

The Third Eye

By Robert W. Chambers

Although the man's back was turned toward me, I was uncomfortably conscious that he was watching me. How he could possibly be watching me while I stood directly behind him, I did not ask myself; yet, nevertheless, instinct warned me that I was being inspected; that somehow or other the man was staring at me as steadily as though he and I had been face to face and his faded, sea-green eyes were focussed upon me.

It was an odd sensation which persisted in spite of logic, and of which I could not rid myself. Yet the little waitress did not seem to share it. Perhaps she was not under his glassy inspection. But then, of course, I could not be either.

No doubt the nervous tension incident to the expedition was making me supersensitive and even morbid.

Our sail-boat rode the shallow turquoise-tinted waters at anchor, rocking gently just off the snowy coral reef on which we were now camping. The youthful waitress who, for economy's sake, wore her cap, apron, collar and cuffs over her dainty print dress, was seated by the signal fire writing in her diary. Sometimes she thoughtfully touched her pencil point with the tip of her tongue; sometimes she replenished the fire from a pile of dead mangrove branches heaped up on the coral reef beside her. Whatever she did she accomplished gracefully.

As for the man, Grue, his back remained turned toward us both and he continued, apparently, to scan the horizon for the sail which we all expected. And all the time I could not rid myself of the unpleasant idea that somehow or other he was looking at me, watching attentively the expression of my features and noting my every movement.

The smoke of our fire blew wide across leagues of shallow, sparkling water, or, when the wind veered, whirled back into our faces across the reef, curling and eddying among the standing mangroves like fog drifting.

Seated there near the fire, from time to time I swept the horizon with my marine glasses; but there was no sign of Kemper; no sail broke the far sweep of sky and water; nothing moved out there save when a wild duck took wing amid the dark raft of its companions to circle low above the ocean and settle at random, invisible again except when, at intervals, its white breast flashed in the sunshine.

Meanwhile the waitress had ceased to write in her diary and now sat with the closed book on her knees and her pencil resting against her lips, gazing thoughtfully at the back of Grue's head.

It was a ratty head of straight black hair, and looked greasy. The rest of him struck me as equally unkempt and dingy—a youngish man, lean, deeply bitten by the sun of the semi-tropics to a mahogany hue, and unusually hairy.

I don't mind a brawny, hairy man, but the hair on Grue's arms and chest was a rusty red, and like a chimpanzee's in texture, and sometimes a wildly absurd idea possessed me that the man needed it when he went about in the palm forests without his clothes.

But he was only a "poor white"—a "cracker" recruited from one of the reefs near Pelican Light, where he lived alone by fishing and selling his fish to the hotels at Heliatlope City. The sail-boat was his; he figured as our official guide on this expedition—an expedition which already had begun to worry me a great deal.

For it was, perhaps, the wildest goose chase and the most absurdly hopeless enterprise ever undertaken in the interest of science by the Bronx Park authorities.

Nothing is more dreaded by scientists than ridicule; and it was in spite of this terror of ridicule that I summoned sufficient courage to organize an exploring party and start out in search of something so extraordinary, so hitherto unheard of that I had not dared reveal to Kemper by letter the object of my quest.

No, I did not care to commit myself to writing just yet; I had merely sent Kemper a letter to join me on Sting-ray Key.

He telegraphed me from Tampa that he would join me at the rendezvous; and I started directly from Bronx Park for Heliatropé City; arrived there in three days; found the waitress all ready to start with me; inquired about a guide and discovered the man Grue in his hut off Pelican Light; made my bargain with him; and set sail for Sting-ray Key, the most excited and the most nervous young man who ever had dared disaster in the sacred cause of science.

Everything was now at stake, my honour, reputation, career, fortune. For, as chief of the Anthropological Field Survey Department of the great Bronx Park Zoological Society, I was perfectly aware that no scientific reputation can survive ridicule.

Nevertheless, the die had been cast, the Rubicon crossed in a sail-boat containing one beachcombing cracker, one hotel waitress, a pile of camping kit and special utensils, and myself.

How was I going to tell Kemper? How was I going to confess to him that I was staking my reputation as an anthropologist upon a letter or two and a personal interview with a young girl—a waitress at the Hotel Gardenia in Heliatropé City?

* * *

I lowered my sea-glasses and glanced sideways at the waitress. She was still chewing the end of her pencil, reflectively.

She was a pretty girl, one Evelyn Grey, and had been a country schoolteacher in Massachusetts until her health broke.

Florida was what she required; but that healing climate was possible to her only if she could find there a self-supporting position.

Also she had nourished an ambition for a post-graduate education, with further aspirations to a Government appointment in the Smithsonian Institute.

All very worthy, no doubt—in fact, particularly commendable because the wages she saved as waitress in a Florida hotel during the winter were her only means of support while studying for college examinations during the summer in Boston, where she lived.

Yet, although she was an inmate of Massachusetts, her face and figure would have ornamented any light-opera stage. I never looked at her but I thought so; and her cuffs and apron merely accentuated the delusion. Such ankles are seldom seen when the curtain rises after the overture. Odd that frivolous thoughts could flit through an intellect dedicated only to science!

The man, Grue, had not stirred from his survey of the Atlantic Ocean. He had a somewhat disturbing capacity for remaining motionless—like a stealthy and predatory bird which depends on immobility for aggressive and defensive existence.

The sea-wind fluttered his cotton shirt and trousers and the tattered brim of his straw hat. And always I felt as though he were watching me out of the back of his ratty head, through the ravelled straw brim that sagged over his neck.

The pretty waitress had now chewed the end of her pencil to a satisfactory pulp, and she was writing again in her diary, very intently, so that my cautious touch on her arm seemed to startle her.

Meeting her inquiring eyes I said in a low voice:

“I am not sure why, but I don’t seem to care very much for that man, Grue. Do you?”

She glanced at the water’s edge, where Grue stood, immovable, his back still turned to us.

“I never liked him,” she said under her breath.

“Why?” I asked cautiously.

She merely shrugged her shoulders. She did it gracefully.

I said:

“Have you any particular reason for disliking him?”

“He’s dirty.”

“He *looks* dirty, yet every day he goes into the sea and swims about. He ought to be clean enough.”

She thought for a moment, then:

“He seems, somehow, to be fundamentally unclean—I don’t mean that he doesn’t wash himself. But there are certain sorts of animals and birds and other creatures from which one instinctively shrinks—not, perhaps, because they are materially unclean—”

“I understand,” I said. After a silence I added: “Well, there’s no chance now of sending him back, even if I were inclined to do so. He appears to be familiar with these latitudes. I don’t suppose we could find a better man for our purpose. Do you?”

“No. He was a sponge fisher once, I believe.”

“Did he tell you so?”

“No. But yesterday, when you took the boat and cruised to the south, I sat writing here and keeping up the fire. And I saw Grue climbing about among the mangroves over the water in a most uncanny way; and two snake-birds sat watching him, and they never moved.

“He didn’t seem to see them; his back was toward them. And then, all at once, he leaped backward at them where they sat on a mangrove, and he got one of them by the neck—”

“What!”

The girl nodded.

“By the neck,” she repeated, “and down they went into the water. And what do you suppose happened?”

“I can’t imagine,” said I with a grimace.

“Well, Grue went under, still clutching the squirming, flapping bird; and he *stayed* under.”

“Stayed under the *water*?”

“Yes, longer than any sponge diver I ever heard of. And I was becoming frightened when the bloody bubbles and feathers began to come up—”

“*What* was he doing under water?”

“He must have been tearing the bird to pieces. Oh, it was quite unpleasant, I assure you, Mr. Smith. And when he came up and looked at me out of those very vitreous eyes he resembled something horribly amphibious. . . . And I felt rather sick and dizzy.”

“He’s got to stop that sort of thing!” I said angrily. “Snake-birds are harmless and I won’t have him killing them in that barbarous fashion. I’ve warned him already to let birds alone. I don’t know how he catches them or why he kills them. But he seems to have a mania for doing it—”

I was interrupted by Grue’s soft and rather pleasant voice from the water’s edge, announcing a sail on the horizon. He did not turn when speaking.

The next moment I made out the sail and focussed my glasses on it.

"It's Professor Kemper," I announced presently.

"I'm so glad," remarked Evelyn Grey.

I don't know why it should have suddenly occurred to me, apropos of nothing, that Billy Kemper was unusually handsome. Or why I should have turned and looked at the pretty waitress—except that she was, perhaps, worth gazing upon from a purely non-scientific point of view. In fact, to a man not entirely absorbed in scientific research and not passionately and irrevocably wedded to his profession, her violet-blue eyes and rather sweet mouth might have proved disturbing.

As I was thinking about this she looked up at me and smiled.

"It's a good thing," I thought to myself "that I am irrevocably wedded to my profession." And I gazed fixedly across the Atlantic Ocean.

* * *

There was scarcely sufficient breeze of a steady character to bring Kemper to Sting-ray Key; but he got out his sweeps when I hailed him and came in at a lively clip, anchoring alongside of our boat and leaping ashore with that unnecessary dash and abandon which women find pleasing.

Glancing sideways at my waitress through my spectacles, I found her looking into a small hand mirror and patting her hair with one slim and suntanned hand.

When Professor Kemper landed on the coral he shot a curious look at Grue, and then came striding across the reef to me.

"Hello, Smithy!" he said, holding out his hand. "Here I am, you see! Now what's up—"

Just then Evelyn Grey got up from her seat beside the fire; and Kemper turned and gazed at her with every symptom of unfeigned approbation.

I introduced him. Evelyn Grey seemed a trifle indifferent. A good-looking man doesn't last long with a clever woman. I smiled to myself polishing my spectacles gleefully. Yet, I had no idea why I was smiling.

We three people turned and walked toward the comb of the reef. A solitary palm represented the island's vegetation, except, of course, for the water-growing mangroves.

I asked Miss Grey to precede us and wait for us under the palm; and she went forward in that light-footed way of hers which, to any non-scientific man, might have been a trifle disturbing. It had no effect upon me. Besides, I was looking at Grue, who had gone to the fire and was evidently preparing to fry our evening meal of fish and rice. I didn't like to have him cook, but I wasn't going to do it myself; and my pretty waitress didn't know how to cook anything more complicated than beans. We had no beans.

Kemper said to me:

"Why on earth did you bring a waitress?"

"Not to wait on table," I replied, amused. "I'll explain her later. Meanwhile, I merely want to say that you need not remain with this expedition if you don't want to. It's optional with you."

"That's a funny thing to say!"

"No, not funny; sad. The truth is that if I fail I'll be driven into obscurity by the ridicule of my brother scientists the world over. I had to tell them at the Bronx what I was going after. Every man connected with the society attempted to dissuade me, saying that the whole thing was absurd and that my reputation would suffer if I engaged in such a ridiculous quest. So when you hear what that girl and I are after out here in the semi-tropics, and when you are in possession of

the only evidence I have to justify my credulity, if you want to go home, go. Because I don't wish to risk *your* reputation as a scientist unless you choose to risk it yourself"

He regarded me curiously, then his eyes strayed toward the palm-tree which Evelyn Grey was now approaching.

"All right," he said briefly, "let's hear what's up."

So we moved forward to rejoin the girl, who had already seated herself under the tree.

She looked very attractive in her neat cuffs, tiny cap, and pink print gown, as we approached her.

"Why does she dress that way?" asked Kemper, uneasily.

"Economy. She desires to use up the habiliments of a service which there will be no necessity for her to reenter if this expedition proves successful."

"Oh. But Smithy—"

"What?"

"Was it—moral—to bring a waitress?"

"Perfectly," I replied sharply. "Science knows no sex!"

"I don't understand how a waitress can be scientific," he muttered, "and there seems to be no question about her possessing plenty of sex—"

"If that girl's conclusions are warranted," I interrupted coldly, "she is a most intelligent and clever person. *I* think they are warranted. If you don't, you may go home as soon as you like."

I glanced at him; he was smiling at her with that strained politeness which alters the natural expression of men in the imminence of a conversation with a new and pretty woman.

I often wonder what particular combination of facial muscles are brought into play when that politely receptive expression transforms the normal and masculine features into a fixed simper.

When Kemper and I had seated ourselves, I calmly cut short the small talk in which he was already indulging, and to which, I am sorry to say, my pretty waitress was beginning to respond. I had scarcely thought it of her—but that's neither here nor there—and I invited her to recapitulate the circumstances which had resulted in our present foregathering here on this strip of coral in the Atlantic Ocean.

She did so very modestly and without embarrassment, stating the case and reviewing the evidence so clearly and so simply that I could see how every word she uttered was not only amazing but also convincing Kemper.

When she had ended he asked a few questions very seriously:

"Granted," he said, "that the pituitary gland represents what we assume it represents, how much faith is to be placed in the testimony of a Seminole Indian?"

"A Seminole Indian," she replied, "has seldom or never been known to lie. And where a whole tribe testify alike the truth of what they assert can not be questioned."

"How did you make them talk? They are a sullen, suspicious people, haughty, uncommunicative, seldom even replying to an ordinary question from a white man."

"They consider me one of them."

"Why?" he asked in surprise.

"I'll tell you why. It came about through a mere accident. I was waitress at the hotel; it happened to be my afternoon off; so I went down to the coquina dock to study. I study in my leisure moments, because I wish to fit myself for a college examination."

Her charming face became serious; she picked up the hem of her apron and continued to plead it slowly and with precision as she talked:

“There was a Seminole named Tiger-tail sitting there, his feet dangling above his moored canoe, evidently waiting for the tide to turn before he went out to spear crayfish. I merely noticed he was sitting there in the sunshine, that’s all. And then I opened my mythology book and turned to the story of Argus, on which I was reading up.

‘And this is what happened: there was a picture of the death of Argus, facing the printed page which I was reading—the well-known picture where Juno is holding the head of the decapitated monster—and I had read scarcely a dozen words in the book before the Seminole beside me leaned over and placed his forefinger squarely upon the head of Argus.

“‘Who?’ he demanded.

‘I looked around good-humoredly and was surprised at the evident excitement of the Indian. They’re not excitable, you know.

“ ‘That,’ said I, ‘is a Greek gentleman named Argus.’ I suppose he thought I meant a Minorcan, for he nodded. Then, without further comment, he placed his finger on Juno.

“ ‘*Who?*’ he inquired emphatically.

‘I said flippantly: ‘Oh, that’s only my aunt, Juno.’

“ ‘Aunty of you?’

“ ‘Yes.’

“ ‘She kill ’um Three-eye?’

‘Argus had been depicted with three eyes.

“ ‘Yes,’ I said, ‘my Aunt Juno had Argus killed.’

“ ‘Why kill ’um?’

“ ‘Well, Aunty needed his eyes to set in the tails of the peacocks which drew her automobile. So when they cut off the head of Argus my aunt had the eyes taken out; and that’s a picture of how she set them into the peacock.’

“ ‘Aunty of *you?*’ he repeated.

“ ‘Certainly,’ I said gravely; ‘I am a direct descendant of the Goddess of Wisdom. That’s why I’m always studying when you see me down on the dock here.’

“ ‘*You Seminole!*’ he said emphatically.

“ ‘Seminole,’ I repeated, puzzled.

“ ‘You Seminole! Aunty Seminole—you Seminole!’

“ ‘Why, Tiger-tail?’

“ ‘Seminole hunt Three-eye long time—hundred, hundred year—hunt um Three-eye, kill ’um Three-eye.

“ ‘You say that for hundreds of years the Seminoles have hunted a creature with three eyes?’

“ ‘Sure! Hunt ’um now!’

“ ‘*Now?*’

“ ‘Sure!’

“ ‘But, Tiger-tail, if the legends of your people tell you that the Seminoles hunted a creature with three eyes hundreds of years ago, certainly no such three-eyed creatures remain today?’

“ ‘Some.’

“ ‘What! Where?’

“ ‘Black Bayou.’

“ ‘Do you mean to tell me that a living creature with three eyes still inhabits the forests of Black Bayou?’

“ ‘Sure. Me see ’um. Me kill ’um three-eye man.

“ ‘You have killed a man who had *three eyes?*’

“ ‘Sure!’

“ ‘A man? *With three eyes?*’

“ ‘Sure.’ ”

* * *

The pretty waitress, excitedly engrossed in her story, was unconsciously acting out the thrilling scene of her dialogue with the Indian, even imitating his voice and gestures. And Kemper and I listened and watched her breathlessly, fascinated by her lithe and supple grace as well as by the astounding story she was so frankly unfolding with the consummate artlessness of a natural actress.

She turned her flushed face to us:

“I made up my mind,” she said, “that Tiger-tail’s story was worth investigating. It was perfectly easy for me to secure corroboration, because that Seminole went back to his Everglade camp and told every one of his people that I was a white Seminole because my ancestors also hunted the three-eyed man and nobody except a Seminole could know that such a thing as a three-eyed man existed.

“So, the next afternoon off, I embarked in Tiger-tail’s canoe and he took me to his camp. And there I talked to his people, men and women, questioning, listening, putting this and that together, trying to discover some foundation for their persistent statements concerning men, still living in the jungles of Black Bayou, who had three eyes instead of two.

‘All told the same story; all asserted that since the time their records ran the Seminoles had hunted and slain every three-eyed man they could catch; and that as long as the Seminoles had lived in the Everglades the three-eyed men had lived in the forests beyond Black Bayou.’

She paused, dramatically, cooling her cheeks in her palms and looking from Kemper to me with eyes made starry by excitement.

‘And *what* do you think!’ she continued, under her breath. “To prove what they said they brought for my inspection a skull. And then two more skulls like the first one.

“Every skull had been painted with Spanish red; the coarse black hair still stuck to the scalps. And, behind, just over where the pituitary gland is situated, was a hollow, bony orbit—unmistakably the socket of a *third eye!*”

“W-where are those skulls?” demanded Kemper, in a voice not entirely under control.

“They wouldn’t part with one of them. I tried every possible persuasion. On my own responsibility, and even before I communicated with Mr. Smith—” turning toward me, “I offered them twenty thousand dollars for a single skull, staking my word of honour that the Bronx Museum would pay that sum.

“It was useless. Not only do the Seminoles refuse to part with one of those skulls, but I have also learned that I am the first person with a white skin who has ever even heard of their existence—so profoundly have these red men of the Everglades guarded their secret through centuries.”

After a silence Kemper, rather pale, remarked:

“This is a most astonishing business, Miss Grey.”

“What do you think about it?” I demanded. “Is it not worth while for us to explore Black Bayou?”

He nodded in a dazed sort of way, but his gaze remained riveted on the girl. Presently he said:

“Why does Miss Grey go?”

She turned in surprise:

“Why am I going? But it is *my* discovery—my contribution to science, isn’t it?”

“Certainly!” we exclaimed warmly and in unison. And Kemper added:

“I was only thinking of the dangers and hardships. Smith and I could do the actual work—”

“Oh!” she cried in quick protest, “I wouldn’t miss one moment of the excitement, one pang, one pang! I *love* it! It would simply break my heart not to share every chance, hazard, danger of this expedition—every atom of hope, excitement, despair, uncertainty—and the ultimate success—the unsurpassable thrill of exultation in the final instant of triumph!”

She sprang to her feet in a flash of uncontrollable enthusiasm, and stood there, aglow with courage and resolution, making a highly agreeable picture in her apron and cuffs, the sea wind fluttering the bright tendrils of her hair under her dainty cap.

We got to our feet much impressed; and now absolutely convinced that there did exist, somewhere, descendants of prehistoric men in whom the third eye—placed in the back of the head for purposes of defensive observation—had not become obsolete and reduced to the traces which we know only as the pituitary body or pituitary gland.

Kemper and I were, of course, aware that in the insect world the ocelli served the same purpose that the degenerate pituitary body once served in the occiput of man.

As we three walked slowly back to the campfire, where our evening meal was now ready, Evelyn Grey, who walked between us, told us what she knew about the hunting of these three-eyed men by the Seminoles—how intense was the hatred of the Indians for these people, how murderously they behaved toward any one of them whom they could track down and catch.

“Tiger-tail told me,” she went on, “that in all probability the strange race was nearing extinction, but that all had not yet been exterminated because now and then, when hunting along Black Bayou, traces of living three-eyed men were still found by him and his people.

“No later than last week Tiger-tail himself had startled one of these strange denizens of Black Bayou from a meal of fish; and had heard him leap through the bushes and plunge into the water. It appears that centuries of persecution have made these three-eyed men partly amphibious—that is, capable of filling their lungs with air and remaining under water almost as long as a turtle.”

“That’s impossible!” said Kemper bluntly.

“I thought so myself” she said with a smile, “until Tiger-tail told me a little more about them. He says that they can breathe through the pores of their skins; that their bodies are covered with a thick, silky hair, and that when they dive they carry down with them enough air to form a sort of skin over them, so that under water their bodies appear to be silver-plated.”

“Good Lord!” faltered Kemper. “That is a little too much!”

“Yet,” said I, “that is exactly what air-breathing water beetles do. The globules of air, clinging to the body-hairs, appear to silver-plate them; and they can remain below indefinitely, breathing through spiracles. Doubtless the skin pores of these men have taken on the character of spiracles.”

“You know,” he said in a curious, flat voice, which sounded like the tones of a partly stupefied man, “this whole business is so grotesque—apparently so wildly absurd—that it’s having a sort of nightmare effect on me.” And, dropping his voice to a whisper close to my ear: “Good heavens!” he said. “Can you reconcile such a creature as we are starting out to hunt, with anything living known to science?”

“No,” I replied in guarded tones. “And there are moments, Kemper, since I have come into possession of Miss Grey’s story, when I find myself seriously doubting my own sanity.”

"I'm doubting mine, now," he whispered, "only that girl is so fresh and wholesome and human and sane—"

"She is a very clever girl," I said.

"And really beautiful!"

"She is intelligent," I remarked. There was a chill in my tone which doubtless discouraged Kemper, for he ventured nothing further concerning her superficially personal attractions.

After all, if any questions of priority were to arise, the pretty waitress was *my* discovery. And in the scientific world it is an inflexible rule that he who first discovers any particular specimen of any species whatever is first entitled to describe and comment upon that specimen without interference or unsolicited advice from anybody.

Maybe there was in my eye something that expressed as much. For when Kemper caught my cold gaze fixed upon him he winced and looked away like a reprovved setter dog who knew better. Which also, for the moment, put an end to the rather gay and frivolous line of small talk which he had again begun with the pretty waitress.

I was exceedingly surprised at Professor William Henry Kemper, D.F.

As we approached the campfire the loathsome odour of frying mullet saluted my nostrils.

Kemper, glancing at Grue, said aside to me:

"That's an odd-looking fellow. What is he? Minorcan?"

"Oh, just a beachcomber. I don't know what he is. He strikes me as dirty—though he can't be so, physically. I don't like him and I don't know why. And I wish we'd engaged somebody else to guide us."

* * *

Toward dawn something awoke me and I sat up in my blanket under the moon. But my leg had not been pulled.

Kemper snored at my side. In her little dog-tent the pretty waitress probably was fast asleep. I knew it because the string she had tied to one of her ornamental ankles still lay across the ground convenient to my hand. In any emergency I had only to pull it to awake her.

A similar string, tied to my ankle, ran parallel to hers and disappeared under the flap of her tent. This was for her to pull if she liked. She had never yet pulled it. Nor I the other. Nevertheless I truly felt that these humble strings were, in a subtler sense, ties that bound us together. No wonder Kemper's behaviour had slightly irritated me.

I looked up at the silver moon; I glanced at Kemper's unlovely bulk, swathed in a blanket; I contemplated the dog-tent with, perhaps, that slight trace of sentiment which a semi-tropical moon is likely to inspire even in a jellyfish. And suddenly I remembered Grue and looked for him.

He was accustomed to sleep in his boat, but I did not see him in either of the boats. Here and there were a few lumpy shadows in the moonlight, but none of them was Grue lying prone on the ground. Where the devil had he gone?

Cautiously I untied my ankle string, rose in my pajamas, stepped into my slippers, and walked out through the moonlight.

There was nothing to hide Grue, no rocks or vegetation except the solitary palm on the backbone of the reef.

I walked as far as the tree and looked up into the arching fronds. Nobody was up there. I could see the moonlit sky through the fronds. Nor was Grue lying asleep anywhere on the other side of the coral ridge.

And suddenly I became aware of all my latent distrust and dislike for the man. And the vigour of my sentiments surprised me because I really had not understood how deep and thorough my dislike had been.

Also, his utter disappearance struck me as uncanny. Both boats were there; and there were many leagues of sea to the nearest coast.

Troubled and puzzled I turned and walked back to the dead embers of the fire. Kemper had merely changed the timbre of his snore to a whistling aria, which at any other time would have enraged me. Now, somehow, it almost comforted me.

Seated on the shore I looked out to sea, racking my brains for an explanation of Grue's disappearance. And while I sat there racking them, far out on the water a little flock of ducks suddenly scattered and rose with frightened quackings and furiously beating wings.

For a moment I thought I saw a round, dark object on the waves where the flock had been.

And while I sat there watching, up out of the sea along the reef to my right crawled a naked, dripping figure holding a dead duck in his mouth.

Fascinated, I watched it, recognising Grue with his tarry black hair all plastered over his face.

Whether he caught sight of me or not, I don't know; but he suddenly dropped the dead duck from his mouth, turned, and dived under water.

It was a grim and horrid species of sport or pastime, this amphibious business of his, catching wild birds and dragging them about as though he were an animal.

Evidently he was ashamed of himself, for he had dropped the duck. I watched it floating by on the waves, its head under water. Suddenly something jerked it under, a fish perhaps, for it did not come up and float again, as far as I could see.

When I went back to camp Grue lay apparently asleep on the north side of the fire. I glanced at him in disgust and crawled into my tent.

The next day Evelyn Grey awoke with a headache and kept her tent. I had all I could do to prevent Kemper from prescribing for her. I did that myself sitting beside her and testing her pulse for hours at a time, while Kemper took one of Grue's grains and went off into the mangroves and speared grunt and eels for a chowder which he said he knew how to concoct.

Toward afternoon the pretty waitress felt much better, and I warned Kemper and Grue that we should sail for Black Bayou after dinner.

* * *

Dinner was a mess, as usual, consisting of fried mullet and rice, and a sort of chowder in which the only ingredients I recognised were sections of crayfish.

After we had finished and had withdrawn from the fire, Grue scraped every remaining shred of food into a kettle and went for it. To see him feed made me sick, so I rejoined Miss Grey and Kemper, who had found a green cocoanut and were alternately deriving nourishment from the milk inside it.

Somehow or other there seemed to me a certain levity about that performance, and it made me uncomfortable; but I managed to smile a rather sickly smile when they offered me a draught, and I took a pull at the milk—I don't exactly know why, because I don't like it. But the moon was

up over the sea, now, and the dusk was languorously balmy, and I didn't care to leave those two drinking milk out of the same cocoon under a tropic moon.

Not that my interest in Evelyn Grey was other than scientific. But after all it was I who had discovered her.

We sailed as soon as Grue, gobbling and snuffling, had cleaned up the last crumb of food. Kemper blandly offered to take Miss Grey into his boat, saying that he feared my boat was overcrowded, what with the paraphernalia, the folding cages, Grue, Miss Grey, and myself.

I sat on that suggestion, but offered to take my own tiller and lend him Grue. He couldn't wriggle out of it, seeing that his alleged motive had been the overcrowding of my boat, but he looked rather sick when Grue went aboard his boat.

As for me, I hoisted sail with something so near to a chuckle that it surprised me; and I looked at Evelyn Grey to see whether she had noticed the unseemly symptom.

Apparently she had not. She sat forward, her eyes fixed soulfully upon the moon. Had I been dedicated to any profession except a scientific one—but let that pass.

Grue in Kemper's sail-boat led, and my boat followed out into the silvery and purple dusk, now all sparkling under the high lustre of the moon.

Dimly I saw vast rafts of wild duck part and swim leisurely away to port and starboard, leaving a glittering lane of water for us to sail through; into the scintillant night from the sea sprang mullet, silvery, quivering, falling back into the wash with a splash.

Here and there in the moonlight steered ominous black triangles, circling us, leading us, sheeting across bow and flashing wake, all phosphorescent with lambent sea-fire—the fins of great sharks.

"You need have no fear," said I to the pretty waitress.

She said nothing.

"Of course if you *are* afraid," I added, "perhaps you might care to change your seat."

There was room in the stern where I sat.

"Do you think there is any danger?" she asked.

"From sharks?"

"Yes."

"Reaching up and biting you?"

"Yes."

"Oh, I don't really suppose there is," I said, managing to convey the idea, I am ashamed to say, that the catastrophe was a possibility.

She came over and seated herself beside me. I was very much ashamed of myself, but I could not repress a triumphant glance ahead at the other boat, where Kemper sat huddled forward, evidently bored to extinction.

Every now and then I could see him turn and crane his neck as though in an effort to distinguish what was going on in our boat.

There was nothing going on, absolutely nothing. The moon was magnificent; and I think the pretty waitress must have been a little tired, for her head drooped and nodded at moments, even while I was talking to her about a specimen of *Euplectilla speciosa* on which I had written a monograph. So she must have been really tired, for the subject was interesting.

"You won't incommode my operations with sheet and tiller," I said to her kindly, "if you care to rest your head against my shoulder."

Evidently she was very tired, for she did so, and closed her eyes.

After a while, fearing that she might fall over backward into the sea—but let that pass. . . . I don't know whether or not Kemper could distinguish anything aboard our boat. He craned his head enough to twist it off his neck.

To be so utterly, so blindly devoted to science is a great safeguard for a man. Single-mindedness, however, need not induce atrophy of every humane impulse. I drew the pretty waitress closer—not that the night was cold, but it might become so. Changes in the tropics come swiftly. It is well to be prepared.

Her cheek felt very soft against my shoulder. There seemed to be a faint perfume about her hair. It really was odd how subtly fragrant she seemed to be—almost, perhaps, a matter of scientific interest. Her hands did not seem to be chilled; they did seem unusually smooth and soft.

I said to her: “When at home, I suppose your mother tucks you in; doesn't she?”

“Yes,” she nodded sleepily.

“And what does she do then?” said I, with something of that ponderous playfulness with which I make scientific jokes at a meeting of the Bronx Anthropological Association, when I preside.

“She kisses me and turns out the light,” said Evelyn Grey, innocently.

I don't know how much Kemper could distinguish. He kept dodging about and twisting his head until I really thought it would come off unless it had been screwed on like the top of a piano stool.

A few minutes later he fired his pistol twice; and Evelyn sat up. I never knew why he fired; he never offered any explanation.

Toward midnight I could hear the roar of breakers on our starboard bow. Evelyn heard them, too, and sat up inquiringly.

“Grue has found the inlet to Black Bayou, I suppose,” said I.

And it proved to be the case, for, with the surf thundering on either hand, we sailed into a smoothly flowing inlet through which the flood tide was running between high dunes all sparkling in the moonlight and crowned with shadowy palms.

Occasionally I heard noises ahead of us from the other boat, as though Kemper was trying to converse with us, but as his apropos was as unintelligible as it was inopportune, I pretended not to hear him. Besides, I had all I could do to manoeuvre the tiller and prevent Evelyn Grey from falling off backward into the bayou. Besides, it is not customary to converse with the man at the helm.

After a while—during which I seemed to distinguish in Kemper's voice a quality that rhymes with his name—his tones varied through phases all the way from irony to exasperation. After a while he gave it up and took to singing.

There was a moon, and I suppose he thought he had a voice. It didn't strike me so. After several somewhat melancholy songs, he let off his pistol two or three times and then subsided into silence.

I didn't care; neither his songs nor his shots interrupted—but let that pass, also.

We were now sailing into the forest through pool after pool of interminable lagoons, startling into unseen and clattering flight hundreds of waterfowl. I could feel the wind from their whistling wings in the darkness, as they drove by us out to sea. It seemed to startle the pretty waitress. It is a solemn thing to be responsible for a pretty girl's peace of mind. I reassured her continually, perhaps a trifle nervously. But there were no more pistol shots. Perhaps Kemper had used up his cartridges.

We were still drifting along under drooping sails, borne inland almost entirely by the tide, when the first pale, watery, gray light streaked the east. When it grew a little lighter, Evelyn sat up; all danger of sharks being over. Also, I could begin to see what was going on in the other boat. Which was nothing remarkable; Kemper slumped against the mast, his head turned in our direction; Grue sat at the helm, motionless, his tattered straw hat sagging on his neck.

When the sun rose, I called out cheerily to Kemper, asking him how he had passed the night. Evelyn also raised her head, pausing while bringing her disordered hair under discipline, to listen to his reply.

But he merely mumbled something. Perhaps he was still sleepy.

As for me, I felt exceedingly well; and when Grue turned his craft in shore, I did so, too; and when, under the overhanging foliage of the forest, the nose of my boat grated on the sand, I rose and crossed the deck with a step distinctly frolicsome.

Kemper seemed distant and glum; Evelyn Grey spoke to him shyly now and then, and I noticed she looked at him only when he was gazing elsewhere than at her. She had a funny, conciliatory air with him, half ashamed, partly humorous and amused, as though something about Kemper's sulky ill-humor was continually making tiny inroads on her gravity.

Some mullet had jumped into the two boats-half a dozen during our moonlight voyage-and these were now being fried with rice for us by Grue. Lord! How I hated to eat them!

After we had finished breakfast, Grue, as usual, did everything to the remainder except to get into the fry-pan with both feet; and as usual he sickened me.

When he'd cleaned up everything, I sent him off into the forest to find a dry shell-mound for camping purposes; then I made fast both boats, and Kemper and I carried ashore our paraphernalia, spare *batterie-de-cuisine*, firearms, fishing tackle, spears, harpoons, grains, oars, sails, spars, folding cage—everything with which a strictly scientific expedition is usually burdened.

Evelyn was washing her face in the crystal waters of a branch that flowed into the lagoon from under the live-oaks. She looked very pretty doing it, like a naiad or dryad scrubbing away at her forest toilet.

It was, in fact, such a pretty spectacle that I was going over to sit beside her while she did it, but Kemper started just when I was going to, and I turned away. Some men invariably do the wrong thing. But a handsome man doesn't last long with a pretty girl.

I was thinking of this as I stood contemplating an alligator slide, when Grue came back saying that the shore on which we had landed was the termination of a shell-mound, and that it was the only dry place he had found.

So I bade him pitch our tents a few feet back from the shore; and stood watching him while he did so, one eye reverting occasionally to Evelyn Grey and Kemper. They both were seated cross-legged beside the branch, and they seemed to be talking a great deal and rather earnestly. I couldn't quite understand what they found to talk about so earnestly and volubly all of a sudden, inasmuch as they had heretofore exchanged very few observations during a most brief and formal acquaintance, dating only from sundown the day before.

Grue set up our three tents, carried the luggage inland, and then hung about for a while until the vast shadow of a vulture swept across the trees.

I never saw such an indescribable expression on a human face as I saw on Grue's as he looked up at the huge, unclean bird. His vitreous eyes fairly glittered; the corners of his mouth quivered and grew wet; and to my astonishment he seemed to emit a low, mewling noise.

"What the devil are you doing?" I said impulsively, in my amazement and disgust.

He looked at me, his eyes still glittering, the corners of his mouth still wet; but the curious sounds had ceased.

“What?” he asked.

“Nothing. I thought you spoke.” I didn’t know what else to say.

He made no reply. Once, when I had partly turned my head, I was aware that he was warily turning his to look at the vulture, which had alighted heavily on the ground near the entrails and heads of the mullet, where he had cast them on the dead leaves.

I walked over to where Evelyn Grey and Kemper sat so busily conversing; and their volubility ceased as they glanced up and saw me approaching. Which phenomenon both perplexed and displeased me.

I said:

“This is the Black Bayou forest, and we have the most serious business of our lives before us. Suppose you and I start out, Kemper, and see if there are any traces of what we are after in the neighborhood of our camp.”

“Do you think it safe to leave Miss Grey alone in camp?” he asked gravely.

I hadn’t thought of that:

“No, of course not,” I said. “Grue can stay.

“I don’t need anybody,” she said quickly. “Anyway, I’m rather afraid of Grue.”

“Afraid of Grue?” I repeated.

“Not exactly afraid. But he’s unpleasant.”

“I’ll remain with Miss Grey,” said Kemper politely.

“Oh,” she exclaimed, “I couldn’t ask that. It is true that I feel a little tired and nervous, but I can go with you and Mr. Smith and Grue—”

I surveyed Kemper in cold perplexity. As chief of the expedition, I couldn’t very well offer to remain with Evelyn Grey, but I didn’t propose that Kemper should, either.

“Take Grue,” he suggested, “and look about the woods for a while. Perhaps after dinner Miss Grey may feel sufficiently rested to join us.”

“I am sure,” she said, “that a few hours’ rest in camp will set me on my feet. All I need is rest. I didn’t sleep very soundly last night.”

I felt myself growing red, and I looked away from them both.

“Oh” said Kemper, in apparent surprise, “I thought you had slept soundly all night long.”

“Nobody,” said I, “could have slept very pleasantly during that musical performance of yours.

“Were you singing?” she asked innocently of Kemper.

“He was singing when he wasn’t firing off his pistol,” I remarked. “No wonder you couldn’t sleep with any satisfaction to yourself”

Grue had disappeared into the forest; I stood watching for him to come out again. After a few minutes I heard a furious but distant noise of flapping; the others also heard it; and we listened in silence, wondering what it was.

“It’s Grue killing something,” faltered Evelyn Grey, turning a trifle pale.

“Confound it!” I exclaimed. “I’m going to stop that right now.”

Kemper rose and followed me as I started for the woods; but as we passed the beached boats Grue appeared from among the trees.

“Where have you been?” I demanded.

“In the woods.”

“Doing what?”

“Nothing.”

There was a bit of down here and there clinging to his cotton shirt and trousers, and one had caught and stuck at the corner of his mouth.

“See here, Grue,” I said, “I don’t want you to kill any birds except for camp purposes. Why do you try to catch and kill birds?”

“I don’t.”

I stared at the man and he stared back at me out of his glassy eyes.

“You mean to say that you don’t, somehow or other, manage to catch and kill birds?”

“No, I don’t.”

There was nothing further for me to say unless I gave him the lie. I didn’t care to do that, needing his services.

Evelyn Grey had come up to join us; there was a brief silence; we all stood looking at Grue; and he looked back at us out of his pale, washed-out, and unblinking eyes.

“Grue,” I said, “I haven’t yet explained to you the object of this expedition to Black Bayou. Now, I’ll tell you what I want. But first let me ask you a question or two. You know the Black Bayou forests, don’t you?”

“Yes.”

“Did you ever see anything unusual in these forests?”

“No.”

“Are you sure?”

The man stared at us, one after another. Then he said:

“What are you looking for in Black Bayou?”

“Something very curious, very strange, very unusual. So strange and unusual, in fact, that the great Zoological Society of the Bronx in New York has sent me down here at the head of this expedition to search the forests of Black Bayou.”

“For what?” he demanded, in a dull, accentless voice.

“For a totally new species of human being, Grue. I wish to catch one and take it back to New York in that folding cage.”

His green eyes had grown narrow as though sun-dazzled. Kemper had stepped behind us into the woods and was now busy setting up the folding cage. Grue remained motionless.

“I am going to offer you,” I said, “the sum of one thousand dollars in gold if you can guide us to a spot where we may see this hitherto unknown species—a creature which is apparently a man but which has, in the back of his head, *a third eye*—”

I paused in amazement: Grue’s cheeks had suddenly puffed out and were quivering; and from the corners of his slitted mouth he was emitting a whimpering sound like the noise made by a low-circling pigeon.

“Grue!” I cried. “What’s the matter with you?”

“What is *he* doing?” screamed Grue, quivering from head to foot, but not turning around.

“Who?” I cried.

“The man behind me!”

“Professor Kemper? He’s setting up the folding cage—”

With a screech that raised my hair, Grue whipped out his murderous knife and *hurled himself backward* at Kemper, but the latter shrank aside behind the partly erected cage, and Grue whirled around, snarling, hacking, and even biting at the wood frame and steel bars.

And then occurred a thing so horrid that it sickened me to the pit of my stomach; for the man’s sagging straw hat had fallen off, and there, in the back of his head, through the coarse, black, ratty hair, I saw a glassy eye glaring at me.

“Kemper!” I shouted. “He’s got a third eye! He’s one of them! Knock him flat with your rifle-stock!” And I seized a shot-gun from the top of the baggage bundle on the ground beside me, and leaped at Grue, aiming a terrific blow at him.

But the glassy eye in the back of his head was watching me between the clotted strands of hair, and he dodged both Kemper and me, swinging his heavy knife in circles and glaring at us both out of the front and back of his head.

Kemper seized him by his arm, but Grue’s shirt came off, and I saw his entire body was as furry as an ape’s. And all the while he was snapping at us and leaping hither and thither to avoid our blows; and from the corners of his puffed cheeks he whined and whimpered and mewed through the saliva foam.

“Keep him from the water!” I panted, following him with the clubbed shot-gun; and as I advanced I almost stepped on a soiled heap of foulness—the dead buzzard which he had caught and worried to death with his teeth.

Suddenly he threw his knife at my head, hurling it backward; dodged, screeched, and bounded by me toward the shore of the lagoon, where the pretty waitress was standing, petrified.

For one moment I thought he had her, but she picked up her skirts, ran for the nearest boat, and seized a harpoon; and in his fierce eagerness to catch her he leaped clear over the boat and fell with a splash into the lagoon.

As Kemper and I sprang aboard and looked over into the water, we could see him going down out of reach of a harpoon; and his body seemed to be silver-plated, flashing and glittering like a burnished eel, so completely did the skin of air envelop him, held there by the fur that covered him.

And, as he rested for a moment on the bottom, deep down through the clear waters of the lagoon where he lay prone, I could see, as the current stirred his long, black hair, the third eye looking up at us, glassy, unwinking, horrible.

* * *

A bubble or two, like globules of quicksilver, were detached from the burnished skin of air that clothed him, and came glittering upward.

Suddenly there was a flash; a flurrying cloud of blue mud; and Grue was gone.

* * *

After a long while I turned around in the muteness of my despair. And slowly froze.

For the pretty waitress, becomingly pale, was gathered in Kemper’s arms, her cheek against his shoulder. Neither seemed to be aware of me.

“Darling,” he said, in the imbecile voice of a man in love, “why do you tremble so when I am here to protect you? Don’t you love and trust me?”

“Oo—h—yes,” she sighed, pressing her cheek closer to his shoulder.

I shoved my hands into my pockets, passed them without noticing them, and stepped ashore.

And there I sat down under a tree, with my back toward them, all alone and face to face with the greatest grief of my life.

But which it was—the loss of her or the loss of Grue, I had not yet made up my mind.