in the harbor.

"Are we alive?" shrieked Bill. "And is that there shore really Long Island? I don't believe it. We're in the Indian Ocean, or the Persian Gulf or the middle of the Hyperborean sea. . . That there thing is a Jormungandar!"

"What's a Jormungandar?" yelled Tom. He was at the end of his rope and clutching valiantly at straws.

"Them things what live on the bottom of the arctic seas," groaned Bill. "They comes up for air once in a hundred years. I'll take my oath that there thing's a Jormungandar."

Jormungandar or not, it was apparent to all of us that the monster meant business. It was bearing down upon the cutter with incredible ferocity. The water boiled and bubbled in its wake. On the other boats men rushed hysterically to the rails and stared with wide eyes.

The officers of the cutter had recovered from their momentary as-

tonishment and were gesticulating furiously and running back and forth on the decks. Three guns were lowered into position and directed at the onrushing horror. A little man with gilt braid on his sleeves danced about absurdly on his toes and shouted out commands at the top of his voice.

"Don't fire until you can look into his eyes," he yelled. "We can't afford to miss him. We'll give him a broadside he won't forget."

"It isn't human, sir!" someone yelled. "There never was nothing like it before in this world."

The men aboard the tug were obviously rejoicing. Caps and pipes ascended into the air and loud shouts of triumph issued from a hundred drunken throats.

"Fire!" shouted the blue-coated midget on the cutter.

"It won't do 'em no good!" shouted Bill, as the thunder of the guns smote our ears. "It won't do 'em a bit o' good."

As it turned out, Bill was right. The tremendous discharge failed to arrest the progress of the obscene monster.

It rose like a cloud from the water and flew at the cutter like a flying-fish. Furiously it stretched forth its enormous arms, and embraced the cutter. It wrenched the little vessel, from the trough of the wave in which it wallowed and lifted it violently into the air.

Its great golden sides shone like the morning star, but red blood trickled from a gaping hole in its throat. Yet it ignored its wounds. It lifted the small steel ship into the air in its gigantic, weaving arms.

I shall never forget that moment. I have but to shut my eyes and it is before me now. I see again that Brobdingnagian horror from measureless abysses, that twisting, fantastic monstrosity from sinister

depths of blackest midnight. And in its colossal arms and legs I see a tiny ship from whose deck a hundred little men fall shrieking and screaming into the black maelstrom beneath its churning maws.

Yards and yards it towered, and its glittering bulk hid the sun. It towered to the zenith and its weaving arms twisted the cutter into a shapeless mass of glistening steel.

"We're next!" muttered Bill. "There ain't nothing can save us now. A man ain't got a chance when he runs head-on against a Jormungandar!"

"That ain't no Jormungandar," piped Tom. "It's a human being, what's been out all night. But I ain't saying we're not in for it."

My other companions fell upon their knees and little Harry O'Brien turned yellow under the gills. But the thing did not attack us. Instead, with a heartbreaking scream that seemed outrageously human it sank beneath the waves, carrying with it the flattened, absurd remains of the valiant little cutter and the crushed and battered bodies of innumerable men. And as it sank loathsomely from sight the water about it flattened out into a tremorless plateau and turned the color of blood.

Bill was at the oars now, shouting and cursing to encourage the rest of us. "Pull, boys," he commanded. "Let's try to make the south shore before that there fish comes up for breath. There ain't one of us here what wants to live for the rest of his life on the bottom of the sea. There ain't one of us here what ud care to have it out with a Jormungandar."

In a moment we had swung the boat about and were making for the shore. Men on the other ships were crying and waving to us, but we didn't stop to hand in any reports. We weren't thinking of anything



but a huge 'monstrosity that we would see towering and towering into the sky as long as our brains hung together in our foolish little heads.

#### 8. *News Item in the Long Island Gazette*

THE body of a young man, about 25 years old, was found this morning on a deserted beach near Northport. The body was horribly emaciated and the coroner, Mr. E. Thomas Bogart, discovered three small wounds on the young man's thigh. The edges of the wounds were stained as though from gunpowder. The body scarcely weighed one hundred pounds. It is thought that the youth was the victim of foul play and inquiries are being made in the vicinity.

#### 9. *The Box of Horror*

[Statement of Harry Olson]

I HADN'T had a thing to eat for three days, and I was driven to the cans. Sometimes you find something valuable in the cans and sometimes you don't; but anyhow, I was working 'em systematically. I had gone up the street and down the street, and hadn't found a thing for my pains except an old pair of suspenders and a tin of salmon. But when I came to the last house I stopped and stared. Then I stretched out a lean arm and picked up the box. It was a funny-looking box, with queer glass sides and little peek-holes in the side of it, and a metal compartment about three inches square in back of it, and a slide underneath large enough to hold a man's hand.

I looked up at the windows of the house, but there wasn't anyone watching me, and so I slipped the box under my coat and made off down the street. "It's something

expensive, you can bet your life on that," I thought. "Probably some old doctor's croaked and his widow threw the thing away without consulting anyone. This is a real scientific affair, this is, and I ought to get a week's board out of it."

I wanted to examine the thing better and so I made for a vacant lot where I wouldn't be interrupted. Once there I sat myself down behind a signboard and took the contraption from under my coat and looked at it.

Well, sir, it interested me. There was a little lever on top of it you pressed and the slide fell down and something clicked in the metal box in back of it, and the thing lighted up.

I realized at once that something was meant to go on the slide. I didn't know just what, but my curiosity was aroused. "That light isn't there for nothing," I thought. "This box means business."

I began to wonder what would happen if something alive were put on the slide. There was a clump of bushes near where I was sitting and I got up and made for it. It took me some time to get what I was after; but when I caught it I held it firmly between my thumb and forefinger so it couldn't escape, and then I talked to it. "Grasshopper," I said. "I haven't any grudge against you personally, but the scientific mind is no respecter of persons."

The infernal varmint wriggled and wriggled and covered my thumb with molasses, but I didn't let up on him. I held him firmly and pushed him onto the slide. Then I turned on the lever and peeped through the holes.

The poor devil squirmed and fluttered for several minutes and then he began to dissolve. He got flabbier and flabbier and soon I could see right through him. When he was nothing but ooze he began to wriggle.

I dumped him on the ground and he scurried away faster than a centipede.

"I'm deluding myself," I thought. "I'm seeing things that never happened."

Then I did a very foolish thing. I thrust my hand into the box and turned on the lever. For several moments nothing happened and then my hand began to get cold. I peeped through the holes and what I saw made me scream and scream and draw my hand out and go running about the lot like a madman. My hand was a mass of writhing, twisting snakes! Leastwise, they looked like snakes at first, but later I saw that they were soft and yellow and rubbery and much worse than snakes.

But even then I didn't altogether lose my head. Leastwise, I didn't lose it for long. "This is a sheer hallucination," I said to myself, "and I'm going to argue myself out of it."

I sat down on a big boulder and held my hand up and looked at it. It had a thousand fingers and they dripped, but I made myself look at 'em. I did some tall arguing. "Snap out of it," I said. "You're imagining things!" I thought the fingers

began to shorten and stiffen a little. "You're imagining all this," I continued. "It's the sheerest bunk. That box isn't anything out of the ordinary!"

Well sir, you may not believe it, but I argued myself back into sanity. I argued my hand back to normal. The wriggling, twisting things got shorter and fatter and joined together and before very long I had a hand with fingers.

Then I stood up and shouted. Luckily no one heard me, and there wasn't anyone to watch me dancing about on my toes either. When I got out of breath I picked the infernal box up and walked away with it. I made directly for the river. "You've had your day," I said. "You won't turn any more poor critters into jelly-fish!"

Well sir, I threw the vile thing into the river, but first I smashed it against the planks on the wharf until it looked like nothing on earth under the stars. "And that's the end of you!" I shouted as it sank. I ought to have got a medal for that, but I ain't complaining. It isn't every man has the pleasure of calling himself a disinterested benefactor of humanity.

