

Story Script

1. The horrible conclusion which had been gradually obtruding itself upon my confused and reluctant mind was now an awful certainty. I was lost, completely, hopelessly lost in the vast and labyrinthine recesses of the Mammoth Cave. Turn as I might, in no direction could my straining vision seize on any object capable of serving as a guidepost to set me on the outward path. That nevermore should I behold the blessed light of day, or scan the pleasant hills and dales of the beautiful world outside, my reason could no longer entertain the slightest unbelief. Hope had departed.

>I remained calm

Yet, indoctrinated as I was by a life of philosophical study, I derived no small measure of satisfaction from my unimpassioned demeanour; for although I had frequently read of the wild frenzies into which were thrown the victims of similar situations, I experienced none of these, but stood quiet as soon as I clearly realised the loss of my bearings.

Nor did the thought that I had probably wandered beyond the utmost limits of an ordinary search cause me to abandon my composure even for a moment. If I must die, I reflected, then was this terrible yet majestic cavern as welcome a sepulchre as that which any churchyard might afford; a conception which carried with it more of tranquility than of despair.

>I continued to wait

Starving would prove my ultimate fate; of this I was certain. Some, I knew, had gone mad under circumstances such as these, but I felt that this end would not be mine. My disaster was the result of no fault save my own, since unbeknown to the guide I had separated myself from the regular party of sightseers; and, wandering for over an hour in forbidden avenues of the cave, had found myself unable to retrace the devious windings which I had pursued since forsaking my companions.

I further contemplated my situation

Already my torch had begun to expire; soon I would be enveloped by the total and almost palpable blackness of the bowels of the earth. As I stood in the waning, unsteady light, I idly wondered over the exact circumstances of my coming end. I remembered the accounts which I had heard of the colony of consumptives, who, taking their residence in this gigantic grotto to find health from the apparently salubrious air of the underground world, with its steady, uniform temperature, pure air, and peaceful quiet, had found, instead, death in strange and ghastly form. I had seen the sad remains of their ill-made cottages as I passed them by with the party, and had wondered what unnatural influence a long sojourn in this immense and silent cavern would exert upon one as healthy and as vigorous as I. Now, I grimly told myself, my opportunity for settling this point had arrived, provided that want of food should not bring me too speedy a departure from this life.

I accepted my fate

The last fitful rays of my torch faded into obscurity. It was, as I staggered blindly through this pitch and winding cavern, that I began to lose all sense of self and civility. Coming upon the black waters of

the cave, I sated myself upon the eyeless and sickly pale fish and bats and the strange fungi with whom I share my labyrinthine tomb. The cave has educated me on the proper movements to traverse its winding depths and I no longer walk as a man but instead scuttle, lurch, and climb like some primordial and malformed ape. I scrawl this text now, on the floor of my new home, as a final act of humanity before it is lost entirely to me. I can feel the animal nature of this dark underworld calling to me, like a faint but familiar melody; distant yet growing ever closer. I no longer wish that any person shall find me in these infernal depths, for anyone who does will not speak of encountering a man but instead of facing THE BEAST IN THE CAVE.

> I shouted for help

As the last fitful rays of my torch faded into obscurity, I resolved to leave no stone unturned, no possible means of escape neglected; so summoning all the powers possessed by my lungs, I set up a series of loud shoutings, in the vain hope of attracting the attention of the guide by my clamour. Yet, as I called, I believed in my heart that my cries were to no purpose, and that my voice, magnified and reflected by the numberless ramparts of the black maze about me, fell upon no ears save my own.

> I listened for any response

All at once, however, my attention was fixed with a start as I fancied that I heard the sound of soft approaching steps on the rocky floor of the cavern. Was my deliverance about to be accomplished so soon? Had, then, all my horrible apprehensions been for naught, and was the guide, having marked my unwarranted absence from the party, following my course and seeking me out in this limestone labyrinth? Whilst these joyful queries arose in my brain, I was on the point of renewing my cries, in order that my discovery might come the sooner, when in an instant my delight was turned to horror as I listened; for my ever acute ear, now sharpened in even greater degree by the complete silence of the cave, bore to my benumbed understanding the unexpected and dreadful knowledge that these footfalls were not like those of any mortal man. In the unearthly stillness of this subterranean region, the tread of the booted guide would have sounded like a series of sharp and incisive blows. These impacts were soft, and stealthy, as of the padded paws of some feline. Besides, at times, when I listened carefully, I seemed to trace the falls of four instead of two feet.

>I fled

Though I knew I had little chance of escaping the creature in its own home, reasoning had given way to primal fear and I ran with full haste from the direction I estimated as its approach. Immediately I realized the folly of this plan. No doubt, each loud footfall only made the thing surer of my position. Tripping on the uneven ground, I fell quite hard and lay upon the cold surface of the cave.

>I tried to stand up

As I tried to lift myself off the cave floor, I could feel the creature's vile hot breath wash over me. Its talon-like forepaws were upon me at once, tearing at my clothes and raking my face, all the while it grunted and occasionally released different utterances that sounded distinctly unlike those of any animal. Though fear continued to paralyze my voice, I began to wriggle myself free of the beast's grasp. In the struggle, my expired torch, which was now affixed to my belt, fell upon the ground. In

doing so, a single ember buried within the torch's head was freed. With my attacker only inches from my face and my eyes having long since adjusted to the utter darkness, this briefest and faintest illumination was sufficient for me to at last see the form of the foul cave thing.

>I looked upon the beast

Though the light was exceedingly fleeting, the fear I felt in that moment has burned the image of the creature into my memory. Black were its eyes; deep, jetty black, in hideous contrast to the snow-white hair and flesh. Like those of other cave denizens, they were deeply sunken in their orbits, and were entirely destitute of iris. I saw that they were set in a face less prognathous than that of the average ape, and infinitely more hairy. The nose was quite distinct. Its hair was snow-white, a thing due no doubt to the bleaching action of a long existence within the inky confines of the cave, but it was also surprisingly thin, being indeed largely absent save on the head, where it was of such length and abundance that it fell over the shoulders in considerable profusion. As the creature let out another garbled utterance I came at once to the astonishing conclusion that the strange beast of the unfathomed cave was, or had at one time been, a MAN!!!

>I lost consciousness

Terror and bewilderment overwhelmed my mind and I passed into unconsciousness. Why the beast did not end my life then, I remain of two minds. Without any doubt, I have that lone ember to thank but I know not whether it is because its light frightened off the creature who had become so accustomed to all-encompassing darkness or that the beast that had once been a man recognized, if only briefly in that fleeting illumination, my own humanity and let me live.

>I awoke

I awoke, pain-stricken but alive and, to my great surprise, could see the features of the cave around me illuminated softly and hear the reassuring voice of the guide who was standing over me. The guide related to me that he had noted my absence upon the arrival of the party at the entrance of the cave, and had, from his own intuitive sense of direction, proceeded to make a thorough canvass of the by-passages just ahead of where he had last spoken to me, locating my whereabouts after a quest of about four hours when he had heard my struggle.

> I told the guide of my encounter

I could not help but to immediately relay my remarkable story to the guide, half-hysterical as I was. I have considerable doubt that he believed a great portion of it but he was kind to humor me and listen intently. We left that wicked underworld together then and I have no inclination to ever return.

I write this account now to warn others who may wish to venture into that vast cavern of what they may encounter there. Let it be known to all that deep in the darkest recesses of that limestone expanse lurks the beast in the cave.

> I did not tell the guide of my encounter

I chose not to tell the guide the true nature of my encounter and instead to report some lie about being startled by a bat and falling upon the ground. I don't believe that the guide was well convinced but he did not question me further and simply helped me to evacuate that dark labyrinth at last.

I write this account now for the sake of my own sanity, though I will keep it under lock and key for the sake of others. As it was for the guide, the truth that I encountered in Mammoth Cave is too

horrifying to force upon others. I will keep this truth hidden, even unto death, that a human being as ordinary as you or I could, with enough isolation, become like the beast in the cave.

> I listened for any response

>I remained still and silent

I was now convinced that I had by my cries aroused and attracted some wild beast, perhaps a mountain lion which had accidentally strayed within the cave. Perhaps, I considered, the Almighty had chosen for me a swifter and more merciful death than that of hunger. Yet the instinct of self-preservation, never wholly dormant, was stirred in my breast, and though escape from the oncoming peril might but spare me for a sterner and more lingering end, I determined nevertheless to part with my life at as high a price as I could command. Strange as it may seem, my mind conceived of no intent on the part of the visitor save that of hostility. Accordingly, I became very quiet, in the hope that the unknown beast would, in the absence of a guiding sound, lose its direction as had I, and thus pass me by. But this hope was not destined for realisation, for the strange footfalls steadily advanced, the animal evidently having obtained my scent, which in an atmosphere so absolutely free from all distracting influences as is that of the cave, could doubtless be followed at great distance.

>I searched for a weapon

Seeing therefore that I must be armed for defence against an uncanny and unseen attack in the dark, I grouped about me the largest of the fragments of rock which were strown upon all parts of the floor of the cavern in the vicinity, and, grasping one in each hand for immediate use, awaited with resignation the inevitable result.

>I threw a rock

I doubted if my right arm would allow me to hurl its missile at the oncoming thing when the crucial moment should arrive. Now the steady pat, pat, of the steps was close at hand; now, very close. I could hear the laboured breathing of the animal, and terror-struck as I was, I realised that it must have come from a considerable distance, and was correspondingly fatigued. Suddenly the spell broke. My right hand, guided by my ever trustworthy sense of hearing, threw with full force the sharp-angled bit of limestone which it contained, toward that point in the darkness from which emanated the breathing and pattering, and, wonderful to relate, it nearly reached its goal, for I heard the thing jump, landing at a distance away, where it seemed to pause.

>I threw the other rock

Beginning to panic, I threw the other rock still in my offhand wildly and heard it bounce off the cave floor nearby, ineffective in its task.

>I searched for help

Same as >I tried to stand up

>I waited for the beast to come near

Meanwhile the hideous pattering of the paws drew near. Certainly, the conduct of the creature was exceedingly strange. Most of the time, the tread seemed to be that of a quadruped, walking with a singular lack of unison betwixt hind and fore feet, yet at brief and infrequent intervals I fancied that but two feet were engaged in the process of locomotion. I wondered what species of animal was to confront me; it must, I thought, be some unfortunate beast who had paid for its curiosity to investigate one of the entrances of the fearful grotto with a lifelong confinement in its interminable recesses. It doubtless obtained as food the eyeless fish, bats, and rats of the cave, as well as some of the ordinary fish that are wafted in at every freshet of Green River, which communicates in some occult manner with the waters of the cave. I occupied my terrible vigil with grotesque conjectures of what alterations cave life might have wrought in the physical structure of the beast, remembering the awful appearances ascribed by local tradition to the consumptives who had died after long residence in the cavern.

>I waited longer

Then I remembered with a start that, even should I succeed in killing my antagonist, I should never behold its form, as my torch had long since been extinct, and I was entirely unprovided with matches. The tension on my brain now became frightful. My disordered fancy conjured up hideous and fearsome shapes from the sinister darkness that surrounded me, and that actually seemed to press upon my body. It seemed that I must give vent to a piercing scream, yet had I been sufficiently irresolute to attempt such a thing, my voice could scarce have responded. I was petrified, rooted to the spot.

>I stood my ground

Same as >I tried to stand up