

our horses, and wild fowl and forest shade for ourselves.

For a few days we revelled in the enjoyment of rest after exhausting toil, and then, touched by that strange fever that seizes those who look after treasure, we commenced to explore for the Opal Cliff.

Bill's ideas of its position were fixed by a series of landmarks, which had yet to be found.

We made a comfortable camp in the valley, taking care to select a place easily defended against attack, and then we commenced to search systematically.

It was arranged that one of us should mind camp, whilst the other two prospected, and it fell to my lot to take the first spell.

Ord and Bill set off well armed, and with provisions for three days. I watched them out of sight, took the horses down to the waterhole for a drink, and then loafed through the hot day taking care, however, to keep a look out for blacks.

Ord and Bill did not return that night, and I scarcely expected them. I put in another day, and still they did not turn up. I guessed it would take them some time to pick up old bearings in such country, and I thought they might have gone further than they intended. I did not bother much about them, but just went about my work, looking after the horses and making the camp snug. I got a good supper ready for them on the third night, and hoped they would turn up to eat it, but no one came, so I laid down on my blanket and went to sleep.

I think it must have been near midnight, when I awoke with a thrill of indefinable horror: a sense of something loathsome. I cannot explain the feeling. The mystery of it was its worst feature. I grasped my rifle, but that seemed a poor weapon against the unknown thing that paralysed my senses.

It was sickening fear, such as I had never before experienced. Danger could not produce such a feeling. I had been face to face with death without shivering. But this! Why death would have been a relief!

With a great effort I rose to my feet. My hair felt like glass threads, my skin was

loose on my body and irritated my nerves as if it were lined with desert sand. Shuddering, as a man might shudder when in the folds of a cold slimy snake, and bathed in perspiration I lifted the flap of the tent and looked out. I could see nothing, I could hear nothing. The very silence of the clear night appalled me. It gave me the idea of awful emptiness. A sound of something familiar—a sight or a sound of the horses, the cry of a night bird, the rustle of an iguana would have been a relief, yet that dreadful silence reigned.

I cocked my rifle, and stood with my finger on the trigger. Stood, it seemed for hours, waiting for something, I knew not what, but nothing came.

The night dragged through infinite time, and try as I could I was unable to shake off the dread that thrilled me. When the bronze light that heralds the Australian day appeared I gave a shout of delight. When the throbbing rim of the sun lifted above the horizon, I welcomed it as one rarely welcomes the sun in hot countries. I tried to think that my fright was the result of nightmare, but even by the light of day I knew it was something more.

I could not touch food. I shuddered at the thought of eating, and an irresistible inclination to find out the something which haunted me, led me out of the tent. I forgot that it was my duty to stay by the camp. Clutching my rifle I hurried with feverish speed in the direction my mates had gone. They had left no tracks on the dry hard ground, but I seemed to know instinctively which way they would take.

I clambered upwards out of the valley up on to bare rock, glad of the exertion of climbing. In the heat of noon I stood on the crest of the range, and saw below me the great plain we had crossed quivering with heat sloping up to the brassy horizon. I did not rest a moment, but hurried on my eager search.

I descended the northern slope, stumbled over loose rocks careless of accident. The glare of sunlight and the dance of heat waves prevented me seeing far ahead. I