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Nothing is more fascinating than a mystery. No mystery could be more mysterious than

“TRACING THE SHADOW”

BY CAROLYN WELLS

Author of “Vicky Van,” etc.

BEGINNING NEXT WEEK

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 290 Broadway, New York, and Temple House, Temple Avenue, E. C., London

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The Nameless Thing

by

Robert W. Sneddon

I.

FOR ten miles we had driven along abominable roads in a drizzle of rain which drifted rather than fell upon us. The road, since we had left such civilization as clustered about the tiny station



of the Highland line, had risen and fallen according to the whim of the first road-builders who had not bothered much with leveling problems, now passing between towering hills with caps obscured by white mist, circling dark and treacherous lochs and dismal unfathomed tarns in which the

water was blacker than ink, and then pursuing a zigzag path through bog and moor untenanted by anything living save for the crying wildfowl, a stray sheep or two, and an occasional group of shaggy, long-horned Highland cattle who seemed inclined to bar our passage.

As for company, my driver was worse than none, for though before leaving Glasgow I had been assured that the Highlander on his native heath was disposed to be friendly, and dearly loved to converse with the infrequent stranger, and that it would not come amiss if I carried a well-filled whisky flask with me, I had found this specimen yield neither to the blandishment of flask nor friendly intercourse. His replies to my inquiries were anything but encouraging, and he seemed disposed to regard me as of less value than the mail-bag he was conveying.

I could get nothing out of him but—"Imphm!" and "You will be saying so," and finally I settled down to my own thoughts, which were concerned more with the question of food and lodging than anything else.

I watched the steaming flanks of the unclipped horse in the shafts, and wondered by what folly I had persuaded myself to come to this part of the country.

I had spent the last three months in Glasgow on behalf of the structural iron firm of which I am a partner, and completed the business which had brought me from New York to this busy city on the River Clyde. It had been a pleasant stay among hospitable people who had made me feel at home; so full of activity and I confess enjoyment that for a time my hobby of geology had been thrust almost entirely into the background, though I had availed myself of the splendid geological collections in the museum and institutes.

A paragraph in the Glasgow *Herald* had, however, awakened my old interest. It was short and unsatisfactory, but such as it was I had an instant desire to investigate for myself what had been reported.

It was stated that a corner of the Highlands had experienced a violent earthquake shock probably of volcanic origin, and that in one part there had been an extensive

rock slide. Inquiry soon procured all the information I wanted, and with a well-filled suit-case, my hammer and other implements, not forgetting my old Colt, I set out on my tiresome journey.

Suddenly we passed out of the never-ending flat moor, heavy with clammy mist, ascended a slight rise, and descending followed a short declivity to a cluster of some five or six low white houses.

My driver pointed with his whip.

"The clachan!" he announced tersely.

I thought I had never seen a more desolate spot on earth. Some dogs and a few hens were running about, but of man or woman there was not a sign.

We drew up in front of the largest house which had a fair-sized window of small panes, behind which I saw a scanty store of canned goods. I got down stiffly from the high gig, and as I did so, a woman with a shawl over her head opened the door and gazed at me with the utmost surprise. The driver handed her the mail-bag, which she took, still staring at me curiously.

To rid myself of my embarrassment I passed the driver his fare, and with a grunted "Thank you," he whipped up the horse and drove off.

"You'll be from the railway, I'm thinking," said the woman at last in a slow, rich voice, very pleasant to the ear after the dialect of the poor class of Glasgow.

"Yes," I answered, "and I'm hoping you have a room you can let me have for a week or so."

"You'll be a commercial?" she asked, looking at me sharply.

"A commercial?" I laughed at the idea of being taken for a drummer. "No, I'm an engineer."

"An Englishman, maybe?"

"No, American."

She hesitated, then said briskly:

"Well, come in out of the rain. It is not the day to be talking in the road when there is a roof near by."

I followed her in meekly, marking with dismay the trails of mud I was leaving behind me on the stone floor, newly washed and decorated with quaint patterns in white chalk.

There was a fire burning in the place,

half store and half living-room, and over the fire an iron griddle on which she was baking scones which sent out a fragrance appealing to my clamoring appetite.

"I'm thinking a cup of tea would do us both good, and a bannock and cheese. Sit ye down till I infuse a pot," said this astonishing woman, removing the shawl from her head and disclosing the face of a woman of about forty-five, vigorous and ruddy.

I assented gladly, and took off my rain-coat. A somewhat sheepish boy of fourteen or fifteen had come out from the other room of the house, and was grinning at me from a safe distance.

"This is my boy, Hamish," his mother explained as she hustled to and fro. "The gentleman is come from America, Hamish."

"Then you'll be knowing my Uncle John," said Hamish eagerly. "He lives in a place called Colorado."

I explained as gently as I could that there was quite some distance between my place of habitation and Colorado, and that I had never met his uncle. I had the impression that Hamish rather doubted my claim to being American, but he said nothing more, and sat down by the fireside with a book.

Little was said till we had eaten a meal, to which I did full justice, and between the warmth and the food my first sinister impression had worn off.

"About sleeping, now," I ventured to begin with a look about the place.

"I have no room for you here," said Mrs. Macdonald, as she had told me her name was.

My jaw dropped in dismay.

"But the station-master said I would find a place here, and recommended me to you."

"All I can do for you, Mr. Giles, is to let Hamish go with you to the schoolmaster's wee house. Poor lad, he went away to the war and has not come back yet, whatever. There's bed and some books, if you're fond of the reading, and you can pay me five shillings a week, and I'll put it by till himself comes home."

"Is it far from here?" I asked anxious-

ly, for I did not look forward to a long walk in the rain.

"How far will it be, Hamish, think you?"

"A mile and a bit," said the boy. "I'll go with you."

"Very well. Will you put up somé groceries for me, Mrs. Macdonald? Tea, sugar, potatoes, a piece of bacon, bread, some cans of soup, anything you think I'll need."

It was just setting in toward evening as we started, I with the suit-case, Hamish with a basket of groceries. We left the cluster of houses and climbed up a steep ascent, coming on to a flat and desolate plateau which we followed by means of a path little better than a sheep trail to a tiny rough-stone house visible in the distance.

It sat on the edge of a declivity which fell with a slope of rocky débris into a cup-shaped depression some fifty feet below which received the waters of two converging mountain torrents. It struck me even in the gathering darkness that the surface of the débris seemed new, and I questioned Hamish.

"Aye!" he said. "We felt the earthquake here. Do you see the rocks there? They all fell down with a great crash. And what's more, it has left an ugly big hole down there."

"A cave?"

"I don't know, but there was a kind of smoke came out of it."

"Smoke?" I cried, suddenly interested.

"Aye! Hot smoke. But I did not like to go near it."

I would have liked to question him further, but we were at the cottage now, and unlocking the door, he led me into a low, one-room building, stone floored, whitewashed, with a hearth on one side, and barely furnished with a cot, a dresser with some coarse china, a table, two chairs, and a tiny case of books.

While I was examining my lodging, the boy got a fire going from a pile of peat in one corner, and had filled the lamp from a can of oil he had brought. He lit the lamp for me, and then seemed to be in such a hurry to get back before it became darker,

that I did not try to detain him. I gave him a shilling for himself, a simple gift which delighted him. I stood at the door and saw him go, with a feeling of loneliness.

And here I am settled for the night, with not a thing to do. There was nothing in the bookcase I had not read, and in sheer desperation to fill in the hour or so which must elapse before going to bed, for going out was impossible as well as dangerous to a stranger, I set down what I have here written.

Little did I think it was the prelude to the most terrible of experiences.

II.

SUMMING up what has come out of my explorations of the past two days I can only say that the prevailing impression which remains with me is one of intense curiosity. I have been startled and amazed more than I have ever been since I took up the study of geology, though I begin to realize that I am but a novitiate in the science.

I slept like a top that first night in the schoolmaster's shack, and awoke ready for any amount of tramping and climbing; and after I had breakfasted on tea, bacon, and scones—no coffee, think of that, American breakfasters—I lit my pipe, took a thick ash stick I had found in the house, and set out.

My goal was the hole, the smoking hole, for my mind had leaped to the surmise of a volcanic crevice. And why not? Though countless ages had passed since volcanoes had flared in activity in this northern isle, and volcanic upheavals cast up peak crag and plateau, scratched, scraped and ground down by the ice-fields which had passed in their turn, still there remained the tell-tale formations. I had seen with my own eyes the extinct crater near Edinburgh town. I had the evidence of the recent earthquakes, and the visible signs in the shape of the rockfall lying at my cottage door.

I descended the slope carefully, for I had no intention of being caught with a turned ankle or broken leg in this nook, which I realized was out of the path of the

dozen or so inhabitants of the village, and I had seen no other houses rearing themselves on the horizon. I might have been on the edge of the world for all the proximity of my fellow mortals.

It was still drizzling, though a watery sun was trying to break through, and the mist lay in a heavy mass at the bottom of the species of pit or semicircular depression into which I was descending. I found it was deeper than I had estimated—nearer a hundred and fifty than fifty feet—an error which I had made owing to the mist.

I was disappointed as I clambered down not to come upon the hole Hamish had described, for I had jumped at the conclusion that it must be conspicuous, and I reached the bottom without discovering it. The pool's outlet at the bottom was nearly filled with débris, and the water poured over it in a steady gush, fed by the two streams falling from the plateau, and another coming from a slit in the rock itself, some underground source.

As I stood looking about me, puzzled, I became aware that in front of me, in the face of the gully facing that which I had descended, was a slit in the rock which had escaped my eye, and clambering over the débris I managed to reach it, though at the expense of the dryness of my feet.

Its width was about that of the length of my stick, though it narrowed to the thinnest of cracks on the surface of the plateau above. It was partially filled with rock and smaller stones which slid under my shoes as I climbed into it, for the surface on which I sought foothold ascended into the interior.

Had it been dark I might have hesitated, but strangely enough there was illumination beyond, and I followed upward, prodding the path with my stick. Suddenly I stepped out into daylight.

I was in a well with sloping sides. It was as though some giant had exerted the strength of his mighty arms and pushed asunder the walls of the narrow cleft by which I had entered, forming a diminutive crater with sloping sides of terraced rock. Across the almost level floor of this crater ran a crack, perhaps four feet wide, over which, without examination, I stepped

blithely in my eagerness to explore a rocky slab which had a yellowish tinge. As I did so my foot slipped upon a pebble which I dislodged and sent over the edge. I nearly followed myself, and only saved my skin by a convulsive contortion forward which still left me with my feet over the opening.

As I lay panting I listened for the tinkle which would tell me that the pebble had reached bottom. But none came, and I drew myself back hastily with a feeling of nausea. I turned over on my knees, somewhat shaken by the revelation of my closeness to death.

In order to confirm my suspicion I threw a heavier stone over the edge, peering cautiously on my knees into the darkness below. I listened. Surely I must hear the stone land. Seconds—minutes—there was no answering sound.

I was dazed, and gazed stupidly till feeling I was in danger of losing my senses, I threw myself back on my heels and got upon my feet. It was then that I realized for the first time that the rock beneath my hands had been strangely warm.

I was excited beyond measure by my discoveries, this bottomless cleft in the crust of the earth, and the warmth of the rock which had certainly not been exposed to the sun, for though the rain had ceased, the sun had evidently given up hope of thrusting its way through and retired in disgust.

I determined to find out from Hamish, who had apparently some information on the point, whether this opening had existed prior to the quake. I was of the opinion that it was of recent volcanic origin.

I will be honest and say that I did not relish the idea of recrossing this crevice in which I might have lost my life but for the merest good luck, and I set about to find some other means of egress from my cage. It was then that I remembered the rock whose yellowness had caught my eye at first and I examined it carefully.

It was of yellow sandstone, which I had understood was found only in another part of Scotland. You can imagine my joy, yes, that is the word to express the emotion of an enthusiast who comes upon a fine specimen of his hobby, to see in per-

fect outline the tail of a monster, a reptilian monster. I could have sworn it was that of a crocodile, and I regretted I had neglected to bring my geologist's hammer. As it was I promised myself that I would spend a good many hours laboriously freeing this fossilized skeleton from its rocky bed.

It was about two o'clock in the afternoon, now, and I felt ravenously hungry, having neglected to provide myself with lunch. I was astonished at the quick passage of the hours, but then I had been intensely interested in my discoveries.

As I could see no way of climbing to the plateau above, and apparently no other way out of the crater, I clenched my teeth and took a running jump over the crevice. And such was my desire to get away that I slid down the débris in the upright cleft of the entrance without consideration for my clothes, and climbed up to the plateau once more.

After lunch I walked over to the post-office in search of Hamish. That young man was digging potatoes, but he stopped to answer my question as to the age of the crater.

"It came after the earthquake," he told me. "It's a fearsomelike place, and if they're wise they'll put a wall round it or the beasties will be falling down it. As for myself, I will be saying it is like—" he hesitated sheepishly.

"Like what?"

"Well, like the place where the black one stays."

I stared at him, puzzled.

"Who do you mean?" I asked.

"The great fellow—the brindled one—you know him."

I caught his meaning after a moment's reflection. The Highlander will never directly mention by name things not of earth.

"Oh, the devil, you mean. You call him in Gaelic 'Diabhol.'"

He nodded.

"Aye! Him of the chain. But did you see the smoke coming out of the hole?"

"No!"

"I did. A thin bit puff of smoke."

"I'll look for that the next time I go,"

I assured him.

"Will you come with me?"

"Indeed I will not, whatever," he answered hastily. "It's ill to be looking for the *Fuath*."

"Another name for the gentleman I mentioned, eh?" I said, laughing, and left him in the potato patch.

There was no mail for me, and after buying some tobacco, and exchanging a few commonplaces with Mrs. Macdonald and an old shepherd who was with her, I returned to my place, cooked a meal, and settled down to the night.

I wrote some letters, read a little in a volume of Carlyle's "French Revolution" I had found in the bookcase, smoked a couple of pipes as I listened to the melancholy wailing of the wild fowl, and went to bed.

I was awakened some time in the night by a trembling, and rising on my elbow, felt three successive shocks, slight but perfectly distinct. Immediately after, there was a whining and scratching at my door.

I had a strange, eery feeling of danger at hand, perhaps due to my waking under such circumstances, and I hesitated a little before slipping on my bathrobe and lighting the lamp. It was very dark outside as I opened the door. I was almost upset by the entrance of a large collie dog, which crept in upon its belly, evidently terrified by the earth tremors.

As I was shutting the door I stopped in the act and sniffed. I had just caught scent of a strange, musky odor on the warm air, reminiscent of something or other, but what I could not say—animal at any rate.

I shut the door, put the lamp on the table, and turned my attention to my visitor. He was a noble specimen, but at that moment he was frightened almost to death, and he let me approach and caress him without protest. As I talked gently he laid a paw on my arm, then raising his head, licked my face with such manifest gratitude that I was surprised.

I gave him a dish of oatmeal and milk, which he lapped up greedily, and the last thing I saw as I tumbled into bed again was his shaggy body extended by the still glowing embers of my peat fire.

I fell asleep, puzzling in my brain over a confusion of things. The cleft—the shocks—the musky odor. If from an animal, what animal? And had that animal, whatever it was, in some way alarmed the dog? But no answer came before I was inert.

III.

My first thought in the morning was to go and see whether the new shock had produced any further change in the conformation of the land, or more rock slides. I tried my best to get rid of my fourfooted visitor, but when I put him out of the door he lay down obstinately on the stone slab and would not stir. I was rather glad of the presence of some living creature about me.

After breakfast I set out, the dog sticking close to my heels, but this time I determined to approach the crater (for so I have definitely named this well in the earth) by the plateau instead of entering it through the upright cleft. I walked past the edge of the corrie with its waterfall and came upon the crater.

In the broad daylight it seemed quite harmless. All at once I made a discovery. The new shock had made a path of débris down into it, and sitting a few feet down on a point of rock projecting from the rubbish was a girl in a tweed suit, busily engaged with pencil and sketching pad. The dog no sooner saw her than he ran about the edge of the plateau as if afraid to descend, then recovering his courage, ran down and greeted her noisily.

She looked up, startled, and our eyes met. She had the most surprised expression on her face as she rose up—a pretty face, I thought to myself as I went down and raised my cap.

"I see the dog is yours," I said. "I hope you haven't been anxious about him. He came to visit me and stayed all night."

"I was anxious, yes. I couldn't think what had become of Laddie; but he runs away now and then," she answered, smiling. "You must be staying near here."

"In the schoolmaster's cottage up there."

"I wondered when I saw you. I

couldn't imagine you were staying with Mrs. Macdonald somehow. And that is the only place for miles around."

"Then you know this country well?"

Somehow I couldn't associate her with the people I had already seen in the neighborhood.

"I was born here," she said with a laugh. "My father is Colonel Hunter, of Finchain, and we have a crazy old house about three miles from here. I came over on my bike to get the mail—it's a wonder you didn't fall over the machine up there. Isn't this a wonderful thing? I saw it a few days ago and wanted to sketch it."

As she seemed to be waiting, I told her:

"My name is Giles. I'm a wandering American engineer, on a holiday in search of thrills, earthquakes and geological specimens, and by the bye, if you care to climb down I'll show you my find, a crocodile."

She looked disbelief, then smiled.

"You're not joking, are you? A crocodile in the Highlands."

"Surely. There were quite a lot of varieties of them in the secondary period. Can I help you?"

"Thanks, I can manage. Come on, Laddie."

But the dog would not follow, and kept running to and fro up above, whining disconsolately.

"Funny," she said. "I never saw him go on like this before."

"It looks almost as if he scented something he didn't like."

"Perhaps your crocodile," she suggested as we went down.

Luckily the descent landed us on the side of the crevice where the yellow sandstone slab was, and we were spared the trouble of making the crossing.

I pointed out my famous crocodile, and was airing my knowledge when suddenly I stopped, taken aback by a curious tingling of my nostrils. I turned quickly to the crevice and saw coming from it a thin drift of smoke. This was followed by an ominous rumbling in the bowels of the earth.

"What is that?" Miss Hunter gasped.

"We are standing over a volcanic rift," I told her.

"Do let us get out of this horrible hole," she pleaded nervously.

"Yes, perhaps we had better. There is no saying what may be going on down there. I don't like that smoke."

We clambered up the slope hastily and reached the plateau in safety.

"I wouldn't go down again for worlds," she confessed with a shudder.

We took a few steps before I remembered something.

"Oh, bother!" I cried, "I've left my hammer down there. Wait a minute, I'll go and get it."

I had just set my foot on the stone slide leading down to the crater when I drew back aghast. One end of the crevice seemed to melt away before my eyes and fall into the gulf beneath, exposing to view a jagged aperture in the rock of the crater wall, which appeared to run downward, and it seemed to my fancy that within the darkness I could distinguish some enormous mass stirring sluggishly.

I watched with distended eyes, but nothing emerged, and I set down the vision to something born of the sudden shock. But for luck I might very well have passed into the gulf with the crumbling portion of the rocky floor.

"Well, I've lost my crocodile," I said disconsolately as I returned to where she stood waiting. "Gone down that hole in the rock."

"Never mind," she said sympathetically, "perhaps you'll find something else—a mammoth or a cave tiger. I must be going now. I wonder if you would care to come and see us. I'm sure father would be glad to have a talk with you. Follow this path till you strike the road, then a couple of miles along you'll come to the lodge gates."

I promised her that I would call, and saw her ride off, followed by Laddie.

Somehow her going left me lonely, and at the moment I had had enough of that dismal hole in the rock.

I spent the next day catching up with my correspondence, which had been woefully neglected, and the day after set out to call on Colonel Hunter. I found him a genial host, a splendid type of old-fash-

ioned Scotsman, who yet was widely awake to the new tendencies of world politics, and enjoyed my visit thoroughly.

After lunch he and his daughter, Ailsa, as I had discovered her name to be, walked back with me to the village. We had just reached my cottage when I saw Hamish and an old shepherd in excited discussion over some object lying in the grass. When they saw us, Hamish ran forward.

"A sheep is lost in a very queer way, indeed. Would you be looking at it, colonel?"

"Certainly, my boy," said the colonel briskly, and turning to me as Hamish ran back, he explained: "He means dead. The people here never will say an animal is dead—it's always lost. Better stay back, Ailsa."

We two men hurried forward.

"What's the matter, Donald?" inquired the colonel.

"Who will be saying?" answered the old shepherd gravely. "It is perfect uncanny the way the beastie will be lost."

"My God!" cried the colonel, "the sheep is crushed into a mess—a mess, that's all I can call it."

I looked down at that which had been running on four legs no very long time ago. It was precisely as the colonel had described it, a shapeless mass, as though some terrible brute force had compressed it, crushing every bone in its body.

We stared at each other, asking for explanation.

"This is a damnable outrage," said the colonel, his face red with anger, "and if I can lay hands on whoever did this, he'll pay for it to the limit of the law. There's no hanging for sheep stealing now, but a thing like this deserves hanging."

I still studied the object.

"No human hand did this," I said at last. "I saw something like this once before—the body of a deer—in South America."

"This is a far cry from South America, my friend," said the colonel. "And what do you suppose did for the deer?"

"A boa constrictor."

"But, my dear man, who ever heard of anything like that in Scotland?"

"That's out of the question, of course. It's rather odd, though. The carcass of the deer was crushed in exactly the same way. The constrictors do that so as to make their food easy to swallow and digest."

The colonel stared at me, then clapped me on the shoulder with a pleased laugh at his own wit.

"You're a regular Mark Twain—jumping frog and all that sort of thing, I declare. Well, we can't do anything. See that this is buried, Donald, and let me know at once if you lose any more sheep. By gad, Giles, you and I will have to get up a hunting party to go after this boa constrictor, eh? Come along, Ailsa. Drop in and see us whenever you feel like it. Always glad to see you."

I thought Ailsa was rather disappointed that I did not go along with them to the post-office, but then I was probably taking too much for granted. I knew that I was attracted to her as I had been to no other woman I had hitherto met. She was charming in her frankness, and there was a soft, wooing quality in her speech which suited my American ear.

While Hamish and Donald were engaged in their unpleasant task, I took the opportunity to examine the ground. I could find no trace of footsteps—if there had been any we had efficiently trampled them out, nor any sign of animal tracks. The one discovery I made was that in one spot where the grass was long it had been crushed down as though some heavy weight had been dragged over it. But on the short-cropped grass and rock, nothing.

Late in the afternoon I went to the village and got my mail. Included in it were a couple of new books I had ordered to be sent to me, and I promised myself an enjoyable evening's reading.

After dinner, and I own I was beginning to think of hotels and cooking being done out of my sight, I lit my lamp, put the bar across the door, and set myself down for the night. A storm was brewing, and I was not surprised when it broke with low rumbling, then louder peals and vivid lightning flashes.

It must have been growing late, for I had all but come to the end of my book,

when outside the house I heard a slow and stealthy rustling and a scraping of the pebbles which the schoolmaster, I presume, had diligently gathered to form a path. I put down the noise to a stray sheep or cow, for they wandered at will over my diminutive estate, and I was about to begin the last chapter of my book, when I happened to glance at the window.

Something dark was swaying to and fro which took form as it approached the glass, and as I looked my blood ran cold, and I shuddered. Pressed against the pane was a bestial face, human and yet not human, the face of a gorilla rather than of a man, with projecting massive jaw and beetling brows, and under the overhanging brows two loathsome balls of discolored, white, pupilless eyes, which rolled blindly in their horny sockets. The skin of the monster was, however, not hairy. It was a dirty brown color, crumpled in heavy folds.

As I stared, stiff with terror, for such is the only way I can describe my sensation of the moment, the lips opened to show two long, thin fangs in the upper jaw, and for an instant I was strongly reminded of a serpent. There was something reptilian in the aspect of this horrible monster which created a positive loathing in me.

How I regretted my revolver lying in my suit-case in the other corner. I was afraid to stir in case I should provoke attack from this nameless thing.

There was a terrific crash of thunder and a dazzling flash. At the same time the face vanished below the level of the window. There was a crashing blow upon the door, and it seemed to me that the cottage itself shook under the impact. I heard a faint rustling which died away.

I did not dare rise from my chair for a few minutes, and when I did my first action was to run to my suit-case, pull out my Colt and load it. Somehow I felt safer, though whether when it came to a question of actual combat, I did not know if I would have nerve enough to face up to it. It had certainly got me scared both ways.

When I got control of myself again, I opened the door and looked out. Not a trace of anything, nothing but that faint, musky odor. It was strange, but in a flash

I recalled where I had noticed just such a smell—in the reptile house at the zoo.

But what connection between this thing and the reptile house there could be, for the life of me I could not suggest. Now that my first horrid impression was over, I began to think my monster was probably some poor deformed piece of mankind, in the making of which the potter's hand had slipped, and since he was allowed to wander about free, harmless. A natural—as they call idiots in Scotland.

And with this explanation I went to bed, all unwitting of another and more horrifying explanation close to my door.

IV.

Nobody in the village has ever seen or heard of any one remotely resembling my uncouth visitor. The mail-carrier promised to notify the policeman at the little town, but as that is ten miles from here I don't see what good that can do.

I went and told my tale to the colonel. He was amazed, as well he might be. At first I thought he was inclined to think I was romancing, but my earnestness convinced him to the contrary, and he insisted on lending me a heavy sporting rifle with explosive bullets—some relic of a tiger-hunting expedition in India. Though what he expected me to do with it, I did not quite gather, only as he told me, he felt responsible as a justice of the peace for my safety.

He set aside my theory of a "natural" in favor of one of his own, that the creature I had seen was a gorilla, escaped from some traveling circus or menagerie. Inasmuch as I found out that no circus or wild-beast show had ever been seen anywhere within the circle of my inquiries, I privately did not agree with him. He was prepared to maintain his point, and I had no intention of getting into his bad graces, for my friendship with Ailsa was progressing with great rapidity.

In fact, I had quite lost sight of the object which had brought me north. The science of geology had been relegated to the background, and though scientists may regret that I lost those days which might have been so precious in discovery, to-day

I feel that I am amply compensated for the loss. We were meeting daily, usually in the neighborhood of the cottage, as Ailsa cycled past for the mail or halted on her way back.

Strange to say I had no recurrence of my visit, and I was almost about to put it out of my mind altogether, when the discovery of another mangled sheep, and the entire disappearance of two others set the whole countryside hunting with dogs for the unknown killer. Nothing was found, and the excitement died down.

I had made up my mind to undertake an extensive survey and examination of the crater, and was only awaiting the arrival of a camera from Glasgow to carry out my purpose, when the culminating act of that tragedy of horror which had been staged in this part of the country was brought so suddenly before me as almost to paralyze my activities when most needed.

I was sitting in the cottage waiting for that happy moment of the day when Ailsa was due to come past, and I remember I had been polishing up the colonel's gun and my revolver, when without warning I heard a terrified scream, followed by the barking of a dog.

I do not know what instinct prompted me to run out, carrying the gun which I had just loaded, and to stuff the revolver into my baggy pocket; but the sound which had come to my ears was so heart-rending, so full of horror, that it came quite naturally to me to think of arms against some animal attack. I rushed out into the sunlight and looked about me.

My first thought had been of Ailsa, but it was before her time for coming. And then I saw a figure in white crouched near the edge of the plateau.

It was Ailsa, and beside her as she knelt with hands before her eyes, writhed something in enormous bulky coils. There was an old tree-stump on the edge there, and it seemed to me that about it extended a broad scaly hand.

There was no time to wonder or surmise, and rifle in hand I ran with all speed toward her, calling frantically:

"Ailsa! Ailsa!"

She must have heard me, for she took her hands from her face, looked toward me, but did not rise.

As I came near I saw that the writhing mass was that of a serpent, but so enormous that I did not think such a monster existed anywhere, and least of all in this cold clime. Its girth must have been greater than that of a heavy man's body. The air was heavy with a musky, sickening odor. I reached Ailsa, and with one hand pulled her roughly to her feet. As I did so the mass of coils separated sluggishly.

I shuddered with uncontrollable revulsion as I caught sight of the mangled body of poor Laddie crushed flat. But stirring within the coils was something else, and my heart beats stopped suddenly as though some stopcock had cut short my life's current. Peering at me was a pair of white eyeballs blinking in horny lids.

"For God's sake, Ailsa!" I cried desperately, "run—run!" I gave her a push in my anxiety. She ran a few steps, then stumbling, fell in a faint.

Before I had time to take a step back, myself, from the coils rose that face of horror I had seen staring into my window, a pair of broad, muscular shoulders and long arms with clawlike fingers, attached to and part of the scaly mass. What indescribable creation of nature was this? This apelike prehistoric man with the body of a serpent.

Never to my dying day can I hope to efface from my memory the vision which upreared itself before my eyes, swaying with clawing hands, the open mouth with its twin fangs, the eyes blinking at me with a dull, expressionless stare.

I was conscious of an ungovernable agitation to which followed a feeling of inertia. The power of motion seemed to have left my limbs, and in a sort of hypnotic trance I watched this vile thing raise its mockery of the human body on a thick coil which slowly began to incline toward me. One hand with clutching fingers was about to descend upon me when, waking from my stupor, I fired the rifle directly into the chest of the monster.

The echo of the report and the thud of the heavy gun which I had held too lightly

to my shoulder, brought me to my senses instantly. I was alert and ready now.

The monster ceased its swaying. I fired again, then throwing down my rifle, pulled out my revolver and poured six shots into the bestial face.

Without waiting to see the result, I took to my heels, snatched up Ailsa, and carried her to the cottage, laid her on my cot, and tried to arouse her to consciousness.

She opened her eyes, then seeing me bending over her, clung to me convulsively.

"Don't let it get me, don't let it get me," she cried like a child.

"It's dead," I assured her. "Now lie there for a moment. You'll be all right if you rest."

"You mustn't leave me," she implored.

And I stayed with her till she became calmer.

It appeared that she had thought she would come along the edge of the plateau and surprise me. As she was passing the crater she saw something moving on the slope, and bent over the edge to see. Suddenly up over the edge of the plateau came a pair of hands, then the face, and swiftly, she said, though I had only seen the monster move sluggishly, the serpent body and tail.

Before she could turn or utter a sound, Laddie had been seized in the terrible hands and the coils had whipped about him, the old tree trunk providing leverage.

She was so shaken with trembling that an hour must have elapsed before she would let me go out. I slipped a handful of the explosive cartridges into my pocket, cursing the folly which had let me throw down my rifle.

I took a long look on coming out of the cottage, but there was nothing visible on the edge of the plateau, and I went along cautiously. My rifle was lying where I had let it fall, and loading it, I advanced carefully to the edge of the crater.

I was in hopes that I could secure the carcass of the creature, and in fancy I anticipated the sensation the news would create. The place would be overrun with reporters and scientists.

I could have cried aloud with exultation. There in the bottom of the crater lay the

extended body, still writhing in spite of my eight shots. I watched it for a time, roughly calculating its dimensions.

From the juncture of the upper part the scaly body must have measured close to thirty feet—perhaps a little more; but I chose to err on the side of safety—and tapering to the thickness of a man's wrist at the extremity.

As to the mysterious conjunction of animal life my imagination could hardly grasp its source. Was it some relic of the Mesozoic epoch, when from the primeval living slime the reptiles were emerging in formed shape, and by what biological twist, unsuspected even by Haeckel, had this mammalian body, primitive, but still human, become attached to it? Was it not the case that reptiles, birds, and mammals had a common origin, and that there was no essential, morphological difference between the human embryo and that of other mammals, birds, and reptiles—the vertebrates.

What mystery of nature would dissection disclose? Buried in some warm nook of the earth, hibernating in trance state, the volcanic convulsion stirring it to life, had at the same time provided a way of escape from its prison of—of millions of years, perhaps. I shuddered at the thought.

All at once I heard the thing stir, and saw the coils writhe in final agony. The tail swept the floor of the crater, sending the stones flying in every direction. Once more the clawing hands groped blindly toward the light.

And then.

Had I been quicker. Had my brain worked spontaneously, I had taken the rifle and fired again. Perhaps I might not have prevented what occurred, but I had no chance to try.

Before I could do anything I saw the shattered thing which had been a head bend over the abyss, and instantaneously the whole mass of slithering coils followed it into the depths in a headlong plunge.

I uttered a groan of dismay, of real regret as I realized the loss to science, and then remembering one I had left waiting for me, I turned away from the crater and hurried along the plateau to the cottage.