

An Early-Hours Dream This 5th of May

I am creeping about an abandoned lumber yard with a strange kind of sidearm. It is made of a soft wood, & though blocky it is light in my hand. It is stained but not varnished—my armorer hoped to beard the chin of a pine. Running along the top are 2 inward-angling rows of 7 nails, these being small in both circumference & length, better for finishing than framing. The nails are connected by a thread wrapping once around the head of each & running on to the next. I pull the trigger & a nail drops into the barrel by a science unknown to me. The ordnance flies & embeds itself in a timber some dozen yards away. It takes with it a continuous run of thread—ammunition unwound from the store draped over my shoulder like the belt of a heavy machine gun. Another nail rises from the weapon's intestines to replace the one I've just spent. I walk on & my shouldered thread unspools behind me, marking my path through the graveyard forest.

I enter a metal-sided warehouse & crouch behind a rotting stack of lumber. From here I see I am on a kind of platform, that the floor is recessed some distance underground. This floor is patrolled by a troop of monkeys with hair as black as night; I disengage my spool & fire on one. I miss. Enraged, the monkey bears its teeth & shrieks, pointing a grizzled finger at me. I hear a crash & at least 4 gorillas storm the room. Knowing my nails would be nettles to them, I turn & flee, following the thread that brought me.

I know I must get to the fence, & from there to the tunnels. I look over my shoulder & am terrified to see the gorillas are gaining ground. Some are climbing the sides of the warehouse to spot me, while one is drawing closer in pursuit. I hazard all & cut loose my trailing thread, wrapping the end round my shoulder-spool & making for the fence across 40 yards of open grass. I have half that distance to go when I hear the gorilla behind me—I pray that Zeno of Elea was mistaken—the gorilla closes half the distance to my body grown soft through “evolution”—I pray that Zeno of Elea was right. God stands in judgment between the twin paradoxai & Fortune takes the stand in my favor—I manage just to clear the fence before the ape comes crashing through it. He is wrapped in the chainlink & loses time untangling, long enough for me to reach the entrance to the tunnels.

At the entrance I see I am not quite yet acquitted; it is an open manhole which looks dismayingly gorilla-sized. I drop into the darkness with no thought of the ladder &, taking a shock to the knees begin to run in the direction which chance sends me stumbling. Seconds later the tunnel rings with the crash & roar of the great ape behind me. I move faster, though I fear my feet will catch on a joint in the masonry & my head will collide with the ground.

For 200 yards the tunnel runs straight & gives the feeling of an oversized storm drain. Luckily it is not so large that the gorilla can open his gait, or he’d have wrung my neck already. But suddenly the darkness gets larger, the air drops cold & still. I feel I have entered a massive chamber. I slow to a frenzied walk, not knowing what lies before me. Somehow through the black I see things blacker still; I reach for one & my hand tells me it is a column of stone, wet & covered with algae growing thickly. I

hurry deeper into the chamber, feeling my way between the columns. Echoes of grunts & heavy breathing tell me the ape has entered the forest of stone & slime. I can hear something else too, a low rumble growing louder. The columns go on without number, the dark grows total. The rumbling, too, rumbles more, & begins to take familiar sonic form—I know the flood is coming.

Again I quicken my pace, bouncing off the stone in the dark. I search frantically for an exit, knowing I am nowhere close to such thing. I debate turning back, but I cannot tell which way the water comes, & somehow I fear the ape knows exactly the path I thread between the pillars. Thread! I drop the wound-up remnants from shoulder to waist & halt at the next column I reach. I lash myself to it like the mast of a ship being threatened with the fury of heaven. I tie 1 knot—the rumbling crescendoes to a roar as water crashes into the chamber—I tie a 2nd—the torrent arrives & crushes me into the column. For a moment I believe it is not the flood but the hand of the gorilla that drives me against the stone, for it seems the force at my back not only will but wishes to crush my bones. But the awful quiet corrects me; I am submerged. Seconds pass on, & the urge to gasp for air begins its creep.

After a time the pressure at my back recedes & I manage to turn my head to the side. The chamber is somehow brighter underwater—an ambling glow of aquamarine now wraps the columns in light, showing them for arches stretching up toward a high & hazy ceiling. The ape is gone now, swept somewhere away by the water which swims about, awaiting its time to flood my aching lungs. I float, hung from a pillar by a thread.