

Another Journey to the Center of the Earth

February 12: It's pitch black. We feel our way along the walls. We stumble. We bump our heads. "Yes, I should have packed lights," my uncle admits. "But how was I to know it would be so dark down here?"

I don't know what to make of our servant, Hans. I thought he was by temperament stolid and taciturn. But alone with Gertrude, his pet duck, he's bubbly. I hear him giggling.

February 15: Ball-like creatures keep rolling into us from all directions in the dark and knocking us down. "We must catch a specimen," my uncle said. "Why?" I replied, "You want to start a bowling alley?" I have no patience for this.

February 17: That oaf Hans knocked my slinky from my hands and over the ledge.

February 21: When we hold our breaths and the silence becomes absolute, I can hear, far below, the faint jangling sound of my slinky, as it makes its lonely way, step by

step, into the bowels of the earth.

February 30: I kicked Hans in the pants today. Why? Because it's dark and he can't prove who did it. No other reason.

March 9: Someone keeps singing "Afternoon Delight" over and over and it may be Gertrude. I'm going mad.

March 19: We're saved! We came across a colony of giant phosphorescent salamanders. My uncle says two forty-pound specimens will suffice to light our way. Hans has one over each shoulder. I get Gertrude.

March 23: Hans keeps looking at Gertrude and me.

April 8: We're low on food.

April 19: My uncle has at last disclosed the purpose of our expedition. We seek the Hortense cucumber fish. The Hortense cucumber fish was once abundant on the surface of the earth, but being morbidly shy and tired of everyone laughing at its comical shape, it one day announced, "The

hell with it!" and fled to the remotest possible region. Its habitat is now restricted to one locale--a spherical body of water ten feet in diameter, located precisely at the earth's core. "The Hortense cucumber fish is supposed to be very tasty," my uncle said, and showed me a bottle of tartar sauce.

April 26: Gertrude likes me better than Hans and Hans knows it.

May 3: I asked my uncle what we will do when the food runs out.

"Haven't you guessed?" he replied. "We will eat Hans."

"But Uncle!"

"Hans won't object--will you Hans? You don't mind if we eat you?"

"Yah, das ist okey," Hans said.

"Hans has the true feudal spirit," my uncle explained.

May 6: Hans, I have no designs on that stupid bird of yours.

May 8: Hans is gone. He took Gertrude with him and

also one of the salamanders. My uncle is dejected and talks of turning back.

"Uncle, let's press on!" I insist, throwing the remaining salamander over my shoulder. "Remember the cucumber fish!" And wouldn't you know it? They were only a hundred yards away. (And there, too, was my slinky.) The poor fish! When we saw them, we couldn't stop laughing.

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