

The Figure

"The weather is worsening, I wonder if that mysterious figure will appear again tonight."

"Tom, you've got to stop drinking that strong stuff," I chided.

"Wait, you'll see. One of these days I'll prove it to you. In fact, it's usually in weather like this that he appears."

"Really? Where does he appear?"

"I always spot him just beyond the channel, there, and he's walking towards the beach huts."

"Perhaps he goes to collect, or store something?"

"I don't think so; I've never see him return."

"He may do so later on."

"No, I've sat up all night watching but I've never seen him comeback."

"Come on, you really are obsessed with him. Perhaps he sleeps there."

"No. I've walked down and looked at the huts and they all had locks on the outside."

"Well, perhaps he strolled past them and continued onto the rocks at the other side."

"I never saw anything."

"You could have had a lapse in concentration."

"I don't think so. This mystery has really puzzled me. It is such a regular occurrence in this type of weather. Why does it not happen in good weather?"

"Tell you what, I'll humour you. Pour us a couple of drinks and let's settle down to keep a vigil. Just like kids waiting for Santa."

"Oh bugger off," Tom muttered as he went off to pour the drinks while I surveyed the beach with a bored air.

Tom's voice distracted me, "Ray, shall I grill some slices of chorizo?"

"Great idea," I called out turning to look in the direction of the kitchen.

As my gaze swung back to the beach I did a double take. There was a figure, a couple of yards other side the channel.

"Tom, get you butt over here at the double."

His first words were, "That's him."

"Where the hell did he come from? He couldn't have covered the distance from the shrubbery to where he is in the time I turned to answer you. Certainly he could not have waded through the channel in a flash."

"I told you it's a weird experience."

He grabbed the binoculars and began studying the figure as it slowly moved towards the huts.

"Here. Have a look," he said, handing them to me.

As I focused on the figure an odd feeling ran through me, the sort of feeling that I got as a kid when reading ghost stories.

"Here," I said, handing the binoculars back to him, "have a look at the tracks he's leaving in the sand."

Tom swept the binoculars back and forth before lowering them, "What tracks? I don't see any tracks."

"Precisely, neither do I."

"Come on," he said, "let's get down there."

We ran down the steps and headed towards the channel but by the time we left the house there was no sign of the figure.

The channel was fairly shallow and we waded through quite easily.

Once across we scoured the sand for foot prints.

There were none.

A strange feeling of unease gripped me.

"Come on," Tom said, "let's go and look at the huts."

We walked down the length of the huts, checking underneath each one to make sure no one was hiding there and making sure that they were all locked from the outside.

There are occasions in life when one just begins to doubt your sanity. This was one of those. My brain could not make sense of what we had just seen and experienced.

Tom broke my train of thought, "My god," he exclaimed excitedly, "Look at that."

A few feet beyond the last hut, footprints suddenly began in the middle of nowhere, leading towards the far end of the beach.

An unearthly cold gripped me as I stared at the footprints.

"This is too weird," Tom said, shivering involuntarily.

"Come on, let's follow them. In for a penny, in for a pound." My words sounded a lot more positive than I felt.

The tracks led to the end of the beach and started up on to the rocks.

We followed the sandy prints.

Tom stopped short.

"What's the matter?"

"In every step the sand is as plentiful as the first steps on the rocks. By now the shoes should have shed all the sand . . .," his voice trailed off.

"Shit," I said. "You're right. This is unreal."

"Come on; let's get to the bottom of this."

The tracks led into the middle of some really rugged rocks where they abruptly stopped next to a metal pole.

We scoured the surrounding rocks but there was no sign of tracks leading away from that spot.

The whole atmosphere felt a lot colder than the ambient temperature.

Tom knelt down and inspected the tip of the pole where it apparently entered the rocks.

“Lend me your pocket knife,” he said.

He began scraping at the barnacles around the bottom of the pole.

“This is weird,” he exclaimed. “It’s concrete.”

By now it was getting dark and we both had the feeling that we’d like to get the hell out of there.

Back in the warmth of the house we poured a couple of stiff whiskies and began trying to make sense of what we had just experienced.

“Tom, let’s have a closer look at that pole tomorrow.”

“Agreed. Tell you what. If the weather clears tomorrow we’ll take some tools and scrape off more barnacles to see how far the concrete extends.”

The front passed over during the night and after an unhealthy fry up we set off for the spot.

We searched and searched the area. There was no sign of a pole.

“Fuck me,” Tom blurted out, “Am I going mad? We were here last night and there was a bloody pole in the rocks.”

A shiver ran down my spine and I shook my shoulders, “There is something very peculiar going on here.”

Some semblance of sanity returned as a couple of locals came strolling across the rocks, “Morning, what are you blokes so earnestly looking for?” they ventured.

I smiled wanly, “There should be a pole here somewhere.”

“A pole? Nope, never seen it and we’ve have been strolling these rocks for thirty years.”

“Ah,” I said slowly, “We must have misheard our friend. He was probably referring to another spot.”

“I would say that you are right, unless he’s taking the mickey,” he smiled, looking intently at me.

“Could be.”

“What’s the story of the pole?”

My mind raced, seeking a plausible response but my words did not sound convincing, “Apparently he planted the pole to indicate a favourable fishing spot.”

The bloke nodded in response but his eyes told me that he didn’t believe a word of what I’d just blurted out.

Tom changed the subject to the local weather conditions and eventually they wondered off to do whatever they had been doing for thirty years.

“Do you believe in aliens, the supernatural?” Tom asked.

I hate those questions. My rational mind shies away from such beliefs yet my experiences have left me in no doubt that there is something - probably many things – that we can’t explain. I tossed around the idea of breaking my self-imposed silence on my experiences.

I decided against it and merely referred to mysteries such as the Bermuda Triangle, “It seems that there things move into other dimensions. Do you think that’s possible?”

He looked at me for a long time before nodding, “I’ve thought about that but can’t get my mind around the concept.”

We returned to the house with very few words, mostly lost in our own thoughts.

We turned on the radio and a voice said, “A massive cold front is approaching tonight and should reach Ballito by sunset.”

“Do you suppose our friend . . .,” and Tom's voice tailed off.

“We’ll keep a watch. I do want to know what the hell is going on.”

The front duly arrived accompanied by the most amazing thunder and lightning that I’d ever experienced on the Natal coast.

Sure enough, at the height of the storm the figure suddenly appeared as if from nowhere.

“Come on,” Tom blurted out, “let’s go”.

We battled our way though the driving rain, wincing at lightening strikes in the near vicinity.

Needless to say the figure was gone without footprints – until we reached the end of the huts. There the trail began.

The sandy footprints led across the rocks and, chillingly, the rain was not washing away the prints. The spookiness of this made me shiver with, I suspect, fear of the unexplained. I thought of bending down to touch the sandy prints but something made me stop.

I jumped as the night was lit by a blinding flash as a lightning bolt struck a little way ahead of us.

Oblivious to the danger from the lightning, a seemingly inexplicable force drew us towards that spot.

Tom was in the lead and stopped so abruptly that I bumped into him, “My god, I can’t believe it,” he blurted out.

We both stared dumbly at the scene before us.

A concrete dome was split open like two halves on an egg. The steel pole lay alongside, still glowing red hot from the lightning strike. At its point was what I recognized as an old fashioned whaling harpoon.

We peered into the split concrete. The rain had stopped and we could clearly see that it appeared to have been moulded around what looked like a human form.

“Look,” said Tom in an awestruck voice.

I stared in dumb amazement. The sandy tracks stopped at the one end of the split concrete while another set out tracks led away from the further side, still sandy despite the rain and the wet.

We stood there for a long time, each lost in his own thoughts.

Finally Tom broke the silence. “Come on,” he said faintly, “Let’s go. There’s no way I’m following those damn prints anywhere. It’s difficult enough dealing with one damn dimension at a time.”

As we mulled over the experience, hot toddies in hand, Tom asked, “What was the figure wearing?”

I stared at him blankly, “I haven’t the foggiest notion.”

That was nearly thirty years ago and that figure has never re-appeared.

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