

# The Pipe

Anonymous



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"RANDOLPH CRESCENT, N. W.

MY DEAR PUGH—I hope you will like the pipe which I send with this. It is rather a curious example of a certain school of Indian carving. And is a present from

"Yours truly, JOSEPH TRESS."

It was really very handsome of Tress—very handsome! The more especially as I was aware that to give presents was not exactly in Tress's line. The truth is that when I saw what manner of pipe it was I was amazed. It was contained in a sandalwood box, which was itself illustrated with some remarkable specimens of carving. I use the word "remarkable" advisedly, because, although the workmanship was undoubtedly, in its way, artistic, the result could not be described as beautiful. The carver had thought proper to ornament the box with some of the ugliest figures I remember to have seen. They appeared to me to be devils. Or perhaps they were intended to represent deities appertaining to some mythological system with which, thank goodness, I am unacquainted. The pipe itself was worthy of the case in which it was contained. It was of meerschaum, with an amber mouthpiece. It was rather too large for ordinary smoking. But then, of course, one doesn't smoke a pipe like that. There are pipes in my collection which I should as soon think of smoking as I should of eating. Ask a china maniac to let you have afternoon tea out of his Old Chelsea, and you will learn some home truths as to the durability of human friendships. The glory of the pipe, as Tress had suggested, lay in its carving. Not that I claim that it was beautiful, any more than I make such a claim for the carving on the box, but, as Tress said in his note, it was curious.

The stem and the bowl were quite plain, but on the edge of the bowl was perched some kind of lizard. I told myself it was an octopus when I first saw it, but I have since had reason to believe that it was some almost unique member of the lizard tribe. The creature was represented as climbing over the edge of the bowl down toward the stem, and its legs, or feelers, or tentacula, or whatever the things are called, were, if I may use a vulgarism, sprawling about "all over the place." For instance, two or three of them were twined about the bowl, two or three of them were twisted round the stem, and one, a particularly horrible one, was uplifted in the air, so that if you put the pipe in your mouth the thing was pointing straight at your nose.

Not the least agreeable feature about the creature was that it was hideously lifelike. It appeared to have been carved in amber, but some coloring matter must have been introduced, for inside the amber the creature was of a peculiarly ghastly green. The more I examined the pipe the more amazed I was at Tress's generosity. He and I are rival collectors. I am not going to say, in so many words, that his collection of pipes contains nothing but rubbish, because, as a matter of fact, he has two or three rather decent specimens. But to compare his collection to mine would be absurd. Tress is conscious of this, and he resents it. He resents it to such an extent that he has been known, at least on one occasion, to declare that one single pipe of his—I believe he alluded to the Brummagem relic preposterously attributed to Sir Walter Raleigh— was worth the whole of my collection put together. Although I have forgotten this, as I hope I always shall forgive remarks made when envious passions get the better of our nobler nature, even of a Joseph Tress, it is not to be supposed that I have forgotten it. He was, therefore, not at all the sort of person from whom I expected to receive a present. And such a present! I do not believe that he himself had a finer pipe in his collection. And to have given it to me! I had misjudged the man. I wondered where he had got it from. I had seen his pipes; I knew them off by heart— and some nice trumpery he has among them, too! but I had never seen THAT pipe before. The more I looked at it, the more my amazement grew. The beast perched upon the edge of the bowl was so lifelike. Its two bead-like eyes seemed to gleam at me with positively human intelligence. The pipe fascinated me to such an extent that I actually resolved to—smoke it!

I filled it with Perique. Ordinarily I use Birdseye, but on those very rare occasions on which I use a specimen I

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smoke Perique. I lit up with quite a small sensation of excitement. As I did so I kept my eyes perforce fixed upon the beast. The beast pointed its upraised tentacle directly at me. As I inhaled the pungent tobacco that tentacle impressed me with a feeling of actual uncanniness. It was broad daylight, and I was smoking in front of the window, yet to such an extent was I affected that it seemed to me that the tentacle was not only vibrating, which, owing to the peculiarity of its position, was quite within the range of probability, but actually moving, elongating—stretching forward, that is, farther toward me, and toward the tip of my nose. So impressed was I by this idea that I took the pipe out of my mouth and minutely examined the beast. Really, the delusion was excusable. So cunningly had the artist wrought that he succeeded in producing a creature which, such was its uncanniness, I could only hope had no original in nature.

Replacing the pipe between my lips I took several whiffs. Never had smoking had such an effect on me before. Either the pipe, or the creature on it, exercised some singular fascination. I seemed, without an instant's warning, to be passing into some land of dreams. I saw the beast, which was perched upon the bowl, writhe and twist. I saw it lift itself bodily from the meerschaum.

### II

"Feeling better now?"

I looked up. Joseph Tress was speaking.

"What's the matter? Have I been ill?"

"You appear to have been in some kind of swoon." Tress's tone was peculiar, even a little dry.

"Swoon! I never was guilty of such a thing in my life."

"Nor was I, until I smoked that pipe."

I sat up. The act of sitting up made me conscious of the fact that I had been lying down. Conscious, too, that I was feeling more than a little dazed. It seemed as though I was waking out of some strange, lethargic sleep—a kind of feeling which I have read of and heard about, but never before experienced.

"Where am I?"

"You're on the couch in your own room. You WERE on the floor; but I thought it would be better to pick you up and place you on the couch—though no one performed the same kind office to me when I was on the floor."

Again Tress's tone was distinctly dry.

"How came YOU here?"

"Ah, that's the question." He rubbed his chin—a habit of his which has annoyed me more than once before. "Do you think you're sufficiently recovered to enable you to understand a little simple explanation?" I stared at him, amazed. He went on stroking his chin. "The truth is that when I sent you the pipe I made a slight omission."

"An omission?"

"I omitted to advise you not to smoke it."

"And why?"

"Because—well, I've reason to believe the thing is drugged."

"Drugged!"

"Or poisoned."

"Poisoned!" I was wide awake enough then. I jumped off the couch with a celerity which proved it.

"It is this way. I became its owner in rather a singular manner." He paused, as if for me to make a remark; but I was silent. "It is not often that I smoke a specimen, but, for some reason, I did smoke this. I commenced to smoke it, that is. How long I continued to smoke it is more than I can say. It had on me the same peculiar effect which it appears to have had on you. When I recovered consciousness I was lying on the floor."

"On the floor?"

"On the floor. In about as uncomfortable a position as you can easily conceive. I was lying face downward, with my legs bent under me. I was never so surprised in my life as I was when I found myself WHERE I was. At first I supposed that I had had a stroke. But by degrees it dawned upon me that I didn't FEEL as though I had had a stroke." Tress, by the way, has been an army surgeon. "I was conscious of distinct nausea. Looking about, I saw the pipe. With me it had fallen on to the floor. I took it for granted, considering the delicacy of the carving, that the fall had broken it. But when I picked it up I found it quite uninjured. While I was examining it a thought flashed to my brain. Might it not be answerable for what had happened to me? Suppose, for instance, it was drugged? I had heard of such things. Besides, in my case were present all the symptoms of drug poisoning, though

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what drug had been used I couldn't in the least conceive. I resolved that I would give the pipe another trial."

"On yourself? or on another party, meaning me?"

"On myself, my dear Pugh—on myself! At that point of my investigations I had not begun to think of you. I lit up and had another smoke."

"With what result?"

"Well, that depends on the standpoint from which you regard the thing. From one point of view the result was wholly satisfactory—I proved that the thing was drugged, and more."

"Did you have another fall?"

"I did. And something else besides."

"On that account, I presume, you resolved to pass the treasure on to me?"

"Partly on that account, and partly on another."

"On my word, I appreciate your generosity. You might have labeled the thing as poison."

"Exactly. But then you must remember how often you have told me that you NEVER smoke your specimens."

"That was no reason why you shouldn't have given me a hint that the thing was more dangerous than dynamite."

"That did occur to me afterwards. Therefore I called to supply the slight omission."

"SLIGHT omission, you call it! I wonder what you would have called it if you had found me dead."

"If I had known that you INTENDED smoking it I should not have been at all surprised if I had."

"Really, Tress, I appreciate your kindness more and more! And where is this example of your splendid benevolence? Have you pocketed it, regretting your lapse into the unaccustomed paths of generosity? Or is it smashed to atoms?"

"Neither the one nor the other. You will find the pipe upon the table. I neither desire its restoration nor is it in any way injured. It is merely an expression of personal opinion when I say that I don't believe that it COULD be injured. Of course, having discovered its deleterious properties, you will not want to smoke it again. You will therefore be able to enjoy the consciousness of being the possessor of what I honestly believe to be the most remarkable pipe in existence. Good day, Pugh."

He was gone before I could say a word. I immediately concluded, from the precipitancy of his flight, that the pipe WAS injured. But when I subjected it to close examination I could discover no signs of damage. While I was still eying it with jealous scrutiny the door reopened, and Tress came in again.

"By the way, Pugh, there is one thing I might mention, especially as I know it won't make any difference to you."

"That depends on what it is. If you have changed your mind, and want the pipe back again, I tell you frankly that it won't. In my opinion, a thing once given is given for good."

"Quite so; I don't want it back again. You may make your mind easy on that point. I merely wanted to tell you WHY I gave it you."

"You have told me that already."

"Only partly, my dear Pugh—only partly. You don't suppose I should have given you such a pipe as that merely because it happened to be drugged? Scarcely! I gave it you because I discovered from indisputable evidence, and to my cost, that it was haunted."

"Haunted?"

"Yes, haunted. Good day."

He was gone again. I ran out of the room, and shouted after him down the stairs. He was already at the bottom of the flight.

"Tress! Come back! What do you mean by talking such nonsense?"

"Of course it's only nonsense. We know that that sort of thing always is nonsense. But if you should have reason to suppose that there is something in it besides nonsense, you may think it worth your while to make inquiries of me, But I won't have that pipe back again in my possession on any terms—mind that!"

The bang of the front door told me that he had gone out into the street. I let him go. I laughed to myself as I reentered the room. Haunted! That was not a bad idea of his. I saw the whole position at a glance. The truth of the matter was that he did regret his generosity, and he was ready to go any lengths if he could only succeed in cajoling me into restoring his gift. He was aware that I have views upon certain matters which are not wholly in

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accordance with those which are popularly supposed to be the views of the day, and particularly that on the question of what are commonly called supernatural visitations I have a standpoint of my own. Therefore, it was not a bad move on his part to try to make me believe that about the pipe on which he knew I had set my heart there was something which could not be accounted for by ordinary laws. Yet, as his own sense would have told him it would do, if he had only allowed himself to reflect for a moment, the move failed. Because I am not yet so far gone as to suppose that a pipe, a thing of meerschaum and of amber, in the sense in which I understand the word, COULD be haunted—a pipe, a mere pipe.

"Hollo! I thought the creature's legs were twined right round the bowl!"

I was holding the pipe in my hand, regarding it with the affectionate eyes with which a connoisseur does regard a curio, when I was induced to make this exclamation. I was certainly under the impression that, when I first took the pipe out of the box, two, if not three of the feelers had been twined about the bowl—twined TIGHTLY, so that you could not see daylight between them and it. Now they were almost entirely detached, only the tips touching the meerschaum, and those particular feelers were gathered up as though the creature were in the act of taking a spring. Of course I was under a misapprehension: the feelers COULDN'T have been twined; a moment before I should have been ready to bet a thousand to one that they were. Still, one does make mistakes, and very egregious mistakes, at times. At the same time, I confess that when I saw that dreadful-looking animal poised on the extreme edge of the bowl, for all the world as though it were just going to spring at me, I was a little startled. I remembered that when I was smoking the pipe I did think I saw the uplifted tentacle moving, as though it were reaching out to me. And I had a clear recollection that just as I had been sinking into that strange state of unconsciousness, I had been under the impression that the creature was writhing and twisting, as though it had suddenly become instinct with life. Under the circumstances, these reflections were not pleasant. I wished Tress had not talked that nonsense about the thing being haunted. It was surely sufficient to know that it was drugged and poisonous, without anything else.

I replaced it in the sandalwood box. I locked the box in a cabinet. Quite apart from the question as to whether that pipe was or was not haunted, I know it haunted me. It was with me in a figurative—which was worse than actual—sense all the day. Still worse, it was with me all the night. It was with me in my dreams. Such dreams! Possibly I had not yet wholly recovered from the effects of that insidious drug, but, whether or no, it was very wrong of Tress to set my thoughts into such a channel. He knows that I am of a highly imaginative temperament, and that it is easier to get morbid thoughts into my mind than to get them out again. Before that night was through I wished very heartily that I had never seen the pipe! I woke from one nightmare to fall into another. One dreadful dream was with me all the time—of a hideous, green reptile which advanced toward me out of some awful darkness, slowly, inch by inch, until it clutched me round the neck, and, gluing its lips to mine, sucked the life's blood out of my veins as it embraced me with a slimy kiss. Such dreams are not restful. I woke anything but refreshed when the morning came. And when I got up and dressed I felt that, on the whole, it would perhaps have been better if I never had gone to bed. My nerves were unstrung, and I had that generally tremulous feeling which is, I believe, an inseparable companion of the more advanced stages of dipsomania. I ate no breakfast. I am no breakfast eater as a rule, but that morning I ate absolutely nothing.

"If this sort of thing is to continue, I will let Tress have his pipe again. He may have the laugh of me, but anything is better than this."

It was with almost funereal forebodings that I went to the cabinet in which I had placed the sandalwood box. But when I opened it my feelings of gloom partially vanished. Of what phantasies had I been guilty! It must have been an entire delusion on my part to have supposed that those tentacula had ever been twined about the bowl. The creature was in exactly the same position in which I had left it the day before—as, of course, I knew it would be—poised, as if about to spring. I was telling myself how foolish I had been to allow myself to dwell for a moment on Tress's words, when Martin Brasher was shown in.

Brasher is an old friend of mine. We have a common ground—ghosts. Only we approach them from different points of view. He takes the scientific—psychological—inquiry side. He is always anxious to hear of a ghost, so that he may have an opportunity of "showing it up."

"I've something in your line here," I observed, as he came in.

"In my line? How so? I'M not pipe mad."

"No; but you're ghost mad. And this is a haunted pipe."



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"A haunted pipe! I think you're rather more mad about ghosts, my dear Pugh, than I am."

Then I told him all about it. He was deeply interested, especially when I told him that the pipe was drugged. But when I repeated Tress's words about its being haunted, and mentioned my own delusion about the creature moving, he took a more serious view of the case than I had expected he would do.

"I propose that we act on Tress's suggestion, and go and make inquiries of him."

"But you don't really think that there is anything in it?"

"On these subjects I never allow myself to think at all. There are Tress's words, and there is your story. It is agreed on all hands that the pipe has peculiar properties. It seems to me that there is a sufficient case here to merit inquiry."

He persuaded me. I went with him. The pipe, in the sandalwood box, went too. Tress received us with a grin—a grin which was accentuated when I placed the sandalwood box on the table.

"You understand," he said, "that a gift is a gift. On no terms will I consent to receive that pipe back in my possession."

I was rather nettled by his tone.

"You need be under no alarm. I have no intention of suggesting anything of the kind."

"Our business here," began Brasher—I must own that his manner is a little ponderous—"is of a scientific, I may say also, and at the same time, of a judicial nature. Our object is the Pursuit of Truth and the Advancement of Inquiry."

"Have you been trying another smoke?" inquired Tress, nodding his head toward me.

Before I had time to answer, Brasher went droning on:

"Our friend here tells me that you say this pipe is haunted."

"I say it is haunted because it IS haunted."

I looked at Tress. I half suspected that he was poking fun at us. But he appeared to be serious enough.

"In these matters," remarked Brasher, as though he were giving utterance to a new and important truth, "there is a scientific and nonscientific method of inquiry. The scientific method is to begin at the beginning. May I ask how this pipe came into your possession?"

Tress paused before he answered.

"You may ask." He paused again. "Oh, you certainly may ask. But it doesn't follow that I shall tell you."

"Surely your object, like ours, can be but the Spreading About of the Truth?"

"I don't see it at all. It is possible to imagine a case in which the spreading about of the truth might make me look a little awkward."

"Indeed!" Brasher pursed up his lips. "Your words would almost lead one to suppose that there was something about your method of acquiring the pipe which you have good and weighty reasons for concealing."

"I don't know why I should conceal the thing from you. I don't suppose either of you is any better than I am. I don't mind telling you how I got the pipe. I stole it."

"Stole it!"

Brasher seemed both amazed and shocked. But I, who had previous experience of Tress's methods of adding to his collection, was not at all surprised. Some of the pipes which he calls his, if only the whole truth about them were publicly known, would send him to jail.

"That's nothing!" he continued. "All collectors steal! The eighth commandment was not intended to apply to them. Why, Pugh there has 'conveyed' three fourths of the pipes which he flatters himself are his."

I was so dumfounded by the charge that it took my breath away. I sat in astounded silence. Tress went raving on:

"I was so shy of this particular pipe when I had obtained it, that I put it away for quite three months. When I took it out to have a look at it something about the thing so tickled me that I resolved to smoke it. Owing to peculiar circumstances attending the manner in which the thing came into my possession, and on which I need not dwell—you don't like to dwell on those sort of things, do you, Pugh?—I knew really nothing about the pipe. As was the case with Pugh, one peculiarity I learned from actual experience. It was also from actual experience that I learned that the thing was— well, I said haunted, but you may use any other word you like."

"Tell us, as briefly as possible, what it was you really did discover."

"Take the pipe out of the box!" Brasher took the pipe out of the box and held it in his hand. "You see that

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creature on it. Well, when I first had it it was underneath the pipe."

"How do you mean that it was underneath the pipe?"

"It was bunched together underneath the stem, just at the end of the mouthpiece, in the same way in which a fly might be suspended from the ceiling. When I began to smoke the pipe I saw the creature move."

"But I thought that unconsciousness immediately followed."

"It did follow, but not before I saw that the thing was moving. It was because I thought that I had been, in a way, a victim of delirium that I tried the second smoke. Suspecting that the thing was drugged I swallowed what I believed would prove a powerful antidote. It enabled me to resist the influence of the narcotic much longer than before, and while I still retained my senses I saw the creature crawl along under the stem and over the bowl. It was that sight, I believe, as much as anything else, which sent me silly. When I came to I then and there decided to present the pipe to Pugh. There is one more thing I would remark. When the pipe left me the creature's legs were twined about the bowl. Now they are withdrawn. Possibly you, Pugh, are able to cap my story with a little one which is all your own."

"I certainly did imagine that I saw the creature move. But I supposed that while I was under the influence of the drug imagination had played me a trick."

"Not a bit of it! Depend upon it, the beast is bewitched. Even to my eye it looks as though it were, and to a trained eye like yours, Pugh! You've been looking for the devil a long time, and you've got him at last."

"I—I wish you wouldn't make those remarks, Tress. They jar on me."

"I confess," interpolated Brasher—I noticed that he had put the pipe down on the table as though he were tired of holding it—"that, to MY thinking, such remarks are not appropriate. At the same time what you have told us is, I am bound to allow, a little curious. But of course what I require is ocular demonstration. I haven't seen the movement myself."

"No, but you very soon will do if you care to have a pull at the pipe on your own account. Do, Brasher, to oblige me! There's a dear!"

"It appears, then, that the movement is only observable when the pipe is smoked. We have at least arrived at step No. 1."

"Here's a match, Brasher! Light up, and we shall have arrived at step No. 2."

Tress lit a match and held it out to Brasher. Brasher retreated from its neighborhood.

"Thank you, Mr. Tress, I am no smoker, as you are aware. And I have no desire to acquire the art of smoking by means of a poisoned pipe."

Tress laughed. He blew out the match and threw it into the grate.

"Then I tell you what I'll do—I'll have up Bob."

"Bob—why Bob?"

"Bob"—whose real name was Robert Haines, though I should think he must have forgotten the fact, so seldom was he addressed by it—was Tress's servant. He had been an old soldier, and had accompanied his master when he left the service. He was as depraved a character as Tress himself. I am not sure even that he was not worse than his master. I shall never forget how he once behaved toward myself. He actually had the assurance to accuse me of attempting to steal the Wardour Street relic which Tress fondly deludes himself was once the property of Sir Walter Raleigh. The truth is that I had slipped it with my handkerchief into my pocket in a fit of absence of mind. A man who could accuse ME of such a thing would be guilty of anything. I was therefore quite at one with Brasher when he asked what Bob could possibly be wanted for. Tress explained.

"I'll get him to smoke the pipe," he said.

Brasher and I exchanged glances, but we refrained from speech.

"It won't do him any harm," said Tress.

"What—not a poisoned pipe?" asked Brasher.

"It's not poisoned—it's only drugged."

"ONLY drugged!"

"Nothing hurts Bob. He is like an ostrich. He has digestive organs which are peculiarly his own. It will only serve him as it served me—and Pugh—it will knock him over. It is all done in the Pursuit of Truth and for the Advancement of Inquiry."

I could see that Brasher did not altogether like the tone in which Tress repeated his words. As for me, it was

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not to be supposed that I should put myself out in a matter which in no way concerned me. If Tress chose to poison the man, it was his affair, not mine. He went to the door and shouted:

"Bob! Come here, you scoundrel!"

That is the way in which he speaks to him. No really decent servant would stand it. I shouldn't care to address Nalder, my servant, in such a way. He would give me notice on the spot. Bob came in. He is a great hulking fellow who is always on the grin. Tress had a decanter of brandy in his hand. He filled a tumbler with the neat spirit.

"Bob, what would you say to a glassful of brandy—the real thing— my boy?"

"Thank you, sir."

"And what would you say to a pull at a pipe when the brandy is drunk!"

"A pipe?" The fellow is sharp enough when he likes. I saw him look at the pipe upon the table, and then at us, and then a gleam of intelligence came into his eyes. "I'd do it for a dollar, sir."

"A dollar, you thief?"

"I meant ten shillings, sir."

"Ten shillings, you brazen vagabond?"

"I should have said a pound."

"A pound! Was ever the like of that! Do I understand you to ask a pound for taking a pull at your master's pipe?"

"I'm thinking that I'll have to make it two."

"The deuce you are! Here, Pugh, lend me a pound."

"I'm afraid I've left my purse behind."

"Then lend me ten shillings—Ananias!"

"I doubt if I have more than five."

"Then give me the five. And, Brasher, lend me the other fifteen."

Brasher lent him the fifteen. I doubt if we shall either of us ever see our money again. He handed the pound to Bob.

"Here's the brandy—drink it up!" Bob drank it without a word, draining the glass of every drop. "And here's the pipe."

"Is it poisoned, sir?"

"Poisoned, you villain! What do you mean?"

"It isn't the first time I've seen your tricks, sir—is it now? And you're not the one to give a pound for nothing at all. If it kills me you'll send my body to my mother—she'd like to know that I was dead."

"Send your body to your grandmother! You idiot, sit down and smoke!"

Bob sat down. Tress had filled the pipe, and handed it, with a lighted match, to Bob. The fellow declined the match. He handled the pipe very gingerly, turning it over and over, eyeing it with all his eyes.

"Thank you, sir—I'll light up myself if it's the same to you. I carry matches of my own. It's a beautiful pipe, entirely. I never see the like of it for ugliness. And what's the slimy-looking varmint that looks as though it would like to have my life? Is it living, or is it dead?"

"Come, we don't want to sit here all day, my man!"

"Well, sir, the look of this here pipe has quite upset my stomach. I'd like another drop of liquor, if it's the same to you."

"Another drop! Why, you've had a tumblerful already! Here's another tumblerful to put on top of that. You won't want the pipe to kill you—you'll be killed before you get to it."

"And isn't it better to die a natural death?"

Bob emptied the second tumbler of brandy as though it were water. I believe he would empty a hog's head without turning a hair! Then he gave another look at the pipe. Then, taking a match from his waistcoat pocket, he drew a long breath, as though he were resigning himself to fate. Striking the match on the seat of his trousers, while, shaded by his hand, the flame was gathering strength, he looked at each of us in turn. When he looked at Tress I distinctly saw him wink his eye. What my feelings would have been if a servant of mine had winked his eye at me I am unable to imagine! The match was applied to the tobacco, a puff of smoke came through his lips—the pipe was alight!

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During this process of lighting the pipe we had sat—I do not wish to use exaggerated language, but we had sat and watched that alcoholic scamp's proceedings as though we were witnessing an action which would leave its mark upon the age. When we saw the pipe was lighted we gave a simultaneous start. Brasher put his hands under his coat tails and gave a kind of hop. I raised myself a good six inches from my chair, and Tress rubbed his palms together with a chuckle. Bob alone was calm.

"Now," cried Tress, "you'll see the devil moving."

Bob took the pipe from between his lips.

"See what?" he said.

"Bob, you rascal, put that pipe back into your mouth, and smoke it for your life!"

Bob was eyeing the pipe askance.

"I dare say, but what I want to know is whether this here varmint's dead or whether he isn't. I don't want to have him flying at my nose—and he looks vicious enough for anything."

"Give me back that pound, you thief, and get out of my house, and bundle."

"I ain't going to give you back no pound."

"Then smoke that pipe!"

"I am smoking it, ain't I?"

With the utmost deliberation Bob returned the pipe to his mouth. He emitted another whiff or two of smoke.

"Now—now!" cried Tress, all excitement, and wagging his hand in the air.

We gathered round. As we did so Bob again withdrew the pipe.

"What is the meaning of all this here? I ain't going to have you playing none of your larks on me. I know there's something up, but I ain't going to throw my life away for twenty shillings—not quite I ain't."

Tress, whose temper is not at any time one of the best, was seized with quite a spasm of rage.

"As I live, my lad, if you try to cheat me by taking that pipe from between your lips until I tell you, you leave this room that instant, never again to be a servant of mine."

I presume the fellow knew from long experience when his master meant what he said, and when he didn't. Without an attempt at remonstrance he replaced the pipe. He continued stolidly to puff away. Tress caught me by the arm.

"What did I tell you? There—there! That tentacle is moving."

The uplifted tentacle WAS moving. It was doing what I had seen it do, as I supposed, in my distorted imagination—it was reaching forward. Undoubtedly Bob saw what it was doing; but, whether in obedience to his master's commands, or whether because the drug was already beginning to take effect, he made no movement to withdraw the pipe. He watched the slowly advancing tentacle, coming closer and closer toward his nose, with an expression of such intense horror on his countenance that it became quite shocking. Farther and farther the creature reached forward, until on a sudden, with a sort of jerk, the movement assumed a downward direction, and the tentacle was slowly lowered until the tip rested on the stem of the pipe. For a moment the creature remained motionless. I was quieting my nerves with the reflection that this thing was but some trick of the carver's art, and that what we had seen we had seen in a sort of nightmare, when the whole hideous reptile was seized with what seemed to be a fit of convulsive shuddering. It seemed to be in agony. It trembled so violently that I expected to see it loosen its hold of the stem and fall to the ground. I was sufficiently master of myself to steal a glance at Bob. We had had an inkling of what might happen. He was wholly unprepared. As he saw that dreadful, human-looking creature, coming to life, as it seemed, within an inch or two of his nose, his eyes dilated to twice their usual size. I hoped, for his sake, that unconsciousness would supervene, through the action of the drug, before through sheer fright his senses left him. Perhaps mechanically he puffed steadily on.

The creature's shuddering became more violent. It appeared to swell before our eyes. Then, just as suddenly as it began, the shuddering ceased. There was another instant of quiescence. Then the creature began to crawl along the stem of the pipe! It moved with marvelous caution, the merest fraction of an inch at a time. But still it moved! Our eyes were riveted on it with a fascination which was absolutely nauseous. I am unpleasantly affected even as I think of it now. My dreams of the night before had been nothing to this.

Slowly, slowly, it went, nearer and nearer to the smoker's nose. Its mode of progression was in the highest degree unsightly. It glided, never, so far as I could see, removing its tentacles from the stem of the pipe. It slipped its hindmost feelers onward until they came up to those which were in advance. Then, in their turn, it advanced

## The Pipe

those which were in front. It seemed, too, to move with the utmost labor, shuddering as though it were in pain.

We were all, for our parts, speechless. I was momentarily hoping that the drug would take effect on Bob. Either his constitution enabled him to offer a strong resistance to narcotics, or else the large quantity of neat spirit which he had drunk acted—as Tress had malevolently intended that it should—as an antidote. It seemed to me that he would NEVER succumb. On went the creature— on, and on, in its infinitesimal progression. I was spellbound. I would have given the world to scream, to have been able to utter a sound. I could do nothing else but watch.

The creature had reached the end of the stem. It had gained the amber mouthpiece. It was within an inch of the smoker's nose. Still on it went. It seemed to move with greater freedom on the amber. It increased its rate of progress. It was actually touching the foremost feature on the smoker's countenance. I expected to see it grip the wretched Bob, when it began to oscillate from side to side. Its oscillations increased in violence. It fell to the floor. That same instant the narcotic prevailed. Bob slipped sideways from the chair, the pipe still held tightly between his rigid jaws.

We were silent. There lay Bob. Close beside him lay the creature. A few more inches to the left, and he would have fallen on and squashed it flat. It had fallen on its back. Its feelers were extended upward. They were writhing and twisting and turning in the air.

Tress was the first to speak.

"I think a little brandy won't be amiss." Emptying the remainder of the brandy into a glass, he swallowed it at a draught. "Now for a closer examination of our friend." Taking a pair of tongs from the grate he nipped the creature between them. He deposited it upon the table. "I rather fancy that this is a case for dissection."

He took a penknife from his waistcoat pocket. Opening the large blade, he thrust its point into the object on the table. Little or no resistance seemed to be offered to the passage of the blade, but as it was inserted the tentacula simultaneously began to writhe and twist. Tress withdrew the knife.

"I thought so!" He held the blade out for our inspection. The point was covered with some viscid-looking matter. "That's blood! The thing's alive!"

"Alive!"

"Alive! That's the secret of the whole performance!"

"But—"

"But me no buts, my Pugh! The mystery's exploded! One more ghost is lost to the world! The person from whom I OBTAINED that pipe was an Indian juggler—up to many tricks of the trade. He, or some one for him, got hold of this sweet thing in reptiles—and a sweeter thing would, I imagine, be hard to find—and covered it with some preparation of, possibly, gum arabic. He allowed this to harden. Then he stuck the thing—still living, for those sort of gentry are hard to kill—to the pipe. The consequence was that when anyone lit up, the warmth was communicated to the adhesive agent—again some preparation of gum, no doubt—it moistened it, and the creature, with infinite difficulty, was able to move. But I am open to lay odds with any gentleman of sporting tastes that THIS time the creature's traveling days ARE done. It has given me rather a larger taste of the horrors than is good for my digestion."

With the aid of the tongs he removed the creature from the table. He placed it on the hearth. Before Brasher or I had a notion of what it was he intended to do he covered it with a heavy marble paper weight. Then he stood upon the weight, and between the marble and the hearth he ground the creature flat.

While the execution was still proceeding, Bob sat up upon the floor.

"Hollo!" he asked, "what's happened?"

"We've emptied the bottle, Bob," said Tress. "But there's another where that came from. Perhaps you could drink another tumblerful, my boy?"

Bob drank it!

FOOTNOTE

"Those gentry are hard to kill." Here is fact, not fantasy. Lizard yarns no less sensational than this Mystery Story can be found between the covers of solemn, zoological textbooks.

Reptiles, indeed, are far from finicky in the matters of air, space, and especially warmth. Frogs and other such sluggish-blooded creatures have lived after being frozen fast in ice. Their blood is little warmer than air or water, enjoying no extra casing of fur or feathers.

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Air and food seem held in light esteem by lizards. Their blood need not be highly oxygenated; it nourishes just as well when impure. In temperate climes lizards lie torpid and buried all winter; some species of the tropic deserts sleep peacefully all summer. Their anatomy includes no means for the continuous introduction and expulsion of air; reptilian lungs are little more than closed sacs, without cell structure.

If any further zoological fact were needed to verify the denouement of "The Pipe," it might be the general statement that lizards are abnormal brutes anyhow. Consider the chameleons of unsettled hue. And what is one to think of an animal which, when captured by the tail, is able to make its escape by willfully shuffling off that appendage?—EDITOR.