

Chapter 1

Sweet Recollections

I am writing the memoirs of a bold adventurer and a wonderful grandfather, Nathaniel Horatio Kenworthy, who passed away peacefully on October 6, 1899 - his ninety-ninth birthday. I complete this manuscript out of love and devotion for a true Renaissance man: an accomplished traveler, a well-known writer, a lover of fine art, and a teller of sweet recollections. This man enjoyed life to the fullest, and even on the last day of his life on this earth, he was still busy retelling his most cherished memories.

Alone, I am entrusted to carry out his last wish, to make his adventures known to the world before they are forever lost in the annals of time. Since he was never married, he adopted my mother after she became an orphan, and outlived his siblings and his closest friends; he had no one to ensure that his legacy would be immortalized through history. Hence, being his favorite grandson and eager listener, by default I was chosen for this important task.

Perhaps I was his most treasured kin because I always pestered him to tell me about his adventures. I alone would never tire of hearing the same tales over and over again, albeit on most occasions he'd embellish the facts to make things slightly more appealing for my young ears. I remember often sitting upon my aging grandfather's lap or on my favorite white wicker chair while he told many great stories of his younger days. While I was pleased to hear his adventures retold in a variety of ways, my mother would often ask Grandpa to stop sharing his tall tales, since they were centered upon improbable adventures and implausible circumstances. Even after all these years, I can still

hear the vexation in my beloved mother's voice as she openly chastised my dear grandfather.

“Dad, please stop filling the boy's head with such nonsense. You know he'll be the laughing stock of the entire school - that is if he ever talks about his grandfather's wild adventures.”

Grandpa would become equally as annoyed with Mother's blatant desire to keep his stories silent to the ears of the entire world, and he would let Mother know his true feelings. “Oh, Elizabeth, what will it hurt, telling the boy the truth? You know that sometimes the truth can be even more astounding than any fabrication of one's mind. And if he passes my adventures to the next generation, my legacy will be enjoyed by those who are still just a glint in their grandmother's or grandfather's eyes. Now, please let the men of the family enjoy some real male bonding time before we head off to bed. I want my grandson to have a big tale to latch onto and dream about when he enters into another and more peaceful realm of existence.” With this nasty rebuttal, Mother would just shake her head and return to cooking our dinner or cleaning the house. Well out of earshot of Grandpa's wild tales, I still can hear her displeasure resounding off of the parlor walls. “Ha, male bonding time, my old tea-kettle dad. You're not at the Goat's Head Inn now with your gullible mates. You're in our home, and in a sacred room where we should respect and only share the truth with the ones we love and the ones, no matter how naive, who love us.”

I didn't give a shilling about any family feud over right or wrong, sacred or profane, truth or exaggeration. With all my heart, I just wanted to hear every detail of an amazing tale and share those tales with the angels when I slept. “Come on, Gramps, what happened next?”

“Right, son, so...as I was saying before your mother came into the room and wanted to scuttle our man ship, our tramp steamer, *The Hattie Chester*, was slowly chugging up around a

bend on the mighty Amazon River when we caught sight of a thousand angry natives. These were the notorious Awa tribe, wearing their full war paint and wanting to let loose their poison-tipped arrows upon us and our tiny craft. Without a warning, they unleashed their death wish upon us. Although I had no idea how many of those deadly projectiles rained down upon us, I do know that there were so many that the sun was blocked out for at least a full twenty minutes. Yes, the golden glow of the morning sun had been obliterated, like a solar eclipse in the middle of the daytime. In the shade of the impending gloom, we kept huddled behind rows of wooden crates, and as each resounding zomp shattered our eardrums, we all envisioned our earthly demise. I surely thought that we were going to die that sunny day on the river. And the idea that we would probably end up as shrunken heads on the spear of a tribal shaman was not very appealing.”

I could barely contain my excitement - Grandpa had never told me about this particular adventure of his journeying up the mysterious Amazon River before. “Really? Then what?”

“Well, Captain Simeon Parsons tried in desperation to navigate around a series of rapids through the hail of arrows that continued to pelt our tiny boat. But, sure enough, the river won this particular skirmish as it surreptitiously drew the tiny craft upon a narrow sandbar in the middle of the river. There we were, miserably dry docked with no hope in sight, and only ten meters from the savages who wanted our heads and any other parts for their sacred trophies. While we were in dire straits as a result of the Awa, it was only half of our dilemma. The men and I were indeed facing a scary moment, because on the one side we had the bloodthirsty natives wanting our prized skulls, while on the other were vicious *Cocodylus intermedius* circling their prey like vultures on dead carrion. And those *Cocodyli* were large - and when I say large I mean it, since at least a handful were as long as our vessel itself. *The Hattie Chester* would have merely been a tasty hors d’oeuvre for those nasty crocs.”

“Grandpa, tell me more!”

“It was obvious we were in grave danger, so I had to think fast before we became someone’s or something’s much-anticipated dinner. The only thing I could think of was to cause a diversion, and furthermore we needed to lighten the boat so we could break free from the grasp of the poorly placed sandbar. I took my trusted muzzle-loader, Betsy, filled her with powder, wadding, a steel shot, and let fire. As I gave her my free rein, the noise from my gun frightened the warriors which then offered some protection for the crew. I continued to fire rounds at the natives as fast as I was able to load such an antique weapon. With my gun blaring, all hands on deck threw out some shiny trinkets to catch the attention of the Awa warriors. Lo and behold, it worked - the bloodthirsty mob was distracted and stopped their barrage of arrows to grab the goods thrown in their direction. Now I wondered if the beasts could be so easily put off of their intended dinner.”

“Cheap trinkets don’t lighten a boat. What did you do to free the *Hattie*, Grandfather?”

“The only thing we could possibly do to save our European hides: we took about half of the *Sus barbati* we had on board and threw them into the river. Those poor beasts were squealing and kicking and trying their best to get away from ending up as morsels for the crocs. Alas, their struggle was all in vain. When they hit the water, the feeding frenzy began, as the hungry hordes even tore into each other for the delicacies we had tossed over the side for them. While the croc’s mighty jaws ripped apart the pigs and themselves, we were able to focus our full attention upon releasing our tiny craft from the sandbar. With these well thought-out diversions in place, the evil sandbar that had us in its deadly grip was about to release us and our lightened boat. After the entire crew threw their weight into the venture, slowly we dislodged the bow and were on our way,

much to the dismay of the malevolent natives and the hungry *Cocodyli*.”

“Fascinating...that’s all?”

“Heavens no, lad, that is just the start of the journey and certainly not the end of it. We were a full three months on that ochre ribbon of dreams. There are a myriad of exciting tales to be told, so do not get too comfortable just yet, or you shall miss the best parts of the entire trip.”

“I’m all ears, Gramps!”

“All right, we had escaped the jaws of death from both our two-legged and four-legged foes for the moment. With a clear path ahead of us and the wicked ones soon to be far behind us, Captain Parsons urged the crew to stoke up the boiler and jam the wood right up to its very brim to get up a full head of steam. Within minutes, our beautiful lady had been freed from her sandy bondage and gathered enough power to whisk us away from the source of our worries and our possible demise.”

“Thank goodness you had those great ideas to get away, or we wouldn’t be here right now sharing this amazing story. I can’t imagine not being with you as my granddad. Perhaps another grandfather would’ve been a lawyer or accountant. How boring it would have been listening to tales of murder or the latest usury rates - no thank you, Grandfather.”

I mimicked what a mundane conversation might have sounded like. “Now, listen, son, and someday you can carry on our family name with your own business. We just made 373 quid with the spices we imported from India, and next month we’ll make even more. Yawn...”

Both of us laughed until torrents of salty tears ran down our cheeks. Having wiped our eyes, we hung our wet handkerchiefs to dry on Mother’s sideboard. If she’d come back to see her favorite men had hung salty handkerchiefs on her treasured heirloom, she would’ve been screaming mad and sent

both of us off to bed with her broom swatting away at our backsides. Gramps resumed his tale.

“We were lucky that time. Although it gets better - listen to this. After a few days of cruising effortlessly up the river, we reached our first destination, which was a small village of the Kanibo tribe. We stopped there to trade for amethyst - in case you are not aware of this fact, this gem was the rage here at home. This deep violet stone adorned every woolen cape and silken dress of the rich at the time, with women and men going equally as crazy over a piece of quartz. That particular shade of violet was both rare and expensive, and only found in the area occupied by the tribe. As good luck would have it, we had tonnes of it available just for the asking or perhaps the taking! And since the crew received a percentage of the profit from the journey, we were all going to be wealthy. I was overjoyed, since I had the grand illusion of retiring at a young age and living a life of relative luxury without a worry in the world.”

Being a precocious lad even at my age, I voiced my best guess of what happened next. “Hum. So, the boat landed, you traded for the gems, and sailed to the next adventure. You had a tonne of shillings to buy nice clothes and a horse or two, right?”

“Wrong! I am elated that you are not a fortune-teller, or want to be one, since you would not have a single satisfied client with your errant prognostications. The trade did go as planned, but once again we ended up in a big kettle of trouble, and it was the two-legged variety this time. I must say that being *tete-de-tete* with an angry mob of Kanibo warriors - fully armed and wanting blood, namely ours, was no picnic in Hyde Park on a balmy Sunday afternoon in July. We did find ourselves nose-to-nose with an angry multitude of skilled hunters with bows, and every member of the crew knew that the end was just a mere breath away if we did not handle the crisis properly.”

I was on the edge of my favorite chair as the adventure unfolded before me. Deep down inside, I wondered how this

group of adventurers could get into a mess and then escape such a terrible situation. “If the deal went well, what went wrong?”

“Here’s the whole story from start to finish. When the boat touched land, we were greeted by the entire village, including the chief. Among the sounds of drumming and chanting, he came out to greet us in a one-meter-high headdress of lapis lazuli. He looked most impressive, decked out in this accoutrement of the uber-rich. As he slowly but confidently walked up to meet the captain and crew, our minds and souls were hypnotized by the gentle swaying of those brightly colored stones perched upon his royal head. Can you imagine the mere sight of a hundred stones, each the size of a hen’s egg, making their way up to a lot of English sailors with a guinea or so in our pockets? It was a walking treasure! The chief wore many gold fanciful bracelets upon his arms, and they were stunning; however, it was those blue gems shimmering brightly in the radiant morning sunlight that were extraordinarily breathtaking. Forty sets of eyes feasted upon the riches that majestically adorned the chief. Little did we know that greed and larceny would almost relegate the crew and ship to the lost pages of history.”

The chief cordially opened the conversation with the captain. “Welcome, Captain Simeon Parsons. We have expected your visit for many moons. I see the benevolent water spirits have favored you and your men on your long journey across the waters. Come, let us enjoy a feast before we exchange our goods.”

The Captain responded in his usual courteous manner as he pressed his open palm to his heart. “Good to see you, my chief. It’s apparent that your English and the village have done well since we last shared time together. Clearly, the forest spirits have been good to you. And have you a new heir to the throne since my last visit?”

With an inviting smile on his face, the chief broke the news to his visitors. “Yes, the benevolent spirits have blessed my queen and sent a healthy boy to us. He’ll be the heir to the throne when I’m too old or too weak to govern our village sensibly and to the best of my ability.”

“Well, I must say that congratulations are in order. And after many moons and an equal amount of suns in the future, may your new boy rule as wisely and nobly as his father has for the good of his tribe.”

The captain and the chief exchanged stories as they led the lengthy procession of natives and visitors to a central tribal building. The *hetohok* was an impressive structure; the walls were constructed of massive tree trunks the size of a London carriage, and thousands of banana leaves covered the thatched roof. It took some time for my eyes to get accustomed to the lack of light as we filed into the dining hall. When I was finally able to see, all around us were the Kanibo women cooking a variety of foods. There were all sorts of indigenous plants that I had never seen in my travels; the aroma of these mysterious plants was sweet as golden honey and enveloped the entire kitchen area. After closing my tired eyes and inhaling these sumptuous smells, my nose was titillated as a hummingbird’s when the first flowers of spring arrive in an English garden. With those smells lingering through my mind, I scanned the rest of the area and saw a number of well-fed *Canus lupus familiari* tied up, no doubt about to meet their unpleasant fate.

“Nathaniel, look, please don’t tell me that we’re having dog for dinner! I can’t stomach the thought that we’ll be downing our best friend for the feast. I just know that I’m going to get sick. And if they leave any fur on the legs or any other part, I know for sure that I’ll spill my innards. I’ve not read about their customs, and I must ask if they will serve the brain and the eyes still in the skull too?”

“Jonas, do not be daft, man. We are the honored guests of the Kanibo, and it is with great pride that they offer us the most prized delicacy on their menu. Yes, not everyone eats or even enjoys our traditional British foods of black pudding, bubble and squash, or toad-in-the-hole. Now, can you imagine if they sat down at our dinner table back home and we fed them our greasy, fatty foods, and they turned their noses up at our delicacies? What would you do, and even more importantly, how would you feel? Look, are you not able to try just a mouthful or so and smile as you chew on that poor canine who gave his life to bolster the prestige of the tribe? After all, that is what this is all about, is it not? Feed your invited guests the best you can to impress the most. So, if you do not eat what is placed before you, you will insult the tribe. Would you have them lose face and perhaps rile them up, which in the end may cause the deaths of the entire crew?”

I was surprised by what grandfather said. “You really gave Jonas a scare.”

“Yes, I did. I just threw in that ‘cause the deaths’ line to shock him into being a hospitable guest and not a finicky one who thought that his own country had the most sumptuous food in the world — but it was not about to work.”

Jonas would not stop fretting. “No! And no disrespect meant to the natives’ culture or traditions, but...I just can’t do it! Once I witnessed a fox ripping a defenseless chicken apart, and I couldn’t eat for a week. My stomach is a very sensitive thing, and anything out of the routine I face every day is upsetting to me. I’m facing a dilemma here, Nathaniel, and as my best mate, I need your help and I need it fast. What am I going to do? I don’t want to be responsible for our demise, but I also can’t dine on dog! I have to admit before my Creator, dog brains a la carte is way, way down on my personal list of dining choices.”

“Do not fret, I have a plan that shall save your skin as well as the rest of men. We shall be served baked dog, which you

cannot run away from, and I have been told we shall also be served a little something to wash it down with. That ‘little something’ is very strong brew made from the juices of a takini tree. This drink is potent, and I do mean it is a powerful concoction. It produces visions, convulsions, and spiritual possessions if a person gets carried away and downs too much of the sacred potion.”

Jonas’s eyes narrowed like a feral cat an inch away from an unsuspecting rodent. He could not believe what he had just heard. “Really?”

“Yes. Now, the good news is that it is not disrespectful to the tribe if you drink too much and start talking in tongues as if possessed by one of their benevolent forest spirits. Apparently, they use this brew as a conduit to the spirit world and as a messenger of the spirits themselves. So drink up and do it quickly before the food arrives. Hence, that way you shall avoid eating our canine friends, and you shall be held in the highest esteem by the chief. Who knows, if the show you put on is good enough, they may ask you to stay and be an honorary member of the tribe. Imagine - we sail away and you stay in paradise.’

“I’m saved! We’re saved! My prayers to the great Creator have been answered! And the answer is no - you go, I go, or you stay, I stay.”

My best friend did not hear that the magical brew caused ‘visions and convulsions and possession’ in the poor soul who drank too much. Nevertheless, in Jonas’s eyes, perhaps being possessed by visions of malevolent demons while convulsing on the floor of the dining hall was a fair exchange for not having to partake of canine flesh.

“This is my advice to you Jonas: I think you had better get a funnel and drink as much as you can and as quickly as you can. If you take heed of what I say, you shall miss the main course because your antics shall probably be the main attraction.

Let the show begin as the witch's brew works its magic." With those last prophetic words, I let out a boisterous laugh. Poor Jonas simply had no idea what that sacred brew could do to a soul. He was used to drinking weak British beer, and this drink was far from impotent.

"I understand. Now, how do I say 'funnel' in the Kanibo language?"

"Banshawna."

"Ban shamans? Is that the pronunciation?"

"No! You really have to improve your listening skills. I am sorry, but given the flustered state that you are in at the moment, I simply could not resist teasing you. I really have no idea how to ask for a funnel in the local dialect. And I was also joking about the funnel. When you behold with those eyes of yours what we shall use to drink that magical concoction, you shall not be disappointed. I can assure you of that."

A much-relieved Jonas closed his eyes and started acclimating himself to spiritual possession before the women delivered jugs of the mind-altering brew to the sailors and tribe members alike. As he opened his eyes, he saw what I had meant: there before him were the much-anticipated jugs - hollowed-out gourds about a half-meter long. They were not a disappointment, since each one must have held at least three liters of the powerful juice. Jonas must have thought to himself that spiritual possession would be an easy road to walk on, and rather quickly as well. He reasoned rightfully that all he had to do was close his eyes and open his mouth to surely avoid the main dish.

"When the large jugs were delivered to the multitude of thirsty guests, Jonas quickly poured some drink down his parched throat and then sat quietly alone. He unceremoniously downed a couple more of the hallowed gourds overflowing with the potent elixir. While on his way to communicate with the spirits that traveled within the building, long before that mystical drink took possession of his mind and body, the tribal shaman

had already arrived at that sacred location where the spirit and physical worlds meet. The powerful forest spirits took possession of this man and started to spin him around like a child's top at an incredible speed. All we could see was a blur of motion from his arms and legs. After several minutes of this twirling, his body started to go into convulsions. His arms lashed out in various directions, and then his head jerked from side to side. It looked as though he could have snapped his neck at any moment. During this numinous spectacle, hideous growling noises, seeming to manifest directly from the depths of hell, emanated from his saliva-encrusted mouth. At one point the possessed shaman let out a high-pitched shriek that made every voice in the dining hall stop and every eye take notice. It was plain to see that the natives were greatly agitated by this loud cry.”

“Grandpa, what did it sound like?”

“Well, it was what one would naturally expect from the foul mouth of heinous Cerberus, the appointed watchdog of the doors to Hades. It was a bone-chilling sound that resonated through every single cell in my body. ‘Aarrrrrrrrrrghhhhhhhh!’”

There was no mistaking what my vivid imagination painted on the recesses of my young mind; the hatred and bloodlust in that scream vibrated up and down my spine, and the hair on my arms and neck stood at full attention. My very soul shook with fear when I imagined Cerberus running after me, nipping at my heels as I ran for my life down an endless corridor with no exits. The powerful jaws of that malevolent three-headed beast were snapping shut with such force that it sounded like someone was violently slamming the metal doors of a train's boiler over and over and over again. After being inundated from the crown of my head to the soles of my feet with this dreadful sound, I became paralyzed and my eyes glazed over with fear. I couldn't move or say a word. My thirteen-year-old body was as tight as a rubber band stretched between my fingers when I was a six-year-old child.

Grandpa could see that I was lost and fumbling for a way to exit this parallel universe of death and fear. “Roger, are you OK? Come on back, you are sitting in your mother’s cottage with your grandfather. You are safe. It is OK. That beast has given up on capturing your soul and has focused upon another. Take a deep breath and release the fear...”

Upon hearing my elderly grandfather’s soothing voice, I gladly shook off the guardian of the underworld and was back in the safety of my family home. As I was brushing off the last ill effects of that self-induced traumatic event, I muttered, “Thanks, Gramps. For a minute there, I really imagined that I was a goner, chewed up by that bad dog.”

“I have to agree with you on that one! Look, you have put yourself through a lot, and I am not sure if you are physically or emotionally able to follow along as I share one of my greatest adventures with you. Do you want me to continue with my story or stop and tell you about this at some other time? The choice is yours to make. What do you think?”

“Continue, there’s no way on earth that I’m going to let that beast make me miss this one - please, keep going.” I thought I was a real soldier of the King. My naive enthusiasm made me continue even after almost being the main course for the canine gatekeeper of the underworld - well, at least in my own mind. Still I was itching to hear the rest of the story.

“You are a real soldier, son,” Grandfather continued. “So, the highly intoxicated shaman let out his spine-tingling scream and then, without warning, he went limp in midtwirl and just collapsed in a heap. His body was motionless for a full ten minutes. He looked like a jellyfish with his arms and legs spread out in an unearthly position. It was as if he had surrendered his entire skeletal system to the forest spirits. If you thought that his screams were bloodcurdling, his lifeless form spread out unnaturally over the floor like a spineless *Turritopsis nutricula* was even more terrifying.

“Oh, there I go again with *Turritopsis* this and *nutricula* that. Sorry. It is a hydrozoan - a jellyfish. This particular jellyfish is a truly amazing creature of the sea designed by our Creator. Why, may you ask? Well, it is the only known case of a metazoan that reaches sexual maturity and then reverts back to sexual immaturity at will. In theory, this wonderful anomaly of nature has discovered immortality. Too bad it is wasted upon some spineless, organless, and brainless creature. If we humans only had that talent instead of reincarnating every few centuries or so, it would be so much easier for us.”

“Umm.” What could a precocious grandson possibly say to that? ”All right, please continue.”

“With his collapse, the shaman’s show was brought to an abrupt finale. Still the three-ring circus was not quite over yet. Just as quickly as the shaman ended his theatrical display, it was then Jonas’s turn to whip the crowd into a frenzy with Act Two. Without uttering a word, my friend jumped up and started dancing herky-jerky. At first, the crowd was thoroughly amused at the sight of a white-skinned European under the influence of their powerful, hypnotic drink. But it soon became really scary, with my mate almost handing over his life to the One for an injudicious moment.”

“No! What could Jonas do that was so terrifying and almost cost him his life?”

“While it was what he did, it was also what was done to him. One second he was dancing and moaning, the next he unexpectedly grabbed a ceremonial dagger from the belt of one of the meanest, ugliest warriors I have ever seen in my life. Now, this is a cultural tidbit that the crew and possibly you may not be aware of: Kanibo warriors do not - I repeat, do not ever surrender their sacred knives unless they are dead. This practice is akin to the brave Spartan warriors of ancient times, who were either alive to fight with their shields or dead upon their shields. It was not a gray area; it was one or the other, and there was no in-

between. And even when a Kanibo warrior traveled to the spirit world, his weapons were buried along with him for all of eternity. So, what do you think happened next?”

I certainly was a naïve lad when I speculated that the meanest, ugliest warrior’ just brushed it off as innocent act of a soul possessed by a malevolent forest spirit.

“No, that mean-spirited warrior stood up, all 210 centimeters worth, and proceeded to wrap his gigantic hands around Jonas’s neck with the death grip of an *Eunectes murinus* around its unsuspecting prey. Slowly and methodically, his vice-like hands were tightening and squeezing the very life out of the cheeky knife thief. Every eye in the place knew the consequences of this act; however, not a single soul would step up and help our crewman, for fear of being the second receiver of the warrior’s type of justice. With only a few minutes until death claimed Jonas’s life, the knife fell out of his hand and onto the ground. It was as if the big man was suddenly appeased: he nonchalantly released his iron grip and his lifeless victim instantly fell to the ground with a resounding thud. I thought that if the native’s iron grip had not killed my friend, then surely the sudden impact upon that solid ground would have. The warrior picked up his knife, rammed it back in his belt, sat down, and resumed his drinking as if that do-or-die confrontation had never even happened.”

“He killed your mate Jonas in cold blood? How brutal! And with absolutely no remorse over his heinous act against a man smaller than he - I find that utterly despicable!” Thankfully, mother was not in the room to hear Grandpa’s latest tale of brutality and suffering, or she would have had something to say about my listening to such tales of cruelty just before bedtime.

“No, I did not say that. I said his ‘lifeless’ body and you assumed that I meant his dead body dropped to the ground. Thankfully, that was not the case, and I was overjoyed that our benevolent Creator had saved my mate’s soul this time, in order

to collect it at some time in the distant future. Unbeknownst to us at the time, one of the side effects of the Kanibo's powerful elixir was to produce a state of suspended animation wherein one's vital organs shut down the same as those of an ornery *Ursus arctos horribilis* hibernating over the long, cold Russian winter."

"Thank goodness that Jonas survived." I truly felt relieved that this canine lover had been spared death while so far away from home.

"He would turn out to be fine after his near-death experience. Although, remember I mentioned a 'three-ring circus' earlier - well, the entertainment was not over yet. No sooner had Jonas's limp body hit *terra firma* than another warrior suddenly jumped up and into the melee.

"Right from the very start, I knew this fellow was serious - he hit the floor twirling around with his ceremonial knife clutched tightly between his blackened teeth. His bloodshot, bulging eyes frantically scanned the dining hall, and if by chance he locked gazes with you for even a mere second, his wide pupils seemed to penetrate right down to the core of your soul. And I can speak from personal experience on that one! All the while he was scrutinizing the scene before him, the crowd was in awe as they witnessed the warrior's lightning-fast movements, his arms and legs lashing out frantically in all directions while his head oscillated wildly from side to side, like a coconut dangling from the vine of a tree. But the best or worst, depending upon how you look at it, was about to happen next."

"Oh, so his head was ripped from his body by that vine?"

"Please, lad, that's only my use of a simile: a rhetorical technique that uses 'like' or 'as' to make a comparison. I would not expect you to know about this literary device right now. Still, when you are older and become a world-renowned writer of wonderful adventure stories, you will have to use this technique to paint vivid pictures for your readers. These are a standard usage by writers to help their readers to easily 'see' what they

want to convey in a text. Imagine: a soul black like the night; a pond as smooth as a mirror; or the wind as warm as a mother's bosom. Few words, but effective ones that help to paint a picture that impresses upon a reader's mind. Wonderful things they are; our language would be so poor without them.

"OK, so, there really was no *Genus vitis* attached to his neck or anywhere else for that matter. However, he was chanting loudly and spinning feverishly as the powerful potion took hold of his brain and body. Then, much to the surprise of the riveted crowd, he slowly pulled the knife out of his mouth. Suddenly he brought the razor-sharp blade back up to his face and proceeded to caress it with his outstretched tongue. He slowly rolled his tongue up the one side of the blade and down the other while the cold metal glistened from the reflection of an open fire in the dining hall."

"No, surely in the state he was in, he must've cut his tongue right out at the roots!" I shuddered as I envisioned the swollen veins of the tongue oozing blood while it wildly pulsated on the dirty hut floor. To assuage the benevolent spirits was one thing, but to bleed to death at your own hands was another.

"Close to the fact, but not quite. Although we were not subject to a gory *taco de lengua*, he did suffer a myriad of vicious wounds to several areas of that tongue at his own hands. However, the real damage that occurred was to his arms and chest. As he continued chanting and gyrating around the room, he began to mutilate his body, and with real zest, I might add. There were gasps of disbelief from the crowd as the possessed warrior drew his knife repeatedly across his chest and arms. After each pass with that sharpened blade, his blood squirted out to the rhythm of his heartbeat. The faster he spun around and around, the quicker the blood shot out from his horrible wounds."

"Hideous!" I knew deep within my adolescent heart that I wasn't about to sleep this night, not after Cerberus almost made

me the main course for dinner. And then to hear that the native's blood splattered in all directions like the water from a newly invented hand pump - one eye would be open all night. My body might be warm under my blankets, but my mind wasn't about to let me escape unscathed from this unforgettable night of blood and terror. Maybe Mother was right, at least this time: I shouldn't have listened to these bloodied tales from my grandfather just before going off to bed. Alas, even though I realized my mistake, the tale was too incredible to ignore. I just had to find out what happened next, to who, and how.

“The men sitting on the ground closest to the self-mutilator covered their faces with their opened palms, seeing they did not want a bloodbath - sorry, no pun intended here.” With that wily comment, Grandpa laughed loudly. “I was one of the unlucky ones. I was so near him that I felt the warmth of his blood as it hit my face, slowly trickling down my cheeks and onto my arms, hands, and bare chest. I was so covered in blood that it seemed I had been in a battle for my very existence. I still shudder at the thought. Nevertheless, he went on dancing and chanting to appease the sleeping forest spirits as he bled profusely from his self-inflicted wounds. There seemed to be no end to his folly, except death itself.”

“What a show! Gramps, I must say that I deeply admire the devoted warrior who cut himself to shreds, bled openly, and was still able to carry on with the spirit-summoning ritual. Once I had a small cut when my pocket knife slipped and my finger got in the way. I cried for a full ten minutes and it wasn't even deep. I've got much to learn about pain, don't I?”

“Well, we might all learn a valuable lesson in life from this spiritual man. Now, making this observation, I must also say that I had hoped with all my heart that the powerful brew would never reach the shores of our intemperate island. Who knows what would happen to our civilization if that ever occurred?”

Look what that evil plant, the poppy, did to China and also to our country. We cannot have yet another means to escape this reality for another, or to ease our pain and numb our minds, souls, and bodies. Much has been lost and we cannot afford to lose more with our choice to abuse these highly addictive substances.”

“It’s been over seventy years since you challenged the Amazon, Grandpa, and it still hasn’t reached us, so, at least for the moment or three, we’re safe. I’m curious, how did this part of the show end?”

“Well, just as the shaman ended up in a lifeless pile on the earthen floor like some rag doll, this warrior ended his performance. One minute he was moaning vociferously and gyrating uncontrollably with his knife slicing up his sinewy muscles, and the next he was in a comatose state lying flat faced in the dirt. I will tell you, that numinous concoction can steal a person’s mind, soul, and body, and take them to places where only the most spiritual have ever tread!”

“Was he all right?” I wondered how anyone could survive such an ordeal and walk away.

“Yes, he was. Several members of the tribe carried the mutilated warrior off to sew up the thin ribbons of skin that had been sliced from his chest and arms. I personally thought that he would have died from the loss of so much blood, or at least he would be convalescing for several weeks, if not for at least a month, since he had inflicted many deep and serious wounds to his body. But this life is full of many surprises and this was one of them: he reappeared after about an hour or so, heralded by loud cheering and clapping from the assembled multitude. The thunderous response to his reappearance stopped as suddenly as it began. Then the whispers went around the room. Was he supernatural? Was he a forest or water spirit incarnate? Was he a good or bad talisman for the tribe? Regardless of the thoughts that abounded concerning this true and noble warrior, remember this very important point: his courageous act for the many tribal

spirits demonstrates the power of spirituality that these entities had upon the human body and mind.”

“He was a brave man and a believer, no doubt. I don’t fully understand what you’re getting at, Gramps, although I am amazed and also terrified by this man’s actions after drinking that powerful drink.” It wouldn’t be until many years later that I grasped the significance of grandfather’s wise words, and those words have carried me along this life through the good and bad.

“He was a very brave man. It is so uncommon in this day and age to hear about such acts. His personal threshold for pain would rival any Spartan warrior. While he dealt with pain nobly, it was his intent, belief, and faith in the power of the many water, forest, and air spirits that sustained him through his ordeal. Perhaps, if we in the modern world had such faith and belief, we would soon realize that our Creator only bestows upon us what we can handle, and also provides the means to overcome and grow spiritually from the things that we think are bad. Instead of crying and trying to escape our pains, we should embrace them and realize that we can grow as a person when we endure and overcome the ills that life sometimes hands us.

“Let us move on now. So, having been spectators to the wildest show on earth, gorged with dog, sweet potato, and our fair share of the hallucinogenic brew, it was then time to complete our business. Mumbling incoherent sentences and staggering over each other, we were led to another building that was erected exclusively for our business transactions.”

“Another building - what’d it look like?”

“It was of similar building materials, yet the interior was strictly utilitarian! There were no counters or tables for different items, like we have at Mr. Robert Smith-Jones Apothecary. There were only banana leaves spread over the entire floor area to facilitate the business at hand. The natives and the crew filed in and took up their positions. It was quite a contrast for the goods being exchanged that day. On the left side were the long

lines of natives with their precious stones, and on the opposite side of the building were the visitors from a faraway island with their inexpensive trinkets. It was quite obvious what culture valued an important commodity and what was not that important. The Kanibo had tonnes of inconsequential rocks at their fingertips, while lacking shiny glass objects that were worthless to us. However, in our defense, we did offer a number of flintlock muskets and metal-handled hatchets, and these modern-day weapons were just enough to sway the balance of power throughout the region in favor of the Kanibo tribe.”

I was curious. “Other tribes didn’t have any muskets like Old Betsy at that time? And if they didn’t, why should we give these to kill the Kanibo’s neighbors, Grandpa?”

“That is a very good question, and looking back on this situation, as foreigners in their lands, we really should have left things alone and not interfered with the natural development of the natives in that area of the Amazon. Inevitably, it’s nature’s way that some tribes would have prospered while others would have suffered. Like the tides on our southerly coast, time changes all, and without human intervention, the beach reaches a state of equilibrium with the sometimes greedy and sometimes generous ocean. So some years the beach is robbed of its sand, while other years more sand is deposited by the tides. Still, it was not our place to steer nature’s course. At the time, our tiny island ruled the world and thought it was our right - based upon economic might and military power - to get involved in these kinds of affairs. We did this without thought of another culture. You would be interested to know that the tribe did not use our modern technology to provide more food to sustain the tribe. Rather, they brutally slayed or enslaved their peaceful neighbors. However, that is another story for another day.”

“They did that to their own...that’s sad and shouldn’t have happened.”

“I agree with you, but think about the meanest boy in your class at school. Now, does he get what he wants and really care about how he gets it, while thinking about the feelings of others? Of course not. The same can be said about nations. Throughout recorded history, every era has had its powerful hegemony that enforces its will upon others because it has the means to do so. It is not right; it is contrary to the laws of nature, where cooperation is the norm and not competition. Helping one another sustains life and cultures, while competing against one another eliminates lives and cultures. Yet there has always been a dominant power in the past: the Egyptians, the Greeks, the Romans, the French, and our own nation. No doubt there shall be many, many more in the future. It is very sad that we as a species do not learn from our mistakes and probably never will. We and we alone will bring about an end to our kind at some time in the future. It is inevitable as spring following winter, and as the morning following dawn.”

I always knew that Grandfather was about to espouse his ethical and political views upon my adolescent ears when his face lost its usual jovial lines and became stern. Along with his change of facial expression, he would speak very slowly and purposely articulate every word to be sure I comprehended his deepest and most important beliefs. He was a wise man, and he knew that he would live on if I understood and carried his ideas to the future.

“I am indeed sorry for that slight digression, son; nevertheless, it is important that you understand the past to understand the future. If you forget the past, you will surely surrender the future. Now - after our sumptuous banquet, our trading session was very cordial, and we completed our business within a very short time. The crew and entire village then went to have a well-deserved nap. We retired to our huts and to the most comfortable vine hammocks strung between trees swaying in the gentle breeze.

“It had been an exciting day of trading, and with the potent brew still percolating through our blood streams, each crewman was ready for some much needed sleep. It felt good to be sleeping on solid ground and not hear the steady chugging of the *Hattie*'s engine ringing in our ears as we slept. Surely, my face revealed my inner contentment as I smiled widely, thinking that my life and this adventure on the Amazon were very special. After checking on Jonas, I was just nodding off to another world when I heard footsteps crushing the twigs on the earthen floor of the hut.”