



Tales from Oblong Pool - Vince & the Midnight Crawler.

Part 2

We hadn't been able to muster a decent torch between us, so our erratic journey through the darkened wood was preceded by the flickering beam of an old lamp which had once belonged to Wince's father. It threw a small circle of light before us which climbed silently over brambles and fallen branches like a big yellow jelly fish as we slowly crept towards the now intermittent screams. "It's stopping, let's go back" whispered Wince who, despite his great size, was obviously the more nervous of the three of us.

"No we can't" I replied, "something is in need of help".

Norman said nothing, but advanced grimly with his big sheath knife at the ready. Never having been allowed in the wood, we were not familiar with it, and in the darkness it all looked alike. The only thing to guide us was the strange noise, which had now turned to alternate squeals and grunts. I, rather bravely I thought, led the way. Norman was directly behind me, while Wince brought up the rear. We made frequent stops to ensure the rescue party was still complete - we'd obviously seen too many of those films where the bloke at the back of the party suddenly disappears without a sound! At last we seemed to be approaching the source of the strange noise. Peering into the darkness, I thought I could make out what looked to be a small, low hut. I stopped abruptly. Norman, following close behind wasn't prepared for the sudden halt, and walked straight into me, stabbing me right in the backside with his (very sharp) knife.

"Aaaagh!" I yelled. Well that set everything off. The other two were on edge enough as it was, and when I suddenly stopped and let out a loud yell of pain, there were two even louder yells from behind me.

"Aaaaah!" shouted Norman".

"Aiieeee!" cried Wince.

They turned to face each other.

"Aaaaaah!", "Aiieeee" they shouted into each others faces, and even louder this time. There then followed a great crashing of branches as Wince and Norman ran in opposite directions into the depths of the wood. This had the effect of starting up the creature again, and for some seconds the wood rang with terrified shrieks coming from all directions. I stood alone holding the fading lamp.

"Hey, where are you going" I called, "come back here for Christ's sake".

The breaking of branches stopped.

"Yew alroight", Norman's quavering voice came from amongst the trees.

"Of course I'm all right" I replied, "you stuck that bloody great knife up my arse, that's all"

"Oh - sorry" came out of the darkness followed by a slow shuffling in my direction.

"Where did Wince go" I called softly.

"I think he went back towards the lake" Norman replied.

"Hey Wince" we both called, "it's O.K., we're alright - you can come out now". From behind us came a hideous slurping sound.

"Christ, what's that now" I said.

"Dunno" replied the crawler, "but it's coming this way".

We crouched behind a large tree stump and waited as the strange slurping noise drew nearer. When it got to within about 10 yards, I pointed the lamp towards the source of the sound. In its weak light all I could see was a huge black glutinous creature stumbling slowly towards us.

"Roight thas me gone" gulped Norman.

"Wait for me" I yelled, and together we broke cover and began to dash back to the lake.

"Hang on" cried a familiar voice. What was this - the voice was coming from the creature. Had some alien taken over Wince's body, and was now after us. We slowed down.

"It's alright, it's only me" wailed Wince. "I fell in a bloody pond!"

And so he had - as the three of us came together Norman and I were aware of a terrible smell of stagnant ditch water. Wince had run straight into a pond which held more mud than water. It would have been hilarious were we not immediately reminded of why we were there by another loud scream from the direction of the little hut.

"Oh no, it's still there" moaned Norman.

"Come on, we'll have to see what it is" I said.

Slowly and nervously we approached the hut. We could now see that there was an area to the front of it enclosed by a low fence. We crept to the edge of the fence and lined up along it, looking into the dark aperture at the front of the hut, from whence now came low grunting noises mingled with high pitched squealings.

Nervously I aimed the lamp into the opening and switched it on.

Immediately there appeared in its slight beam an enormous and hideous pink head with horribly staring eyes. On seeing the light the creature blinked, threw back its head and let out a deafening scream. Wince yelled some strange word in his native language and

immediately fell to his knees and began beating the ground with his hands. Norman managed a more conventional expletive before disappearing once again into the surrounding darkness. For a moment I was paralysed, too shocked to move. But then, in that instant, I realised that the strange creature, the source of all the peculiar sounds, was no more than an enormous pig.

"It's alright" I said to Wince, "it's only a pig" But Wince didn't seem to hear me, and kept babbling away in some strange foreign tongue.

"Norman" I shouted, "it's only a pig - come back here". A rather sheepish Norman soon stood by my side.

"Whassup with 'im then?" he asked gesturing towards Wince, who was still on his knees.

"I don't know" I replied, "Come on Wince - it's only a bloody pig - get up for Christ's sake!"

"Bloimey - thas one 'ell of a bloody pig" said Norman, peering into the darkness. "Oim buggeder if oi ever seen one tha big!".

"Help me get Wince up" I said. We both pulled the poor fellow to his feet. He was still babbling away.

"Speak English" I said, "tell us what's up".

"D-did you see it?" he stammered, looking very shaken.

"Of course I bloody saw it", I replied "it's only a pig - look". Wince stared at the pig, which blinked innocently back at him.

"What was all that grovelling and funny talk about?" I asked him.

In answer he began, with considerable embarrassment, to explain. Apparently the peoples in the remote part of Asia where Wince had been born followed a weird religious cult wherein the pig was a sacred animal. They had been told since very small children that if they offended too often against the religion, then one day the image of a giant pig would appear before them. Such a sighting should be taken as a portent of the unfortunate offender's imminent death. The only pigs Wince had ever seen were those in the religious books, and, so he said, they apparently looked just like this one. For some time now he had neglected his religion, and so deeply ingrained had the early teachings been that for some moments his intellect had been overcome by his instincts, and he had mistaken this giant pig for some great pork deity come to seek retribution. So he explained. I was a bit taken aback by all this, and wondered for a moment what had been in those roll-ups. I looked at Norman. He was obviously struggling not to laugh, and seeing the twinkle in his eyes made it difficult for me to contain my amusement. I might have done it though had I not then caught sight of Wince, standing there covered in stinking black mud and looking forlornly at the pair of us. That did it. I laughed as loud as I can ever remember doing, and of course that started Norman off. We literally rolled about on the ground in uncontrollable fits of laughter which were only curtailed when Wince called to us -

"Oh yes - and there's something else I should tell you".

"Oh yes - ha! ha! ha! - and what's that" I choked.

"Oi suppose they trees'll be coming to loife next" guffawed Norman.

"Well no" said Wince, slowly backing away, "Actually the gate's open and the pig is coming straight for you!"

"What!" we chorused, sitting up in rather a hurry. The great pig was bearing down on us from only a few yards away. Stories of pigs eating anything, including human bodies, raced through my head. Wince had already disappeared and in less time than it took us both to yell "Wooooooh!" Norman and I were on our feet and running as fast as we could through the woods with the pig in hot pursuit. We could just make out the lighter area which was the lake, and ran towards it, all the while with a snorting and grunting behind us. I never knew pigs could run so fast, but, thank goodness, though it kept coming in our general direction, I don't think it could tell exactly where we were. We soon reached the fence which surrounded the lake and thankfully clambered over it, Norman and I collapsing on top of each other on the far side. The pig was still rummaging about somewhere in the wood. Hopefully he'd settled for a few acorns! I've never heard of a man-eating pig, but you never know. It was Wince's turn to laugh now, and he made the most of it as Norman and I struggled to our feet and made our way back to the swim.

It seemed hours since we'd left, but in fact all this took place in about 10 minutes. I was soaked in sweat and cut and scratched all over, as was Norman. Wince was still caked in mud and smelt awful.

"If you want me to fish near you, you'd better wash some of that mud off" I told him. He agreed, and stripping off, waded into the lake margins to wash himself down. It seemed like a good idea, and soon we were all larking about in the water which was beautifully cool. In the middle of all this the silver paper indicator on one of my rods began dancing up and down, then broke into a steady hiss as line poured from the open spool of the reel.

"Shit" I yelled as I jumped out of the water and grabbed the rod. It felt like a good fish, and began to take line.

"Come on you two" I said, get out here and help. Obliging, they both crawled from the lake and stood ready to give assistance where required. It must have been a strange sight, three naked men standing silently round an arched fishing rod - a bit like some strange ritual (I suppose it is, really...). Anyway, just as well that it was dark, and there was no-one about....

Suddenly there was a rustle behind us. Instinctively we swung round and the next second we were standing bathed in a powerful beam of light.

"I don't suppose any of you have seen a pi....oooooh!" said a young female voice, the owner of which was invisible in the darkness behind the torch. For a second or two the light played over our naked bodies, taking unfair advantage of the anonymity afforded by the darkness behind its beam. Then another "oooooh!", followed by a sudden scuffling as the farmer's daughter - for that is who it turned out to be - ran off quickly up the path. It was to be a topic of discussion for years afterwards as to whether those "ooohs" had been squeals of pleasure, or of sheer panic. All I will say is that the second one was definitely slower, deeper and far more appreciative sounding than the first! But for

me at least, there was no time to worry about being arrested for indecent exposure. The carp was pulling hard and I turned my full attention back to the business of landing it. By the time I had, Norman had dried and dressed himself, and Wince had made himself respectable in the few bits of spare clothing he had brought with him. Norman weighed and sacked the fish for me while I got dressed myself. The carp turned out to be a superb mirror of just under 25lbs, which was quite exiting as it was our first ever "twenty" from Oblong. However, with all the other goings on, the significance of that event did tend to get rather overlooked at the time.

"Look" I said, "one of us had better go up to the farm and explain before the police arrive." As Norman was the only one not fishing, he volunteered. An hour later he was back. There had been no trouble at the farm, in fact they had all been highly amused by Norman's version of the events. The farmer's daughter had run off quickly on hearing the pig scrabbling about in the wood - and not, as we thought, because of the sighting of three giant snakes (wishful thinking?). In fact she and Wince became very friendly after that incident, though whether it was through something she saw that night Wince would never tell us.

By morning the pig had been successfully recaptured and made secure in the pen where we had first found it. So ended a fairly normal night at Oblong pool. Like I said, it was very rarely that nothing of interest happened there. Next time I'll tell you about Joey and the Spook....

Alan Tomkins

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