

The Water

by Bill Yarrow

At every step we took inland
the conviction forced itself upon us
that we were in a country
differing essentially from any
hitherto visited by civilized men.

We saw nothing
with which we had been
formerly conversant.

The trees resembled no growth of either the torrid
the temperate or the northern frigid zones
and were altogether unlike those of the lower southern latitudes
we had already traversed.

The very rocks were novel in their mass
their color and their stratification

and the streams themselves
utterly incredible as it may appear
had so little in common
with those of other climates

that we were scrupulous of tasting them
and indeed
had difficulty in bringing ourselves to believe
that their qualities were purely those of nature.

At a small brook which crossed our path
(the first we had reached)
Too-wit and his attendants halted to drink.

On account of the singular character of the water
we refused to taste it
supposing it to be polluted

and it was not until some time afterward
we came to understand
that such was the appearance of the streams
throughout the whole group.

I am at a loss to give a distinct idea
of the nature of this liquid
and cannot do so
without many words.

Although it flowed with rapidity in all declivities
where common water would do so
yet never except when falling in a cascade
had it the customary appearance of limpidity.

It was nevertheless in point of fact
as perfectly limpid as any limestone water in existence
the difference being only in appearance.

At first sight
and especially in cases where little declivity was found
it bore resemblance as regards consistency
to a thick infusion of gum arabic in common water.

But this was only the least remarkable
of its extraordinary qualities.

It was not colorless
nor was it of any one uniform color—
presenting to the eye as it flowed
every possible shade of purple

like the hues of a changeable silk.

This variation in shade
was produced in a manner
which excited as profound astonishment
in the minds of our party
as the mirror had done in the case of Too-wit.

Upon collecting a basinful
and allowing it to settle thoroughly
we perceived that:
the whole mass of liquid
was made up of a number of distinct veins
each of a distinct hue

that these veins did not commingle
and that their cohesion was perfect
in regard to their own particles among themselves
and imperfect in regard to neighboring veins

Upon passing the blade of a knife
athwart the veins
the water closed over it immediately
as with us

and also in withdrawing it
all traces of the passage of the knife
were instantly obliterated.

If however the blade
was passed down accurately
between the two veins
a perfect separation was effected
which the power of cohesion
did not immediately rectify.

The phenomena of this water
formed the first definite link
in that vast chain of apparent miracles
with which I was destined
to be at length encircled.

