

THE PRETERNATURALIST

DR. HOBBS AND THE
KHUMJUNG YETIS



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Dr. Hobbes and the Khumjung Yetis

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I had recently returned from my sojourn in North America. Now, it being mid-October, I began, owing to my recent upsetting professional experiences—the ugliness in Whitechapel with the beastly Jack Rakes, and the disappointment I experienced in Scotland the preceding season, not to mention the dismal excursion to Ashford’s farm in the state of New York—to feel the need of some new research to stimulate me and, I might even hope, help to elevate me out of the mild funk into which I had descended. I began to turn my mind, as ever has been my wont, to the oceans. Indeed, I began to think again of my own invention, the *Eye in the Deep*, and to consider ways in which that intrepid vessel might be employed to again seek out the *Sirenia sirenii*, the mer-species upon which so much of my initial fame rested. I began to consider whether, for instance, the submersible vessel might not be employed in a survey of the lairs of these aquatic mammals, that I might study their social structures and witness their family units in action. Certainly some measure of simple loneliness had descended upon me, so it is not unsurprising that I should then consider the pursuit of a species which had brought to me such a wealth of carnal—and, I might even go so far as to say, emotional—satisfaction and even pleasure.

I rang the bell to summon Richard. The worthy fellow appeared some minutes later, an expectant look upon his face.

"I believe it is time I got back to work, Richard," I said.

"Very good, sir."

"I trust that you have kept the *Eye in the Deep* in good trim."

"Exactly as you specified, Doctor."

I nodded. Richard cleared his throat and lifted a yellow slip of paper for me to see.

"You have a telegram, sir."

"Thank you," said I, taking the paper from him.

"Shall I charge the electrical cells on the submersible?"

"Just a moment. This may require a response."

The telegram read as follows:

Daniel

Traveling in Himalayas, Nepal. Have come across a tale by the locals that seems right up your street. Have you heard of Meh-Teh? Some sort of bear or ape, I understand, but communicates with local monks. While visiting Khumjung monastery, saw one from a distance. Huge, ugly beast. Locals claim quite gentle. Opportunity for a man of your unique skills, perhaps.

Must push on, but thought it worth sharing the tale with you. If you come, seek out my nephew Adrian at the border. Must be accompanied by a diplomat. He knows of your work and would be happy to assist.

Happy hunting.

Yours etc.

Wesley Portsmouth, DVS, MBS

I considered this exceptional communique for a long moment. Of course I knew Wesley Portsmouth—a perfectly beastly man himself, in my opinion. I pushed aside my irritation at his informal greeting, and at his suggestion that I might require his nephew’s presence as a chaperone. There was something intriguing here. Thus far, with the exception of the recent debacle in Oquaga, New York, in the United States of America, my scientific inquiries had all taken place within the British Isles. Here, now, was an opportunity to extend my studies into the exotic lands of the Orient. Should I be fortunate enough to learn anything useful about these Meh-Teh—let alone to secure a specimen!—such a venture would go a very great distance toward cementing my reputation among the greats of zoology. Certainly I would miss the ocean, where my heart and the bulk of my expertise lay, and indeed the thought of missing out on an opportunity to acquaint myself with new members of *Sirenia sirenii*, with their gentle caresses and lovely, human-like visages, stung me deeply. But I could not but acknowledge that doddering old Portsmouth had handed me what could very well be the key to the next level in my career.

Richard cleared his throat again. “Shall I see to the submersible, Doctor?” he asked.

“No, Richard,” I said. “I’ve just received a most remarkable intelligence. Send a reply to Dr. Portsmouth immediately, informing him that I shall embark within the week. Then go down to the aerodrome and see about booking passage for us. After that you can prepare our traveling clothes and equipment. Cold weather, this time, and rugged terrain. We’ll be in the mountains. And see to it that the electrical rifles are ready for use, and lay in a good store of the proper caliber of ammunition.”

“Very good, Doctor. Where shall we be flying?”

“Why, to Nepal, of course.”

“Of course.”

My journey from the aerodrome at Edinburgh to the one in Kathmandu occupied the best part of a week. From Edinburgh, my aerostat, a local carrier, brought me to London, whence I took a subsequent vessel to the aerodrome at Paris. From there I proceeded east to Munich, and thence on to my destination, with stops in Kyiv, Volgograd, and any number of ever smaller and tawdrier aerofields, switching conveyances sometimes twice or more in a day. When finally I disembarked at the Kathmandu aerodrome, I was exhausted, my legs aching, my back stiff. I instructed Richard to collect the bags and trunks, and to meet me in the squalid, mud and brick edifice that served as the lobby and staging area for the aerodrome. I took the porting basket down to the apron.

The air, at least, was clean and crisp at Kathmandu’s high altitude, and in the final days of October, it was quite fairly frigid. The aerial traffic at the aerodrome, I might remark, was unimpressive in the extreme, consisting largely of poorly maintained blimps, most flying foreign colors—predominant among these the British, although I did espy two or three carinales and, at the edge of the apron, flat upon the hard-packed earth, with her catenary shroud sagging lazily, a single rigid dirigible, her fittings rusted, which flew a Belgian standard. The sky was clear as crystal, with only the occasional scud of flying cloud; high mountains surrounded the city, which sprawled to the east of the aerodrome, a gray and red mosaic intershot with spaces of green fading into the browns and oranges of late autumn, which I deduced must indicate the presence of parklands or mighty estates—or, perhaps, of the many temples to whatever

idolatrous deities the superstitious locals kowtowed to. A light dusting of snow clung to the ground, damp and crusty about my boots.

The moment I stepped inside of the single-story structure I was accosted by a brown-skinned, mustachioed Nepali in epaulets and a turban, into which his long, black hair had been stuffed. The official was armed with a revolver in a covered holster on a baldric, upon which he set his hand as he addressed me. When it became clear to him that I did not speak the local language, he switched to a pidgin dialect of English, and asked me my name and the nature of my business.

“I am Doctor Daniel Hobbes, of Her Majesty’s Royal Society,” said I. “I have come to conduct a survey of your local fauna.”

The constable, or the Customs official, or whatever his title was, led me to a desk, where another dark-skinned and mustachioed personage, similarly dressed but with short hair and wearing an officer’s kepi, repeated the questions. Again I provided my credentials.

“Ah, sir,” said the officer, “I am afraid that I cannot permit you to enter Nepal unescorted. Is there anyone here who can vouch for you?”

“Vouch for me?” I demanded. “I have just informed you that I am a member of Her Majesty’s Royal Society!”

“That is very good, sir, but Queen Victoria is the sovereign of Great Britain, not of Nepal. Is there no one in the country whom you know?”

I fished Wesley Portsmouth’s telegram from my waistcoat pocket and scanned it.

“Adrian Portsmouth should be expecting me,” I said, forcing down my wrath at being detained by such a lout, and for no good purpose that I could see.

“Ah! Sir! You are Doctor Portsmouth’s friend! The scientist.”

“I’ve already told you as much, you ass.”

“Ambassador Portsmouth is expecting you.”

“Then by all means, show me to him.”

“He is at the embassy, in his office, but he asked that we inform him the moment that you arrived. I shall send for him.”

Adrian Portsmouth, when he arrived, proved to be young, of a tall and gangly build, with a stooping gait, a prominent Adam’s apple, a high, hooked nose, and very brown skin for an Englishman. He wore a khaki suit and a pith helmet, as though he had dressed for an African safari, and carried a riding crop. I could tell before ever he opened his mouth that he was every bit the imbecile that his uncle was. He extended his hand to me.

“Doctor Hobbes!” he crowed in a nasal voice, his accent that of the Oxford-educated milksop. “I’m very pleased to make your acquaintance! If you’re ready, I’ve a coach waiting outside. I can offer you a glass of gin, an agreeable meal, sherry and cigars, and a comfortable night’s sleep before we depart for Khumjung.”

“Most kind of you,” said I. “I do hope that your coach can accommodate my luggage. I have come equipped for a serious scientific expedition into rough country.”

“Certainly!” said my new acquaintance. “I had expected as much.”

Portsmouth was as good as his word. Within an hour our luggage had been laden into a coach, and our persons conveyed to Portsmouth’s private residence within the embassy grounds—one of the smaller of the park-like areas I had noted when first I alit upon the aerodrome apron. Another hour’s time saw me changed into fresh clothes and seated before a

brightly burning hearth in an opulent parlor, its high windows overlooking a snowy garden of dying flowers and stunted trees in the process of losing their leaves, sipping gin and smoking cigars with the ambassador.

After the usual tedious pleasantries, I turned our conversation toward the subject of Wesley Portsmouth's telegram, inquiring as to the nature of the Meh-Teh of which my buffoonish colleague—though I knew better than to express my true opinion of him to his kin—had written. Portsmouth grinned and pulled the chain to order another round of gins—not that I had any interest in a second; I had hardly touched the first.

“Quite intriguing, what?” he asked, puffing pompously on his cigar. “Local legend, don't you know. Mainly from the mountain regions, which of course comprise the majority of the whole bally country.”

“Then you have not seen one yourself?”

Portsmouth chuckled. “I'm afraid I have not. But Uncle says he has, and that's good enough for me.”

“Wesley mentioned a monastery. A place by the name of Khumjung.”

“That is the spot, or so I'm informed.”

“What of the monks? Have they seen these creatures?”

“So the story goes. Bally saints, these Meh-Teh are rumored to be.”

“Surely not. If there is any accuracy at all to what Wesley has written, they are nothing more than dumb brutes.”

“You’re the naturalist, Doctor Hobbes, but I really must say that every tale I’ve heard paints the creatures as kindly and gentle. The monks claim to speak to them. They say the bally beasts teach them philosophy, of all things!”

This was, of course, preposterous. Certainly I had read accounts of the mountain gorillas of the African continent, and of other tribes of manlike primates about the globe, suggesting that such beasts lived in what might be considered a sort of noble innocence, idyllic and indolent, at relative peace within their own societies and in equilibrium with the ecology about them. But so much could be said for the simplest fishes in the oceans, or the birds in the trees; yet there was no call to attribute any great, mystical intelligence to such creatures. The notion that *Homo sapiens* might learn any sort of useful philosophy from a lower order of animal bordered on the offensive. However, in the interest of maintaining my alliance with Portsmouth the younger—he had explained to me that it would be impossible to travel to any monastery outside of the environs of Kathmandu unescorted by an official such as himself—I did not betray my thoughts on the subject.

“I have never witnessed such a thing myself,” I said. “I look forward to finding such a creature and taking its measure.”

“I bally well bet you do!” Portsmouth crooned, accepting a tall glass of gin from a nut-brown youth in a turban. “Never you mind, old bean! I’ve arranged everything. We’re off for Khumjung tomorrow morning. Traveling in style, what? Now, smoke up, and we’ll have ourselves a fine dinner.”

After what did indeed prove to be an excellent meal, Portsmouth furnished sherry and another brace of cigars. The cigar I stowed in an inner pocket of my frock coat, explaining that I

was saving it against any lean times that may be forthcoming. I toyed with my sherry, taking a few miniscule sips, and presently managed to escape to my quarters—lavishly appointed with Oriental carpets, rich wall tapestries of a most exotic fashion, and a four-poster bed—to begin my notes on my journey.

In the morning Portsmouth, Richard, and I were bundled back into the ambassador's coach, our luggage, with the exception of one or two small valises, having spent the night *in situ*. To my surprise, the coach brought us directly back to the aerodrome, and fifteen minutes later the three of us were seated in a sort of a flying parlor or lounge in what appeared to be Portsmouth's—or perhaps the embassy's—private blimp. Though it was no later than nine in the morning, our host immediately stretched himself out on a sofa with yet another stinking cigar and a glass of brandy. I declined his offer of the same.

The aerostat followed an eastward route, and within two and a half hours descended upon a snowclad village nestled in the arms of the highest mountain I had ever seen in my life. The village itself appeared tiny and inconsequential, of a similar design to Kathmandu, from what little I had seen of Nepal's great metropolis, though far less densely populated. Clearly this village had seen better days; those buildings I could make out appeared to be in poor repair, and I saw few beasts of any sort, the people appearing hunched and bowed as with great labor or great misfortune.

As for the mountain, it was simply a marvel. Its mighty head was partially obscured by swirling clouds, while glaciers of ice and snow crawled down its craggy sides, embracing the village of Khumjung. I must confess that I was actually moved on an emotional level by the spectacle. My guide sat up from his sofa and glanced over my shoulder, out the porthole.

“Ah, yes!” he said. “That would be Everest. Highest peak in the bally world! Pity the ruddy village is dying. Bally backwater, what? No trade, nothing to offer the world. Still, the mountain’s a bally sight to behold!”

“A most impressive vista,” I said, my rationality and coolness restored, and feeling somewhat shamed by my strong emotional reaction of a moment before—and equally glad that I had not given it voice.

“You know, no one yet has ever made the summit,” Portsmouth said, pointing at the mountain’s peak with the burning tip of his cigar. “Been a few attempts, too. Bally air’s too thin, don’t you know! Between that and the weather, which I’m led to understand is bloody beastly, every bally expedition’s turned back, and a few men have died! You won’t be attempting to scale that blighter, will you, Doctor?”

“I am a naturalist, not a mountaineer,” I said. “I fancy I shall have to see what these monks have to say, but I am quite certain I shall not have to travel to the summit of the mountain in order to encounter these Meh-Teh. Since no one else has reached the summit, and yet there are Englishmen claiming to have seen the creatures, and monks claiming to have spoken with them, it follows logically that they are accessible at lower altitudes.”

Portsmouth smiled vacuously, cigar smoke curling from his nostrils.

“I say!” he crowed. “You really are a clever old bean, what?”

I stifled my annoyance with Portsmouth for the moment, for I still required his presence, and if it came to an expedition of any sort, I was aware that he had packed a great number of supplies against such an undertaking.

Our conveyance swept over the sad little village of Khumjung and followed a defile up the side of the mountain. After some five minutes we had traversed perhaps as many miles. Presently the aerostat came to a hover, her nose into the buffeting wind outside, her screws turning at a velocity precisely sufficient to hold her more or less stationary.

The descent in the porting basket was a nightmare. The tiny basket swayed sickeningly from side to side in the harsh and icy wind off of the mountain, and it spun on its tether as well. Portsmouth grinned throughout the ordeal, possibly owing to the half-bottle of brandy he had consumed since our departure from Kathmandu. Richard remained impassive, though his knuckles where he gripped the side of the basket were white. Anderson, Portsmouth's porter or valet—I had yet to determine which—turned green and gripped the porting cable, his eyes closed tightly. The descent occupied the space of only perhaps two minutes; nevertheless, when the porting basket bumped to the earth in a stone-flagged courtyard of what appeared to be a temple of some sort—I presumed this to be a portion of the Khumjung monastery—I was only too glad to climb out, and quite contented to stand upon firm earth.

"Be a good lad, Anderson, old man, and see about unloading our things," Portsmouth said, clapping the queasy-looking fellow on the elbow.

"And bring down my bags and trunks first," I said. "I have a scientific enquiry to commence, and I should like to get started straightaway."

Anderson nodded and swallowed. He pulled a handle attached to the porting cable, and momentarily the basket was lurching and spinning up toward the aerostat, some hundred or so feet overhead.

“You really ought to be more selective in your choice of valet,” I said to Portsmouth. “That fellow hardly has the constitution required for such exigencies. Have a look at Richard, here. Evolution and generations of hardship have hardened him into a man of a stoic cast and unquestionable mettle.”

Richard nodded in recognition of this high praise. Portsmouth glanced up at the receding basket.

“Anderson? Diplomatic aide, what? Dangling from blimps is hardly a part of the bally job description! Still, the lad works for me, and sure as houses, he knows which side his bread is buttered on.”

A squat, brown man appeared from a decorated stone archway. He was swaddled in a voluminous, ochre-colored robe, and his shaven head shone a dull brown in the half sunlight. Straightaway he began reciting a frantic litany in what I could only presume was the Nepali tongue. Portsmouth silenced him with a gesture of his hands—one of which again held his riding crop—and presented a sheaf of papers covered in boxy Oriental calligraphy. Our assailant perused these, then stepped back and bowed, his hands folded in front of his sternum, eyes downcast.

“Forgive me, Ambassador Portsmouth,” he said, in heavily accented English. “We were not informed that you would be arriving from the air.”

Portsmouth grinned crookedly. “You didn’t think I was going to bally well walk all the way from that village, did you?”

“Master Namrata awaits in the temple,” the monk said.

“Show us to him, then, old bean!” said Portsmouth. “This gentleman has a scientific enquiry he’d like to initiate, what?”

The monk forthwith ushered us through one of the many stone archways, and presently we stood in a columned room with a stone floor and ceiling. Unlike what little of the monastery I had seen thus far, which seemed to feature only small, covered windows, doubtless designed to keep out the cold, this room sported many tall windows, the most prominent of which overlooked the mighty peak that towered above us. Also unlike what I had seen thus far, which had a cheap and tawdry air, with inexpensive fittings and poor floor coverings, this room held an air of opulence and luxury, a direct contrast to the bare stone floors and unadorned walls we had passed on our way in. Heathen idols festooned the room, some standing upon the floor, some upon raised plinths and daises, some set into recesses in the walls, and still others protruding from the walls and columns themselves. Before many of these stood small tables, which I could only surmise were altars, and upon which were laid various implements and offerings, such as fruit and what I took for a clear, yellowish wine or beer. A second monk knelt before one of these, his head bowed. At the sound of our entrance he stood, then turned to face us.

This fellow bore a striking resemblance to the first monk—who had already withdrawn from the temple—though he was older, with a long, white chin-beard and drooping mustaches, and taller by some four or five inches, with long and spindly limbs beneath his robe and a protruding potbelly.

“Which of you is the English scientist?” our host asked, his voice high and fluting.

“I say, old thing,” said Portsmouth. “Ambassador Adrian Portsmouth, at your service. This gentleman is Doctor Daniel Hobbes, of Her Majesty’s Royal Society, and that’s his boy.”

“Ambassador,” said the old monk, bowing toward Portsmouth. He favored Richard with another bow. “Doctor.” I received my own pointless bit of ritual. “What has brought you here, to the knees of Qomolangma?”

Portsmouth gave his vapid smile. “Come now, old bean. You’ve received our letters. Your man was waiting for us, what? The doctor has come to study up on your yetis.”

“Yetis?” I asked.

“Sure, old man,” said Portsmouth. “Anglicization, what? We’re bally Englishmen, after all. We can’t be cracking our jaws all day, trying to speak the local lingo.”

“Doctor?” said the monk, who had not taken his eyes from me. He wore a faint smile, as though some secret jest had been spoken. “What brings you here?”

Portsmouth looked put out, but I found I almost liked the old monk, superstitious dupe though he may be, for had he not cut immediately past all of my chaperone’s pomp, to address the most qualified of his interviewers, and the one leading the investigation?

“As the ambassador said,” said I, “I have come in the hopes of having a look at these yetis of which I have heard.”

The monk nodded slowly, his pouched old eyes nearly closed.

“Many come seeking the wisdom of the Meh-Teh,” he said. “But they do not speak with all who seek them. They are wise beings, and they share their enlightenment only with those whom they deem have come in wisdom and humility.”

“As for humility, sir,” I said, “I have been humbled in having been required to travel here under chaperone. As for wisdom, I have studied the natural world for all of my life. I have studied the *Sirenia sirenii*, the mer-folk of the seas, and the *Insectus fae minutus*, the fae insects of our towns and cities, and the inhabitants of many other environments of our world, all to further mankind’s understanding of the natural world around us. I hold numerous scientific degrees, and have invented many ingenious devices—though it is others who have named them as such, and not I. I have come precisely because I know that there is much to be learned of such animals.”

“The Meh-Teh are not animals, Doctor,” the monk said. “They are beings above our station as humans, closer to the gods themselves.”

“I understand that you view them as such,” said I. “In any event, I have come to expand humanity’s knowledge. Surely that is a pursuit which you can endorse.”

“Perhaps,” said the monk, his deep-set eyes twinkling, as he turned away from me. “Return to the courtyard. Madhav will take you to your rooms.”

“I should really like to begin my enquiry straightaway,” I said, for what felt like the hundredth time that day. “Can you take me to where these yetis are encountered?”

“I can, but only after I have prayed and meditated, and only with the consent of the Meh-Teh.”

“Do you mean you shall be consulting with the bally yetis, old thing?” asked Portsmouth.

“You Englishmen claim that manners are important,” said the monk, his back to us as he gazed out a window upon the fields of snow and ice above. “If Doctor Hobbes would be

introduced to another great doctor, would you not first speak with that other doctor and secure his agreement for the interview? I accord the Meh-Teh no less courtesy. Madhav will bring you to me in the morning.”

“The bally morning?”

“Farewell for now, Ambassador Portsmouth, Doctor Hobbes, and his boy. You will speak with me in the morning.”

As we withdrew I felt a surge of indignation, that I should be put off by this superstitious yokel, and, moreover, at his intimation that my encountering of—I could not bring myself to think of it as “meeting,” given it was a lower animal of which we had been speaking—the yetis should somehow be left a matter for the animals’ own approval. Yet this monk was, in his fashion, a gatekeeper, whether symbolic or in some real sense, in much the same way that it had been only on Adrian Portsmouth’s say-so that I had been even admitted into the country. That a significant scientific investigation, one which should advance mankind’s understanding of the natural world immeasurably, should be forever held up and checked by such arrogant and ignorant buffoons I could scarcely countenance—and yet, it appeared that, for the time being at least, I had little choice in the matter.

“I may have to bally well send Anderson back to Kathmandu for more bally brandy and cigars!” Portsmouth breathed at my side as we entered the courtyard.

Supper was a meager affair, consisting mainly of rice, augmented with a thin broth. For his part, Adrian Portsmouth appeared unperturbed by the meanness of the meal, owing no doubt to his copious brandy consumption.

The following morning I was led, unchaperoned, by Madhav into the same temple room where the elderly monk had greeted us the previous afternoon. The old cleric appeared not to have moved since the day before.

“Doctor Hobbes!” he said, bowing and stepping toward me, as Madhav withdrew.

“Good morning,” I said. “Perhaps you would do me the honor of informing me who it is that I am addressing.”

The monk grinned placidly. “My name is unimportant. Too much ego, too much self-importance, and too much attachment are tied up in names.”

“Whether or not it is important,” said I, “I may have need to call you something.”

“You may call me Holy Father.”

I stifled my urge to recoil physically from the suggestion.

“I am a man of science, on a scientific expedition,” I said instead. “I deal in facts, not ritual or superstition.”

At the latter term, the monk’s habitual smile deepened.

“Superstition,” he said. “Such a term! Yet Holy Father is my title, just as Doctor is yours.”

“That is fair,” I said, “in as much as it is true. However, you do not simply know me as Doctor, nor have I asked this of you. I have given you my name, and you have used it.”

“Then you clearly feel that you are owed the same.”

“I worked many long years for my title, and I am sure you did the same for yours. I would consider it a professional courtesy.”

“Very well. Namrata is my name. Holy Father Namrata.”

“Thank you for the courtesy, Namrata. And thank you for your hospitality. I perceive that your monastery is not a place of great wealth.”

Namrata smiled placidly. “Our monastery is supported by the people of the village of Khumjung,” he said. “Khumjung is a small village, with little wealth. They provide for us monks as they are able, and we are grateful to them for all that they can do. I sometimes fear that the monastery is a burden beyond their means, but the elders inform me that this is not the case.”

“In any event, you have shown me much kindness. I trust you have had sufficient time to conduct your prayers and meditations?”

“I have, but I am certain that you will be displeased by the result.”

“Why do you say that?”

“Because I have learned that the Meh-Teh do not wish to be studied in the way that you propose.”

I could not conceal my ire. “What do you mean?” I demanded. “You will not show them to me?”

“That is precisely what I mean. I do not believe that you seek them out in the interest of spiritual growth. You do not seek them out gently, or with humility. You are not a peaceful man, Doctor Hobbes.”

“Whatever in the world would make you say such a thing? You know nothing of me! Why, not only am I a man of science. I am also a man of medicine. Though they were achieved through scientific means, I tell you that I have performed miracles in the service of the health and well-being of others. I have restored the capacity for motion, the ability to live and be productive, to a cousin of mine after a dreadful mishap robbed him of an arm and both his legs!

I encountered a dying beast, of an ancient species—a plesiosaur from the age of the great lizards—and nurtured it to health! Moreover, I have committed no act of violence upon any man, woman, or child!”

“And yet there is violence in your life, Doctor. I can sense it. There has been suffering among those whom you have encountered. It is in the air that you breathe.”

“What of that? Indeed, people have suffered, but it has been at the hands of others than me! I shudder to think what greater suffering they would have endured, if not for my knowledge and skills. Moreover, I am a renowned naturalist. I tour the world, giving lectures and teaching other wise and learned men about the natural world around us. My time is valuable, sir, and my counsel is sought after! I have not traveled across two continents, many thousands of miles, only to be put off by a robed idolator!”

Namrata regarded me slowly for several moments. He let out a sigh.

“You think too highly of yourself, Doctor, and of your science. What was it that your English poet, Mr. Shakespeare, wrote? ‘There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy.’ You are a very proud man, and I am sorry if you cannot abide the wasting of your time. Perhaps you could put your time here to better use, if you are to wait. You could pray, or meditate, or at least stroll the grounds. You might then find some peace.”

“If I am to wait? To wait for what? Have you, then, amended your decision?”

“I did not know that you use your knowledge for healing work. If there is truth in these words, the Meh-Teh may be swayed.”

“Then you shall speak to them on my behalf?”

I still resented Namrata's interference, but as so few civilized people had told tales of these yetis, I did not like my odds of finding one, should I be reduced to wandering the slopes of Everest seeking them out. If the monk could still be imposed upon to make an introduction, it would render my job considerably easier.

"I will, Doctor Hobbes. Today I shall go to them, and tell them all that I have learned of you. Again I urge you to use your time here wisely. Stroll the grounds, meditate, pray. Madhav will bring you to me when I return."

"When will that be?"

"A day, perhaps two. Likely no more than three."

I withdrew, fuming, with no intention of praying or meditating—ludicrous suggestions! Portsmouth dispatched Anderson for a fresh supply of brandy and cigars, and that evening, in the ambassador's company, I even indulged in three glasses of brandy, so great were my irritation with the delay and anticipation at the prospect of finally meeting the elusive yeti. The evening meal, in any event, was none the worse for being augmented in this fashion.

As fate would have it, the period of my waiting for Namrata's return was, indeed, three full days. On the morning of the fourth day, Madhav woke me in my monk's cell, which, apart from my own luggage and trunks and bags of scientific equipment, contained only a simple bowl for water and a straw pallet upon the floor for sleeping. He ushered me into Namrata's presence, again in the same temple room.

The elderly monk appeared tired, as though he had not slept in some time, and his robes had a worn appearance about them, as though he had not changed them since our last

interview. He bowed deeply when he saw me, his Asiatic eyes heavy-lidded and sporting dark bags.

“Good morning, Doctor Hobbes,” the old cleric said.

“Have you spoken with the yetis?” I asked.

“Your lack of patience, of serenity, rob your life of richness, Doctor. I hope that you have used the past three days to your advantage.”

“I spent them awaiting your return, Namrata. I am no holy man, nor am I a seeker of whatever sort of higher truths you superstitious types claim to deal in. Now, do me a kindness, if you feel no call to exercise courtesy, and tell me what is the upshot of your talk with the yetis, for if you cannot bring me to them, then I shall be forced to seek them out on my own.”

“Very likely, you would not find them.”

“I have sought and found many an elusive animal over the course of my career, Namrata.”

“How is Ambassador Portsmouth? How is your boy?”

I could have shaken the ass, so frustrated was I with his stalling, and so eager to commence with my investigation—but I maintained a calm demeanor, knowing that I was at the old fool’s mercy.

“They both are quite well,” I said, in the most level tone I could manage, “though I suspect they are humbled by the short commons.”

“Do you mean to say that our table does not meet the needs of you and your companions?” Namrata asked.

“I merely mean to say that I am impressed that any man can occupy himself with matters of a spiritual nature, when he must surely be hungry at all times. Other than that, we are all keeping well. At least, the ambassador is, if he does not drink and smoke himself to death. As for Richard, he occupies himself quite well when I do not require his assistance, and I see him seldom when he is not performing any task for me.”

“Perhaps you should seek them both out, Doctor. Madhav and I will take you to meet the Meh-Teh today. I shall eat a bit, and sleep an hour, while you gather what tools you need.”

“There is no need to wait!” I cried, fairly overcome with relief that my work could finally commence. “I can be out the door in twenty minutes!”

“Perhaps you could, but I am old, and I must prepare myself.”

“Cannot Madhav bring us alone? We are well provisioned and have weapons with which to defend ourselves.”

“Your weapons, the gods being willing, you shall not need. But I am not a young man, Doctor Hobbes, and I must see to the needs of my body before we depart. The Meh-Teh will not see you—in fact, they may be quite impossible to find—if I do not accompany you.”

This, of course, was a preposterous suggestion, that an animal’s ability to be found depended upon the presence of one man. Certainly it stood to reason that a person might have spent time around these beasts, and may have sought them out on many occasions, lending him a facility at finding them; such was the case for me with regard to seeking out the *Sirenia sirenii*. Yet I would never posit that no person might ever come across the creatures without my assistance. The arrogance of this heathen seemed without limit. Still, I knew better, by

now, than to gainsay the fool. Namrata was the master of his monastery, and he ruled with an iron fist; there would be no expedition but it adhered to whatever strictures he applied to it.

“Madhav!” Namrata called, looking over my shoulder toward the door through which the other monk and I had entered. “Bring Doctor Hobbes to me, with his two companions, in two hours.”

Madhav bowed. I accompanied him out of the chamber, bristling with impatience. When we reached the courtyard, I enquired whether he knew where Richard might be found.

“He is at prayer, or perhaps meditating with Aditya,” was the response. “Your Richard has put his time here to very good use. Already he has become more serene, a peaceful and contented man.”

I wondered at this. Not that I paid much heed to his personal affairs, but I had never known Richard to be a man of a religious inclination, nor had I ever witnessed him in any act of worship or prayer. I hoped that his utility as a servant would not be compromised through his time spent with these monks. But there you had it. These fellows preached laziness and soft thinking, and if we must needs spend time in idleness among them, there was the risk that their foolish ways might have a deleterious effect upon members of our company.

When we had gathered in the courtyard, Portsmouth appeared hung over, but I was gratified to see that Richard showed no outward sign of having altered his behavior in any way. He still wore his practical wool suit and bowler hat, and spoke no word of prayer, or meditation, or any of the other absurdities practiced in this strange place. All three of us wore our heavy coats—wool all around, like the practical Englishmen we were—while the two monks, Namrata and Madhav, had donned outer garments of fur.

At long last we departed the Khumjung monastery. Madhav led, followed by Namrata, his back bowed beneath his small backpack. Our route took us up the lower slopes of Everest, following a winding path among rocks and stunted clumps of trees or shrubs, the covering of snow upon the ground growing deeper the higher we rose. The air blowing down off of the mountain cut through our coats, and it carried with it the combined scents of snow and ozone. We crossed two or three small streams, and were forced to clamber through one particularly steep-sided gully. At least it was now plain that Namrata's stalling had been no mere matter of indolence; I found myself surprised that a man of his apparent age was able to make the trek at all, and began to wonder whether he was not perhaps considerably younger than he appeared. I let the matter go; it held no bearing upon the object of our journey.

The afternoon shadows were lengthening when we descended into a bowl-shaped area in the lee of a glacier-clad ridge. The moment I set eyes upon the dell, I was struck with a sense of oddness. For one thing, for no reason that I could perceive, the snow ended at the edge of this depression, which spanned some four hundred feet in diameter. Large stones stood upon the brown and yellow grass that lined the ground, gathered into clumps and clusters, some of which were decidedly circular in shape, while others took on square or triangular forms. Several of the stones had the appearance of great, flat tables, while others seemed to be of suitable proportions to be considered chairs or settees. All of this I perceived immediately, and I made a mental note of it; but rather than rendering me reverent or awing me, it served instead to create in me a sense of suspicion. I was, after all, here seeking out wild animals, not men or women, and certainly not priests or monks.

Madhav led us down into this natural amphitheater, toward the center, where the greatest agglomeration of the unusual stones had been arranged in a circular formation. As we descended into the dell the wind died down, and the frigid chill left the air, such that it seemed no colder than a brisk autumn evening at home. I could perceive no logical explanation for this phenomenon—but, of course, meteorology is not one of my areas of expertise. Our party came to a stop before a flat, table-like stone at the center of the central cluster.

“Well, Namrata?” I asked. “Where are they?”

The monk smiled serenely. “They are about. They see us, and they hear us. They have been aware of us for quite some time now.”

“So take me to them.”

“That is not necessary. When they are ready, the Meh-Teh will come to you.”

“To me?”

“Yes, Doctor Hobbes. Madhav and I must leave you now. Here you shall meet the Meh-Teh, if they are still willing to meet you.”

“Then how are we to return? None of us knows the way.”

“We shall return in a day or two. Will that time be sufficient for you to conduct your enquiry?”

“I cannot say. I do not know what it is I am going to encounter.”

“Use your time wisely, Doctor Hobbes.”

“I say, old thing,” said Portsmouth. “Bally big help you’ve been, what? Just leaving us here, after all our arrangements?”

“The Meh-Teh are peaceful creatures, Ambassador. You shall be safe, and all of our arrangements shall be honored. I shall see you soon.”

With that, the two monks began the ascent back out of the bowl. Within five minutes they had vanished from view, passing behind the glacier on the ridge above us, their fur garments again flapping in the freezing Himalayan wind.

Portsmouth looked around miserably. “Hardly in keeping with the spirit of our bally agreement!” he muttered.

“Richard,” I said, ignoring the ambassador, “set up the tents.”

I bent down to open my pack and remove my spyglass, but was stopped fast. A thrill of excitement, quickly freezing into fear, washed down my back. I was looking at the legs and feet of a huge, apelike creature. I slowly raised my eyes to take in the whole animal, which stood some dozen or so feet beyond where I had set down my pack, stepping backward several paces as I did, such that I nearly collided with Portsmouth, who had taken a flask from his pocket and was preparing to take a drink. The ambassador turned toward me, but whatever inane comment he intended to make died upon his lips as he noticed the yeti in his turn. His eyes opened wide, his mouth gaped, and his brown face blanched.

The animal stood on two legs, without leaning upon its forelimbs in the manner of a gorilla. A tawny, brownish fur coated its body, fading to gray and white about its shoulders. Its arms hung nearly to its knees, and all four limbs were heavily muscled beneath its thick pelt. The eyes of the creature appeared nearly black in the afternoon sunlight, and a strangely intelligent light glinted deep inside them, as though it pondered over some deep question. In all, the effect was thoughtful and manlike, though from the shape of the feet to the claw-like

aspect of the forepaws and the long fingernails, it was plain that the animal was a brute capable of great violence. From head to toe it stood no less than eight foot high, and quite possibly taller.

Richard came running. He halted beside me, leveling one of the electrical rifles that I had built a couple of years prior, when emulating the devices described in Professor Aronnax's remarkable treatise on his journey aboard the submersible *Nautilus*. The yeti stood quite still, regarding us with a serene expression reminiscent of the one I had seen upon Namrata's face on several occasions.

"Have no fear, gentleman," the animal said—or appeared to say; I instantly realized that its mouth had not moved, and that the language had formed inside my own head, in as proper a British accent as my own. The voice I heard was deep-pitched, gruff but melodious, and it carried a mood of calmness. "You will come to no harm here."

I glanced at Portsmouth, and was unsurprised to see his face a mask of shock. By now Richard and I had both become accustomed to hearing lower animals emulate human speech. We had encountered similar phenomena among the *Sirenia sirenii* and the *Insectus fae minutus*, and I had also conversed with the naiad creatures in North America. Nevertheless, to witness such a thing can be unnerving the first few times, hearing what seems to be intelligent speech issuing from the mouth of a lower order of animal; I could only guess how great a shock such a thing must be when it is first encountered within one's own skull. For myself, I took comfort in the fact that the animal had not spoken with tongue and vocal cords, and began to consider the various means by which an animal might induce an auditory hallucination. Pheromones immediately leaped to mind, and this was something I resolved to explore as soon

as I could secure a specimen—that is to say, get one of these creatures subdued, bound, and drugged so that I could safely begin an extensive physical examination.

“I can’t bally believe it!” Portsmouth gasped.

“You stay back, beast!” Richard cried, brandishing his rifle.

The yeti made a sweeping gesture with one paw. “There are nine of us, Richard. Your weapon will not avail you.”

I glanced about the dell. The creature had spoken—for the sake of convenience, I shall use this word, but I entreat the reader to bear in mind that all the yetis’ speech occurred within our heads, and they never uttered a single word aloud—truthfully. Among the stones about us a collection of the animals ranged, having appeared as suddenly and as silently as the first. The nearest stood no more than ten feet from Richard’s position. I saw a wide variety of body types and coloration among them, with some of them taller than others, some more broad-shouldered, one or two sporting potbellies that reminded me of Namrata’s, and fur that ranged from nearly black to nearly pure white, and every conceivable shade in between. Still, the most diminutive of the animals stood easily seven foot tall; they were a most physically imposing species.

“What, then, do you intend?” I asked, stepping forward.

“Intend?” the yeti asked. “Is it not you who sought us out, Doctor Hobbes? You requested a meeting, and we have come to meet with you.”

“Then why have you come in such a great number? Do you intend to overpower us?”

“You have entered into a shrine, Doctor Hobbes, just as you did in Khumjung. There are often a number of us in this place.”

“Why do you call it a shrine?” I asked.

“This is but one of many shrines we have built for ourselves. Qomolangma is our temple.”

“Rather disconcerting, isn’t it?” asked Portsmouth at my side. “All this talking in one’s head rot, I mean. Don’t you yetis ever speak properly?”

“This is how we speak, Ambassador. In your work, you have surely met many people who speak languages other than your own. That is all.”

“It is not true speech, Adrian,” I said. “These are animals. They are merely emulating our language for their own purposes.”

“Do you truly believe that, Doctor?” asked the yeti before us, the only one that had spoken as yet.

“It is the only scientifically feasible explanation for what we are witnessing.”

“How very limiting is this concept of yours.”

“Which concept would that be?” I asked.

“That which you name ‘science.’”

“A bit of the old sour grapes, what?” asked Portsmouth.

“If you do not wish to speak with us, you are welcome to depart,” said the yeti, the tone of his voice in my mind placid.

“I have not said so much,” said I. “I do, however, find it unsettling that you have come upon us in such a great number, and have surrounded us in this fashion.”

“And how should we feel, when you have entered into our shrine armed? Did you perhaps come here on a hunting expedition?”

“I assure you that the only type of hunting that I intend is the search for scientific data. I wish to study you, to know what you are and how you live.”

“You know what we are, or rather *who* we are. We are the Meh-Teh, the folk of Qomolangma and the surrounding mountains. You cannot learn how we live by killing us. Nor can you learn what wisdom we have to share in that way.”

I regarded Richard and Portsmouth. The former now held his rifle with the barrel pointing toward the ground. Portsmouth still stood in gap-mouthed disbelief, as if he had not been, at least in part, an architect of our presence here, and was now seeing something he had never believed existed. I realized, suddenly, that this surely was the case. His entire demeanor thus far had been that of a man on a holiday—a working holiday, perhaps, but one upon which he could be free to enjoy himself. Perhaps he had never considered that we might actually encounter the animals we sought, and assumed that, having exhausted our (now vastly augmented) store of brandy and cigars, we would eventually return to Kathmandu, none the worse for having failed to find an animal that so very few civilized people had seen. Whatever his uncle Wesley might know of my achievements, clearly Adrian knew little or nothing of the same. I pursue my enquiries with diligence and an intense focus, and have seldom failed to find that which I sought.

“Perhaps you are right,” I said, for in my dealings with the speaking orders of the animal kingdom below the station of man I have found that it is often helpful to mollify them. “We did not know that it was a shrine that we traveled toward. Had we realized that such was the case, we would not have dreamed of bringing in our weapons.”

“Your words are polite, at least,” our interrogator allowed.

“How, then, can we proceed?” I asked.

“If Richard would put away his weapon, you and I could begin an interview.”

I glanced at Richard and nodded at his rifle. Taking my point, the handy fellow switched off the rifle and slung it over his shoulder. He stepped back to his pack, and the nearest yetis backed off a few paces. He strapped the weapon in its sheath along the side of the pack.

“I say, Daniel!” said Portsmouth. “Surely you’re not going to concede to the bally old ape? We’ll be torn to pieces!”

“Namrata often visits, Ambassador,” said the animal. “He comes unarmed, and leaves unmolested.”

“I don’t like it,” Portsmouth said, shaking his head and moving to stand by Richard near our backpacks. He withdrew his brandy flask from a pocket and took a long swig.

“You don’t need to like it,” I said. “It was your *bally* task to bring me here, *old thing*, and that you have done.”

Portsmouth gave me a sheepish smile and a shrug, clearly missing my sarcastic use of his own vocal tics, and raised his flask again.

“If you will come with me, Doctor, the others will see to it that your companions are fed,” said the yeti. “You have brought shelters, I imagine?”

“We have.”

“Then your companions can set them up while we prepare a meal for them. They will be shown where they can place them.”

I glanced at Richard, who nodded at me and began unlacing one of the small tents we carried. It immediately became clear that Portsmouth would not be pitching in; instead of

unlimbering a section of a tent, he withdrew a bottle of brandy from his pack and pulled out the cork.

“Come with me,” said the yeti, laying a heavy hand upon my shoulder.

I nearly jumped out of my skin, so shocked was I to be touched; when last I had looked at it, it still stood a dozen feet away. It had closed the distance instantly and silently.

Reluctantly, feeling helpless in the midst of so many powerful creatures, I allowed myself to be led away from Richard and Portsmouth. Two other yetis, one tall, lean, and brown-pelted and the other squat and stout and nearly white, fell in behind me. They led me to a triangular set of stones high on the eastern wall of the dell, from which it was possible to hear the howling of the wind outside, and witness the swirling clouds of snow. The leader sat down upon a large boulder that resembled a sofa. The other two yetis took positions several yards distant, behind me, one to either side. The leader gestured toward a low stone, upon which I sat.

“What would you like to know?” asked the leader.

I glanced about, nervous. Within the dell Richard had begun to erect one of the tents. Portsmouth lounged a few feet away, sipping miserably at his bottle. A loose collection of yetis, whose number seemed to have been augmented, loitered about them, while others had started a small cookfire, over which I saw one hang a pot. I turned back toward my interviewee—or interviewer, as the case may be.

“First, I should like to know whether you have a name.”

“I am called Prem.”

“Do all yetis have names?”

“We are thinking creatures, just as you are. Of course we have names.”

“Will you permit me to perform a physical examination?”

Prem smiled. “Perhaps I shall, at some point.”

“That is the purpose for my coming.”

“I know it. What else would you care to know now?”

I thought for a moment. Now that I was in close proximity to the yetis, I could see that the resemblance to apes went beyond the superficial. The shape of the skull appeared to be similar to that of an ape, though the mandible was shorter, closer to that of a human being, and it had a longer neck, again more manlike in its structure. It occurred to me that I may be speaking with a member of some “missing link” species, a bridge between the ape species and *homo sapiens*, such as a neanderthal or Cro-Magnon. This suggested an avenue of inquiry.

“Tell me how long your people have been here, Prem,” I said, annoyed at the necessity of referring to these lower animals as “people.”

“We have always been here. We are one with Qomolangma, and share in his wisdom.”

“You claim that Mount Everest is alive?”

“As are all mountains, and all oceans, and all forests, and all deserts.”

I wondered whether this superstitious nonsense had its origin with Namrata. It certainly had the sound of the type of vague drivel spouted by many spiritualists.

“And have you always been friends of the monks?”

“Since they first came, we have. But we were here long before them. Meh-Teh were in the mountains before the first of your people appeared on the Earth.”

This reinforced my hypothesis that these animals were a “missing link” between apes and men, though I hardly credited that such historical data were liable to be accurate, coming as they did from a dumb brute.

“And you claim that the monks came to you seeking your teachings.”

“For a long time we observed them. Eventually we allowed them to find us, and at that time we began speaking with them. They recognized our enlightenment, and after a time began sending their wisest to learn from us.”

“Then there has always been peace between the yetis and the monks.”

“Why should there not be?”

“Tell me, then, Prem, what it is that yetis eat.”

Prem’s lips curled in something resembling a smile.

“We eat the fruits of the land, and we catch and consume some of the animals that dwell in the mountains.”

“Then you are not entirely peaceful creatures.”

“We must eat. Qomolangma is wise and generous, but food is scarce in such country, and we must make do with what we can provide for ourselves.”

“Which entails killing.”

“You fear that we are violent in our nature?”

“Compared with mankind, you are large and strong. If ever you intended violence toward us, we could scarcely resist you, unless we were armed.”

I thought of our electrical rifles, strapped uselessly to our packs, surrounded by a gang of mighty, apelike creatures.

“In the past, the Meh-Teh were different. I did not say that we were always as you find us now. At one time we ranged far and wide, beyond these mountains. We fought wars, tribe versus tribe, killing many of our own. It has been said that when the first men appeared, some of our folk hunted them. But always the Meh-Teh were their own greatest foe, and more of us died at the hands of other Meh-Teh than we could abide. Eventually we became few. But before we could entirely wipe ourselves out, we learned serenity and peace. By then only those of us living in these mountains remained, but since that time we have lived peacefully and learned the wisdom of Qomolangma. Like mankind, we have violence within us, but unlike mankind, we have defeated this violence, and now strive to teach our serenity to any who will listen.”

“And this is the nonsense you peddle to the monks in Khumjung?”

“I am sorry that you think it is nonsense.”

“It is the same as all such spiritualist claptrap, full of vague platitudes about serenity and peace, being spouted by creatures capable of great violence.”

“Do you then doubt that we Meh-Teh live in harmony with Qomolangma, in a way that is at peace with natural balance?”

“Indeed, of all the things you have spoken, I would name that the one certain truth,” said I. “You are animals, after all, and you inhabit these wild mountains. You build no structures of which I am aware, nor have any structured society, no manufacturing, no means by which to mine metals from the Earth or to synthesize chemicals. Harmony with the natural world is the only way of life available to you.”

Prem gave his enigmatical smile. "What of you, then, Doctor?" he asked. "You have asked to see us, and now you have done so. You say you wish to study us. To what end?"

"Toward the end of furthering human wisdom, of course."

He shook his head, a movement that incorporated much of his upper body. "Numbers, names, dates. Data. These things may further knowledge, but they do nothing to improve wisdom. What wisdom have you brought to your people through your studies?"

"Thanks to my work, humanity has a better understanding of the natural world."

"And yet you continue to build factories, to fish the ocean with nets, to dam rivers and cut down forests. There is no wisdom in any of this."

"If you do not wish to speak with me, or to be examined, you may say so, Prem, and my companions and I shall depart."

"What form will it take, this examination of yours?"

"I shall take measurements of your body. I shall make impressions of your hands and feet and teeth, make note of the height and weight of as many of you as I am permitted, noting your proportions, your ages, as much of your personal histories as I may gather. If I am allowed, I may take samples of your blood, your hair, your nails and teeth."

"You would take our blood, and our teeth?" one of the yetis behind me said, the first time any yeti other than Prem had spoken. This one had a voice that sounded lighter, higher, as though perhaps this creature was female. I glanced over my shoulder. The yeti had risen to its feet, and leaned toward me, its large, sharp teeth bared, the hair standing on the back of its neck and its shoulders. Now that I looked more closely, I could see the suggestion of mammary

glands upon the animal's chest. Its companion had also risen, and stood looking from this yeti to Prem.

"Surely your people lose teeth from time to time, as do mine," I said quickly, hoping to mollify the brutes. "I never suggested that I would attempt to steal the teeth from your mouths."

"What will you do with such information, Doctor Hobbes?" Prem asked, raising his paws in a pacifying gesture.

"First and foremost I seek to classify you, to determine what is your place within the natural order. I would determine what other creatures you are most closely related to, and where you fit in on the timeline of evolution."

"And yet you seem to value this information above the wisdom that we Meh-Teh could impart to you," Prem said, as his comrades settled themselves back down behind me.

I tried a new tack. "I am not a monk, like Namrata," I said. "The science of spirituality is Namrata's discipline, not mine. The spiritual wisdom of humanity is enhanced by Namrata's interaction with you. My function within society is different, as are the contributions that are expected of scientists such as myself."

Prem seemed to consider this for a moment. Presently he let out a heavy sigh.

"Very well, Doctor," said he. "I cannot say whether there is any wisdom in what you propose, but neither can I see any overt harm, so long as you pledge that you will do no injury to those you examine. I shall permit you to begin your examinations. But please be aware that you will be watched at all times, and you must leave your weapons with your luggage as you have done now."

“I can learn much from you doing little more than scratching your skin,” I said. “A pinprick will suffice for me to obtain blood samples; the rest will require no intrusion whatsoever, save a bit of measuring and observing.”

Prem looked down the slope to where the cookfire had been laid, then back at me. “What is it that your Ambassador Portsmouth drinks with such diligence?”

“The man is a drunkard, I fear,” I said. “He is unaccustomed to the type of scientific expedition upon which he has found himself, and the alcohol serves to steady his nerves.”

“He fears us, then?” the yeti asked.

“Indeed, he does. Moreover, I might add that such fear is not entirely unreasonable, when one considers how you yetis have surrounded us and separated us from our weapons, and the vast differences in our physiologies. Were you not the tranquil and peace-loving creatures that I now know you to be, one might consider us to be in a grave situation.”

Prem smiled at this, then shook his head again. “You are in no danger, Doctor Hobbes, so long as you deal honestly with us. Honesty is of great importance to the Meh-Teh.”

“I am very relieved to learn that my companions and I are safe,” I said. “You shall find that I, also, esteem honesty highly. Indeed, it could be said that the pursuit of truth is my profession.”

“Namrata is a speaker of the truth,” Prem said. “For this reason, he has gained our trust, and for this reason we have allowed you to come among us. If your science proves to be a search for truth, then perhaps we Meh-Teh shall learn a new respect for it.”

Prem raised his head, turning his shoulders so that he could look down the dell toward the cookfire, his nostrils flaring. “I smell supper,” he said, turning back to face me. “Let us go

down and eat. Tonight you may make what observations you can, and in the morning you shall commence your enquiry. Are you satisfied?"

I allowed as how I was, and Prem and his two companions led me down to the center of the dell, where Richard had finished erecting our three shelter tents and my companions now sat in the midst of some two dozen of the great hairy brutes.

Supper consisted of a thick stew containing many root vegetables and chunks of meat—goat, I thought, and perhaps deer—served in earthenware bowls. The broth was watery but savory. There were no utensils of any type; I imagined that the meat had been shredded upon the formidable claws of the yetis.

Richard, Portsmouth, and I sat in a cluster at the center of the group of yetis. By the time the meal commenced, Portsmouth was already quite drunk, and he eyed our hosts warily, with darting eyes and a hunted expression, and spoke little. For myself, I gathered what observations I was able, jotting down notes between mouthfuls of stew.

My conversation with Prem ate at me. It galled me—beyond the many concessions I had been required to make to scientific reason in order to keep the beasts pacified—that I had been required to “pledge” to the brute that I would not harm any yeti. Naturally this was a promise that I could not keep, as the quality of my observations and examinations, and indeed my professional reputation, rested upon my ability to secure a specimen, either dead or alive, with which to return to Britain. I had done so with the *Sirenia sirenii*, and *Insectus fae minutus*; I had nearly managed it with the unfortunate plesiosaur of Loch Ness. To return from my current expedition with less than a complete specimen was unthinkable to me; but at this time,

separated from our weapons and surrounded by a veritable herd of the powerful beasts, I could not imagine how such a specimen might be secured. I resolved to bide my time.

As the evening wore on many of the yetis retired, curling up into scarcely recognizable balls, their long arms wrapped round their bodies, heads tucked against their chests. However, a good half-dozen of the animals, Prem among them, remained about us. While their demeanor seemed peaceable and, to use Prem's own word, serene, I could not escape the certain knowledge that we were being watched—guarded, even—lest we should make some move toward our weapons.

Portsmouth, seated upon the stony ground, lolled against one of the great stones, nursing his bottle of brandy. He chatted softly with Richard, but by now I had all but written the oaf off as an irrelevance upon our expedition. Presently I noted that two of the animals had seated themselves near to him, and were watching him closely.

"What do you drink?" one of the animals asked, its voice carrying a tonality that reminded one of a woman's.

Portsmouth's head rolled lazily to the side, until he looked up at the beast that towered some four feet from him. His eyes widened, and he made to back away, but the stone against which he sat barred his escape.

"I say, just a drop of brandy, old thing," he slurred.

"What is brandy?" asked the second yeti.

"It's a bit of the grape, what? Alcohol, don't you know."

The two animals eyed him uncomprehendingly.

"Fermentation?" Portsmouth hazarded.

“May I try it?” asked the nearer of the two beasts.

“You mean to say you’ve never had booze?” asked the ambassador.

“Our people make no booze,” said the second yeti. “It seems to render you most serene.”

“I dare say!” Portsmouth said. “That’s its purpose.”

“Let us try it,” said the nearer yeti.

Portsmouth gave me a look.

I shrugged. “This could be your only chance to make friends of them,” I said.

Portsmouth took a deep swig from his bottle, then, very slowly, extended it toward the huge animals. The nearer of the yetis snatched it from his hand, its arm moving faster than a striking cobra, and Portsmouth recoiled. The yeti sniffed at the mouth of the bottle. It looked up at its fellow.

“It smells good,” said the yeti that held the bottle. It raised the bottle and took an experimental sip, lipping the mouth like a gorilla and coating the neck with thick saliva, which I imagined might be enough to put Portsmouth off it.

“Well?” asked the second beast.

The yeti lowered the bottle thoughtfully. A smile crossed its hideous snout.

“It warms!” the thing said. “It fills the belly with heat, and the heat rises to the mind!”

“That’s rather the point, old bean,” said Portsmouth timidly.

The yeti upended the bottle and drank deeply. When it lowered the bottle, it let out a fierce bellow, high-pitched and ululating, which must have carried for miles in this open country.

“I must try it!” said the second yeti, reaching for the bottle.

The first animal pulled the bottle away. “No!” it snapped. “Not until I have had more!”

It sucked at the bottle again. Before it could lower the bottle, the second beast had snatched it away, and was sucking at it like a man with a canteen who has just returned from a desert trek. When it had drunk, it let out a bellow much like that of its companion.

“Alright, old man,” said Portsmouth, rising unsteadily to his feet. “That’s enough, now. I need that.”

The two yetis turned upon him, their faces transformed into visages of rage, teeth bared and eyes narrowed, their hackles raised. The first yeti bellowed fiercely.

Portsmouth tottered backward. He fetched up against the stone and sunk to his haunches, his arms raised as if to ward off a blow.

“I say!” he said. “You two may as well keep that one, what? I’ll just start another.”

He rose and began to walk unsteadily toward the place where our backpacks lay, but the two yetis snarled at him. The first took a step toward him, and he stopped in his tracks.

“I say, Richard, old thing, be a good lad, would you? Bring me another bally bottle.”

Richard, who had managed to seat himself close by the luggage without exciting the suspicion of the animals, slipped a hand into a bag and withdrew a second bottle. The yetis watched him cagily, but did not react. He tossed the bottle to Portsmouth, who in his inebriation very nearly let it crash to the rocky ground.

Instantly the two yetis bellowed, almost in unison, and rushed toward him, the first with its claws extended, the other clutching the already opened bottle to its chest. Portsmouth cowered, holding the bottle out for them to take it.

So much for serenity and peaceableness, I thought.

“Amita, Rohit,” came Prem’s voice, and suddenly I was aware that that creature stood beside my companion, his arms raised, though I could not determine whether in pacification or threat. “These people have come among us seeking our wisdom. You must show them serenity. Ambassador Portsmouth has generously shared his brandy with you. It would be poor hospitality to further impose upon him.”

The two junior yetis—junior in rank, if not in age or mass—halted their advance, though their demeanor remained threatening. They looked from Prem to Portsmouth, mouths open, teeth displayed.

“I told you to leave this man in peace,” said Prem. While his expression remained placid, the hairs on his shoulder and the back of his neck—and also atop his head—raised. “Do not force me to ask you again.”

Slowly, reluctantly, Amita and Rohit—I could not say which was which—seemed to relax, their expression growing more even and the hair on their necks and shoulders sleeking. After another moment they moved off, one of them still clutching the open brandy bottle. A moment later two new yetis appeared, crouching on the rocks above Portsmouth and Richard and eyeing us Englishmen warily. In the distance I heard another ululating bellow.

“Perhaps it would be best, Ambassador, if you would not share your brandy with my people,” said Prem. “I will do what I can to discourage them from seeking more.”

“Tally-ho, old thing!” said Portsmouth, removing the cork from the new bottle with a sharp pop.

Not long after this, my companions and I retired. Portsmouth, the reader will be unsurprised to learn, snored the night away in a tone barely less frightful than the terrifying bellow of the yetis, while Richard and I, huddled on opposite sides of the cookfire and wrapped in blankets, dozed more peaceably. Were I a man given to the vice of sarcasm, I might even say serenely.

The next morning I was up with the sun. Four yetis stood watch over we three Englishmen; though I had not come to recognize many of them, I was certain that I had not previously seen any of this cohort. Immediately they set about building up the fire, and presently the dell began to fill with more of the beasts. The pot of stew was placed over the fire, and within the hour we were eating again, Portsmouth with a waxy complexion and bags under his eyes.

When I set my bowl aside, a yeti approached me—a tall and fat one, with thick arms and a pelt of brown streaked with gray—and bade me follow it. I took up my doctor's bag, and it led me up the side of the dell to where Prem had interviewed me the night before, where I again encountered the yetis' leader.

"I am told that you and your companions did not enter your shelters," Prem said when I had seated myself.

"It was merely nervousness," said I. "We are in a strange place, and in the company of creatures of which we know little."

"You are still unconvinced that we are peaceful creatures?"

"Amita and Rohit have put other thoughts into our heads," said I.

“You must forgive them, Doctor Hobbes. No Meh-Teh have ever tasted brandy before. Its effect upon them was unexpected. Now, how would you begin your examination?”

“First I should like to take several measurements,” I said. “The length of your body, and of your limbs, the size of your cranium—that is to say, your head—and your mandible. I would like to measure your weight, but I have no means of doing so at present. Then, if you are willing, I would like to take a small vial of your blood, and samples of your saliva and your hair.”

I spent the morning conducting a basic examination of Prem himself. His height proved to be two hundred sixty-three centimeters, and from this I calculated that his weight must be in excess of one hundred eighty kilograms, perhaps as high as two hundred and seventy. His claws exhibited a remarkable dexterity, similar to that seen in other great apes such as chimpanzees and the gorillas of the African continent, though the nails were longer, thicker, and undoubtedly sharper, no doubt owing to adaptation to a harsher environment and the need for an omnivorous diet. Likewise, the teeth were longer and more robust than those of other great apes, with the pronounced canines and incisors more often observed in predatory species. The limbs, as I have noted previously, were long, and thickly muscled, while the hair was wiry and long, growing matted in places—again, no doubt, owing to the freezing temperatures in this mountainous environment, a factor which the peculiar qualities of this dell rendered easily forgotten.

Prem showed little trepidation when I requested a saliva sample, for which I was able to fill a good-sized vial. His reaction to the needle, when it came time to take a blood sample, was initially one of reluctance bordering upon hostility; yet with persuasion, and after I appealed to his sense of pride by mocking a creature so vast in size yet afraid of such a tiny pinprick, he

permitted me to draw several vials. The blood proved to be both thick and, by the standards of *Homo sapiens*, extraordinarily warm when first taken; when it had been drawn, he seemed to puff up with pride, as though he had survived some frightful ordeal and come through heroically. I spoke no word to disabuse him of this impression, for I perceived that by appealing to his ego, I might remain in his good graces—a need which, again, butted against my own instincts as a scientist, knowing as I did that I made such concessions to a dumb brute, for the sake of simple convenience.

By noontime I had made as many notes on his and the other yetis' physiology as I felt I would be able without an anesthetized or deceased specimen to dissect. I asked him whether I might fetch my camera, and thus make some photographic plates of him and the other yetis for future study.

“Have you, then, completed your physical examination?” the beast asked me.

“For the time being, until I can get the samples I have taken to a laboratory, where I might examine them further with the aid of a microscope,” said I, wondering afresh how I might go about procuring a full specimen to take with me. “For now, I think it best that I make my photographs, and observe you and your people here in your habitat.”

“And what of our religion, our philosophy?”

“You led me to believe that you have imparted much of this knowledge to Namrata and the other monks. This information I can get from them. My time is better utilized in observing you and making plates.”

“What observations must you make?”

“I must know what you eat, and how you obtain it. I must know how you live. Do you hunt, for instance? Do *all* of you hunt, or do only some of you? Do you raise crops, or cultivate gardens? Do you inhabit the same country year-round, or do you migrate? Are there any animals which you avoid, which are dangerous to you?”

“No animal is dangerous to the Meh-Teh,” said Prem, “save mankind only.”

Little surprise, there!

So I launched into a new line of inquiry, during which I learned that the yetis spent the summer months at higher elevations, as at that time the hunting in those regions was superior, migrating to lower altitudes in the winter in order to follow their prey. They mainly hunted the local goats and deer, though it seemed as though the yetis, who feared no other animal, would also take bears and leopards, given the opportunity. They practiced no cultivation, preferring to forage for vegetables on the slopes of the mountains, where the climate would permit such foodstuffs to grow naturally. Labor among the yetis, it seemed, was shared equally, with males and females of the species contributing to both hunting and gathering. Mating occurred primarily in the warmer months, though it was not unheard-of for a couple to mate during the winter as well, and gestation lasted some seven months. The yeti lifespan ranged from twenty years to as high as two hundred, if Prem could be believed on the subject; his own age he gave as one hundred and three—a statistic about which I felt more than a little skepticism. This much Prem supplied willingly enough, but then he seemed put upon, and became unwilling to tell me more.

“I do not understand you, Doctor Hobbes,” the beast said. “You have at your disposal a member of an ancient race, and the opportunity to avail yourself of the wisdom of my people, and yet you preoccupy yourself with trivialities of our daily lives.”

“I have already told you, Prem, that such wisdom is not mine to seek. The questions I have put to you are relevant to my discipline. Those you would have me ask are not.”

“Your Richard seems to feel otherwise. Yesterday as you and I spoke, he asked a great many questions of my people. He is a man filled with serenity, and a seeker of deeper wisdom.”

I recalled Madhav’s words about Richard spending time in meditation and prayer at the monastery—and also the way in which the previous evening the yetis had seemed unperturbed when Richard, alone of our party, seated himself near our packs and our weapons. Perhaps there was a use for all this superstition, after all.

“Indeed, Richard is a seeker,” I said. “But Richard is not the leader of our expedition, Prem. I am, and the information I have asked is the purpose of our coming to you.”

“Perhaps Richard should be the leader,” said the beast, petulantly.

And there you see the mind of the lesser animal revealed. Only that which he regarded as of concern could occupy his attention, however immaterial to the enquiry at hand, and he had no interest in divulging further intelligence regarding the lives of his herd.

I laughed. “Richard?” said I. “The leader? The man is barely literate!”

“And yet he is a seeker of deeper truths.”

I neither conceded nor argued the point. Instead, I pressed Prem about making my photographs and observing the yetis as they went about their affairs. At length he relented.

“Fetch your camera-box,” said he, “and make your photographs. But know that you have refused a gift far more precious.”

Indeed!

I returned to the base of the dell, where I found Richard engaged in a discussion with three of the yetis, while Portsmouth poured a measure of brandy into his tea. With yetis watching me closely, I fetched my camera from my pack and erected its tripod.

I spent the next several hours photographing the creatures about the dell. In all, I made twelve plates, two of which featured Prem, though the yetis’ leader did not speak to me at any length for the remainder of that day. We again ate the yetis’ stew, surrounded by the animals. For their part, they seemed almost entirely indifferent to our presence by this time, though a handful of them always loitered around the center of the dell where our packs—and our weapons—had been left in the open.

As we ate, Prem told tales of the yetis’ past. The mountains, and Everest in particular, figured prominently in these, and indeed the tales often featured violent episodes in which one tribe or herd of yetis fought against another. Some few of the tales, these being told later in the evening, featured human beings, who were often depicted as rivals or foes, until the appearance of the monks, which seemed to follow the conversion of the yetis from the violent brutes of their early history to the self-proclaimed seekers of peace and serenity of today.

Throughout Prem’s tales, Adrian Portsmouth sat drinking brandy and smoking cigars, his eyes darting nervously from one yeti to another. At one point Richard moved off a few yards and engaged one of the yetis in a private conversation, leaving the ambassador and myself with the main group. Prem asked me whether he could see the photographs that I had made, and I

was obliged to explain to the brute that this would be an impossibility, because the plates required a darkroom and chemicals in order to be developed, which most likely could not occur before I reached Kathmandu, or possibly until I returned to England. This seemed to annoy the animal, who, I gathered, had developed an interest in seeing his own image. He said a few words about seeing me upon the morrow, then walked off into the darkness, vanishing in a most unsettling way almost the moment he left the circle of light cast by the cookfire.

Portsmouth snorted at my side. "The bally ape's conceited!" he opined.

"The phenomenon is not uncommon in nature," said I. "Think of the tropical birds who will sit mesmerized beside a mirror, when one is placed inside a cage with them. Orangutans and chimpanzees, likewise, are fascinated by mirrors."

"What about your mermaids, then?"

I thought of Manta and Delphinas. Oh, in that moment, how the company of such exquisite creatures might have comforted me!

"Indeed, the *Sirenia sirenii* and the *Insectus fae minutus* both are capable of being enchanted by their own reflections, in much the same way that a human woman might be. Those two species, and now these yetis, reminded me very much of humans in that and many other regards. Perhaps it is a phenomenon worth studying. Clearly intelligence on the order of humanity's is not necessary for a creature to recognize itself."

Portsmouth stood shakily, gripping his bottle by the neck.

"Time to drain the bladder, what?" he said. "Bally cold in these ruddy mountains, old bean, even in this blasted enchanted dell!"

"Surely you were expecting that."

“Still, looking forward to a nice sherry by the fire, don’t you know!”

He turned away and began walking toward the lip of the dell, toward the place we three Englishmen had been using as a latrine. Thus far I had not had the fortune of observing any of the yetis in the act of voiding, and I resolved that I would see if I could not procure a fecal sample for later analysis. Such a sample would go a long way toward establishing the particulars of the yetis’ diet—and, in so doing, in confirming Prem’s accounts.

From the darkness two yetis suddenly loomed, one to either side of Portsmouth, and the ambassador stopped in his tracks. I recognized Amita and Rohit, the two that had stolen his brandy the night before. One of the beasts seized Portsmouth about the chest with one arm, while the other snatched the brandy bottle from his hand. His captor then cast him roughly to the ground. The yeti holding the bottle let out one of the fierce howls that I had observed the previous night. Portsmouth began to scuttle backward on all fours.

The yeti holding the bottle raised it and drank, then handed the bottle off to its companion. Portsmouth regained his feet and dashed back toward me. He flung himself at the backpacks, snatching up one of the electrical rifles and levering a round into the chamber. The yetis on the rocks above us bellowed.

Prem appeared beyond the two offending animals, accompanied by the tall, fat yeti that had brought me into his presence that morning, the two of them seeming to simply coalesce out of the darkness. Prem’s companion let out a fearsome cry, far louder and more terrible than the cries of Amita and Rohit.

The yetis’ leader made a thrusting gesture with one great arm, like a man shoving open a heavy door, and the yeti holding the bottle flew back, crashing against one of the great stones

and tumbling to the earth. The tall yeti seized the other offender by the neck, snarling like a maddened bear, and the two beasts set to clawing and biting at one another.

As this was happening, Portsmouth came to rest beside me, his back against a rock, a hunted look in his eyes. Meanwhile, the yetis above us cried out, jumping up and down not unlike the spectators at a cricket match.

Prem seized up a large stone, twice the size of a man's skull, and brought it down on the face of his victim. The stricken yeti cried out and attempted to rake the leader with its deadly claws, but this had little effect on Prem, who brought the stone down for a second blow, then a third. His victim's arms went limp. Even as this occurred, Prem's companion sunk his teeth into his victim, who shrieked in agony as the former gored it. The shriek cut off abruptly as the larger yeti drew back its head, trailing blood, a mass of flesh gripped in its teeth. The victim fell to the ground, its throat torn out. Black blood spread about its spasming corpse, steaming in the light from the cookfire.

Darkness seemed to descend between Portsmouth and myself and the fighting yetis, and they vanished from sight as though they had been consumed by the night. The animals on the rocks above us slowly fell silent, eyeing Portsmouth, who sat panting beside me and clutching his rifle, with wariness, if not with outright hostility.

"Sleep, Doctor Hobbes," came Prem's voice from out of the darkness. "We shall speak again in the morning."

"I say, Hobbes!" Portsmouth panted. "We've got to get out of here! Those bally animals were like to kill me!"

“It is late at night, and we are in the middle of the Himalayas, Adrian,” I said. “We do not know the way back to the monastery. We cannot leave now.”

“It’s hardly worth the profit, what? I mean to say, I’ve come to regret having come here.”

Richard stepped up to us. He eyed the rifle in Portsmouth’s hands and looked at me inquiringly.

“Fetch your rifle,” I said. “Manners be damned. We must protect ourselves from these animals.”

Richard complied, and the three of us spent the remainder of the night sleeping in shifts, one man always on guard with a rifle in his hands.

When morning arrived, the yetis rekindled their cookfire and went about preparing their stew as though nothing untoward had occurred the night before. The stew, I could not help but notice, was thicker, with considerably more meat, which led me to believe that, while it may not be the regular order of things, cannibalism was not unknown among these feral brutes. The newer meat lacked the toughness and stringiness of goat meat, having instead the richness of the meat of a large bear. It was, I must confess, a welcome change.

As we were finishing our meal, the yetis began to stir and to mutter, and presently Namrata and Madhav appeared, walking slowly into the dell. They stopped beside the cookfire. Namrata looked at the rifles in Richard’s and Portsmouth’s hands with an air of disapproval—which instantly kindled in me a feeling of resentment.

“How do you do with your inquiry, Doctor?” asked the elder monk, without any preamble.

“Not very well,” I said. “These animals have proven to be quite dangerous.”

“The Meh-Teh are not dangerous,” said Namrata. “Those who sojourn among the Meh-Teh bring with them their own peril.”

“I’ll hear no more of your ridiculous philosophy. Now, if you truly know anything of these brutes, you will tell me how I may go about procuring a specimen. I have no more desire to remain among these creatures.”

“Do you mean that you wish to take a Meh-Teh with you?”

“I do indeed.”

Namrata smiled his insipid smile. “That is quite impossible. The Meh-Teh will not go with you.”

“I did not say the specimen must be alive.”

“Just the same. The Meh-Teh hide their dead. None has ever been seen.”

“The yetis eat their dead,” I said. “In fact, they are quite delicious. But in any event, I have procured specimens of many large and dangerous animals, and I do not intend to leave this place without one. Perhaps one of the two who died last night still remains, and Prem could be imposed upon to let me take that one away with me.”

Still smiling, Namrata shook his head. “Prem would never allow such a thing to occur.”

Portsmouth stood. “Look, old bean,” he said, addressing the monk. “I say! It was all well and good, your asking me to find you a bally scientist to come up here and make your bally monastery a hub of scientific inquiry, what? And I don’t want to seem ungrateful. You’ve paid us handsomely and all that. But it’s bally dangerous! These animals are savages! I insist that you ask for the doctor’s bally specimen, and take us back to Khumjung this bally instant!”

“You have been paid,” said Namrata. “You are not in a position to make such demands.”

“Do you mean to tell me that I am here as the result of some sort of bribe?” I asked.

Portsmouth looked at me sheepishly. “Look, old man,” he said. “It’s a depressed area, what? A bally backwater. Bringing in a scientist seemed just the ticket for building a bit of an economy. Everybody stands to profit, yourself included. What difference does it make, if a few shekels changed hands? You still have your chance to advance scientific knowledge, what?”

“I guess, then, that you aren’t nearly as serene and wise as you would portray yourself, Namrata. Or is bribery acceptable in your version of spirituality?”

Namrata gave me his inane smile again. “You do not comprehend. Perhaps your Richard could help you understand.”

I stepped away from the monks, too irritated to continue the conversation. Richard followed me, still holding his rifle. I approached the nearest yeti, one with which I had yet to interact.

“I would like to speak with Prem,” I said.

The yeti pointed up the side of the dell, toward the place where I had conducted my examination of the leader the previous day. I was unsurprised; the spot clearly held some significance to Prem’s animal intelligence. I made my way up the slope, Richard in tow, and in a few minutes found Prem, seated on his sofa-like rock. The tall yeti that had helped him kill Amita and Rohit stood by, as did the other two who had been present the previous day.

“Good morning, Doctor Hobbes,” said Prem, rising. “I see that you have been joined by Namrata and Madhav.”

“We have,” I said.

“Will you be staying further, or do you wish to depart to Khumjung?”

“I wish to bring away a specimen.”

“You took specimens yesterday, did you not?”

“I wish to bring away a yeti.”

“No Meh-Teh will leave Qomolangma. This is our home. It is a sacred place.”

“What of the ones killed last night? I could take away one of the corpses.”

“Even in death, the Meh-Teh do not leave Qomolangma and the mountains about him.”

“Could I purchase the corpse?”

“You may not. We remain in our sacred home. Especially after our deaths.”

“More superstitious claptrap.”

“I am sorry that you lack the wisdom to understand.”

“I was under the impression that even you spiritual seekers have your price.”

“I do not understand. What could make you say such a thing?”

“Those you have taught are not above trafficking in bribery.”

“Your meaning is unclear to me.”

“I refer to Namrata. My presence here is the result of a bribe. Namrata bribed Portsmouth to bring me here. It seems your precious monks hope that scientific inquiry will produce evidence of the yetis’ existence and bring more scientists. Perhaps they even hope to see you become a tourist attraction.”

Prem’s expression fell. His mouth turned downward, exposing his teeth, and a low growl escaped his throat.

“Namrata has complained of a lack of resources at his monastery,” the beast intoned, “but I would not credit that an honest man such as he would stoop to base bribery, nor to the exploitation of the friends from whom he had gained so much wisdom.”

“What proof have you of your friend’s honesty?” I asked. “I never misrepresented my intentions to him, and yet you have repeatedly offered me spiritual counseling that is outside of my areas of inquiry. Clearly either he presented me to you as a spiritual seeker with some interest in science, or you have deluded yourself. Moreover, I witnessed your treatment of Rohit and Amita last night, and can now inform you that this peacefulness and serenity of which you speak so fondly and at such great length is a lie that you yetis tell to yourselves. Humans are capable of lying, Prem, and clearly so are yetis.”

“I will not believe this!”

“The man himself stands by your own cookfire. You need not believe my words. You can speak with him yourself.”

“You say that Namrata would sell access to us to one who would take a Meh-Teh away as a specimen?”

“He most assuredly did. And sooner or later, some investigator or other will succeed in procuring a yeti as a specimen, and bring it away for dissection. You may as well hand over Rohit’s corpse, or Amita’s. The march of science is unstoppable, Prem, and you and your *people* are now an official discovery.”

“There is no truth in these words!”

“Speak with Namrata, then. You will find that the one who has been honest with you is me, not him.”

Prem looked to his three companions and snarled. If some mental communication passed between them, I was unaware of it, but as one they turned and faced down the slope to where Portsmouth stood dickering with Namrata and Madhav. As one they blinked out of existence.

“Brace yourself, Richard,” I said. “I think once they learn the truth of Namrata’s opportunism, these animals may enter a frenzy.”

The four yetis coalesced beside the fire. Namrata turned placidly toward Prem, while Portsmouth stumbled backward, clearly dismayed at the sudden appearance of the irate beasts. I watched as Prem turned toward Namrata. Even with the seemingly telepathic nature of the yetis’ communication, I could not make out at this distance what Prem might be saying to Namrata, but from his body language it was clear that he had assumed a confrontational aspect. Namrata, for his part, remained serene. I could see him answering Prem’s inquiries, but with the howling of the wind outside the dell I could not discern his words. For some time they appeared to talk back and forth, until finally Prem’s bearing became threatening; even from this remove, I could make out the raising of the hair on his shoulders and the top of his head. The other yetis around the dell stood, turning to face the center. Portsmouth backed away several steps, raising his rifle.

Prem let out an ululating shriek of rage. He raised one great claw and brought it down on Namrata’s head. Even from a remove of two hundred or more feet, and despite the howling of the wind beyond the lip of the dell, I heard the sound of the impact. Blood sprayed from the old monk’s face, and he crumpled, arms and legs working as he tried to crawl away. Prem’s big

companion lifted Madhav from the ground in a bear-hug, bellowing, and the monk's eyes bugged.

Still backing away, Portsmouth fired a shot, catching Prem's big enforcer in the neck, and the yeti fell, twitching and growling. Prem fell upon Namrata, beating at him with fists, while another yeti laid Madhav's guts open with its claws. Madhav gave out a choked cry as he expired. Prem stood above Namrata's corpse and turned to face Portsmouth, who fired two shots at him that appeared to miss their mark. The ambassador backed away. He fired another three shots, one of which struck a yeti in the chest. Prem's enforcer, meanwhile, appeared to have expired.

"Back away," I whispered to Richard, and we began moving slowly and, I hoped, unnoticed toward the lip of the dell.

The yetis had clustered around Portsmouth now, concealing him from my view. I heard the rifle report a few more times, and the yetis' bellowing crescendoed as at least a dozen of them bore down upon him, tearing at him with claws and teeth. I heard the man cry out.

I seized Richard by the shoulder and spun him toward the lip of the dell, hoping that we could put some distance between us and the enraged beasts while they were preoccupied with tearing the ambassador limb from limb. We crested the dell and were immediately engulfed in raging wind and flying snow. We plunged down the far slope, running as hard as our legs would carry us. The bellows of the yetis followed us for an hour, but we saw no more of the hideous brutes.

It took Richard and me a day and a half to reach the Khumjung monastery, by which time we were both exhausted and starving and nearly done in with the cold. The monks there

inquired after Namrata and Madhav, and I informed them that their superiors had been devoured by yetis. At first the monks seemed reluctant to believe this intelligence, but eventually I made them understand that what I had said was true, and that Namrata and Madhav would not be returning.

Two days later Anderson returned with the aerostat, and was quite perturbed when I informed him of his master's grisly demise. I recall the man uttering various threats and imprecations, saying that the brutes would be sorry for having savaged a member of the British aristocracy. When we reached Kathmandu, Wesley Portsmouth, Adrian's imbecilic uncle, met us at the embassy—he had been on his way out to the monastery to check on our progress. The man flew into a rage when he learned of his nephew's death. I had little use for these histrionics, given how poorly behaved, and what an utter ass, Portsmouth the younger had proven to be, and how cavalier had been his attitude toward a serious scientific expedition. The man vowed to exercise his not inconsiderable influence in the region to ensure that the British military was brought in to put down the beasts responsible for his nephew's death.

I returned to my estate in Scotland, ruing the desertion of my samples and my camera. For several months I followed the news out of Nepal. Several battalions of British troops were, indeed, dispatched to deal with the threat of the yetis, and, it seems, had a great deal of success in hunting the brutes down, until it seemed there were none to be found. I inferred from the various reports that it was the monks themselves who facilitated the hunt.

Unfortunately, though dozens—perhaps two hundred—of the beasts were killed, no specimens were secured; it appeared that the animals' ability to quickly disappear remained active even after they died. Moreover, none of my equipment, including my samples and my

camera, was ever recovered. The monastery above Khumjung was eventually converted into a Royal Army base, which I regarded as a vast improvement over the nest of superstition and quackery it had been previously.

I felt frustrated, having wasted a summer and autumn between the unsuccessful investigation in New York and the expedition in Nepal, but, if anything, this only served to reinforce the urge I had felt earlier that season, and I began once again to plan a voyage in the *Eye in the Deep* to seek out the lovely *Sirenia sirenii*. Mixing work with pleasure had brought me fame early in my career; perhaps now it could serve to revitalize it, and bring me some much-needed relief.