

Elephant Tears

By: A.K. Child

Hugo sat uncomfortably in the tiny room, his eyes focused on the clock. The chair under him was much too small, and creaked unreliably, as if it was going to fall apart any minute. He was bound in a straight jacket, and had marveled that they had found one big enough for him. Though the truth was, he could have flexed any portion of his large gray hide, and ripped it to pieces. Such an action wouldn't help his cause any.

They had filed his tusks and capped the ends with rubber padding. His trunk had been bound into the straight jacket to keep him from flailing it about and injuring someone. This made it difficult for him to speak, however. Not that he wanted to. Hugo had nothing to say.

And as of yet, he didn't have to say anything. His lawyer, a pure black jackal, who could have been the reincarnation of Anubis himself, had said everything. And nothing. "My client is innocent," he kept repeating over and over. "You have no right to treat him this way. It's inhumane, and we won't stand for it. As soon as this is cleared up, my client will be bringing a suit against your entire department for these injustices."

The detective on this case, a diminutive hyena with a bad case of halitosis, snarled a knowing grin at the lawyer. "Mr. Giselly, if your client is innocent, then why was he the only survivor? Why was he the only one to walk out of there, not only alive but completely unharmed? You can't blame us for taking precautions."

Hugo had grown tired of this back and forth. They were getting nowhere, and it he had been sitting there for hours, unable to defend himself. At first he had tried to argue with the detective, but Giselly cut him off each time, repeating the same response that he spoke now. "We've told you for the hundredth time, he can't remember what took place. But it makes no sense for him to kill off his entire herd. His family! Hugo Munson is not a murderer." Giselly pounded his fist on the table, emphasizing his strong words.

"Cut the crap," the hyena snapped back, standing up to glare into Hugo's distant eyes. "You're an elephant. You're supposed to remember everything. I don't believe for one minute you can't remember what happened. Admit it, Hugo. You're nothing but scum."

Hugo closed his large, black eyes, unable to look at the hyena. How did a person prove they really couldn't remember something? It was like proving whether a god exists. Giselly also jumped to his feet, growling at the detective. "So, it comes right back around to it, doesn't it Detective Harris? You're not getting a false confession out of my client, no matter how hard you push. If these spurious accusations are what you pass off as detective work, then I suggest you find a different profession."

Harris smirked and turned toward the door. "Don't tell me how to do my job, Giselly, and I won't tell you how to do yours." The hyena opened the door, and Hugo looked up again in time to see a zebra walk through. "Gentlemen," Harris said, turning back to them. "This is Doctor Morgan Scheckles. She's an expert in the field of hypnotherapy, and we've called her in to get to the bottom of this." He closed the door and glared at Giselly. "Unless you're afraid to allow your client to speak his own mind."

The zebra smiled, approaching the table where Hugo and Giselly sat. “Good afternoon.” Her voice was soothing, bringing Hugo back to the conversation as he watched her silently. Giselly glared between the doctor and Harris. Doctor Scheckles ignored the lawyer’s less than pleasant demeanor, however. “Mr. Giselly, you have nothing worry about. I’m here to help Mr. Munson.”

“Help him right into prison,” Giselly grumbled, settling back into his chair. “I know how these things work. You’ll make a few suggestions, he will agree to them, and Harris will have his confession. You should know nothing my client says under hypnosis will be admissible in court.”

“You have the right not to participate, Mr. Munson,” Doctor Scheckles said as she smiled toward the bound elephant. “But, I assure you, this could help you case if you are actually innocent. While it’s unfortunate that you’re the only suspect in this case, you’re also the only witness. I can help you remember anything that might be beneficial to you.”

All eyes were on Hugo now, and he shifted uncomfortably in his small seat, making it groan. He looked toward Doctor Scheckles and tried to pull his trunk up enough to speak without sounding like he had a gallon of cement inside it. “What if...I don’t want to remember?” He still sounded stuffed up to his own ears, but at least he could be understood. “I know they’re dead. All of them. What if I forgot for a reason? What if I forgot because I’m...”

Giselly cut him off with a sudden growl. “That’s enough, Hugo.” He stood up, gathering his papers to stuff into his briefcase. “I think we’re done here. We have nothing more to say. Either you find some solid evidence, or you let my client go.”

“Please, Mr. Giselly,” Doctor Scheckles smiled at him now and leaned on the back of the chair the detective had been sitting in. “It’s entirely possible that your client has blocked out the memories because they were traumatic, rather than because he is guilty. As you said yourself, anything he says under hypnosis won’t be admissible, so what do you have to lose?”

The jackal gave another low growl, but looked at Hugo. “I would advise you not to do this, Mr. Munson, but the choice is yours. If you do incriminate yourself, there will be very little I can do to help you.”

Hugo turned his eyes to the table, silent for a moment as he mulled over the possibilities. If he were truly innocent, he would likely feel survivor’s guilt, and if he were guilty, then he would deserve whatever punishment would come of it. But not knowing one way or the other was driving him mad. Finally, he looked up to Doctor Scheckles. “Will I remember what I say?”

“You don’t have to,” Doctor Scheckles responded, her tone growing softer as she spoke to him. “But it will be recorded. Admissible or not, the truth will be known to those of us here in the room. What happens after that will be up to Detective Harris and your lawyer.”

“I want to remember,” Hugo said so quietly, that it took the others a moment to realize what he said. Then louder, more definite in his decision, “I want to go through with this. I don’t think I could live with myself not really knowing.”

Giselly grunted and sat back down in his chair, while Doctor Scheckles nodded sympathetically. “Very well. Are you comfortable Mr. Munson?”

Another creaking shift in his seat seemed to answer that question for him. “Not like this,” he said, attempting to look down to the straight jacket.

Doctor Scheckles turned to Harris. “Is there somewhere here where Mr. Munson will be more comfortable? And I don’t think he needs to be bound up like that. He doesn’t seem to be a threat to anyone.”

Detective Harris narrowed his eyes, looking back up at the large bull elephant. “Look Doc, I don’t need him rampaging through the office if something goes wrong. You’re just going to have to make do with what you got.”

“It won’t work if he’s not comfortable,” Doctor Scheckles replied. “And I’ll take full responsibility for his behavior. I guarantee, once he’s under, I’ll be able to control him completely.”

“That’s what worries me,” Giselly snarled.

Harris snorted from the other side of the room and flashed a toothy grin toward Doctor Scheckles. “If that’s the case, then I think we can make some room in the Captain’s office. He has a couch that’ll probably be a lot more comfortable for Mr. Munson.”

“That will be fine,” Doctor Scheckles replied, starting for the door. “Oh, and if you are both going to be present, I would ask that you turn off your cell phones. I don’t want any interruptions to break his concentration.”

“Fine, whatever,” Harris grumbled, opening the door for the doctor and the others. “Come on, lardo. Let’s get this over with.”

Giselly grabbed his briefcase and glared at the detective. “Your derogatory comments are unnecessary, and will only push you further down the hole, Detective Harris.” He looked at Hugo once more as he moved around the table. “And I still recommend against this, Mr. Munson.”

Harris merely grunted as Hugo stood. The chair groaned with relief as the large elephant gained his feet. They would likely need to replace it before anyone else was subject to sitting there. “It doesn’t matter anymore,” Hugo replied to his lawyer as he started for the door. “Either I did it, or I didn’t. Want to know.” Though whether he would want to remember it after all was said and done, was another matter completely.

The captain had not been pleased when the parade stopped in his doorway. Such a request was highly unorthodox, but Doctor Scheckles eventually convinced him that it was for the best, and they would only be there a short time. Grudgingly, the captain decided to take his lunch break, and hand over his office to the small group.

Hugo sat on the couch, taking up the entire surface, and Doctor Scheckles motioned to Harris. “Please remove his restraints, Detective. I give you my promise he’ll behave, right Mr. Munson?” She smiled kindly toward the elephant, who nodded as much as his trapped trunk would allow him.

Harris eyed Hugo for a moment, then sighed and did as the Doctor requested. Giselly took a seat in the corner, watching everything with a stern look on his face. Though their reasons differed, Harris and Giselly at least agreed that this situation was less than optimal. Their arguments had been heard though, and there was little else they could do. They would simply have to trust that Scheckles and Hugo would keep their promises.

Once free, Hugo stretched his trunk and arms out to get rid of the kinks that had built up within him. Harris immediately reached for his gun, growling at the sudden movement. Hugo looked toward him and let his trunk droop back down again. “I promised I wouldn’t do anything. Whatever you think about me, I’m an elephant of my word.”

“Yeah, well, you just better watch it,” Harris grumbled back, relaxing slightly. “I’m keeping my eyes on you. Don’t think for a second you can get away with anything.”

“Please, Detective,” Doctor Scheckles said in a scolding tone. “That’s really not necessary.” She smiled back to Hugo and leaned against the captain’s desk. “All right, Mr. Munson. I want you to just relax as much as you can. I realize this isn’t the most comfortable of situations, but you really will need to keep as calm as possible.”

Hugo shifted slightly on the couch, and glanced over to his lawyer who was busy fuming about his advice being ignored. Then he looked back to the Doctor and nodded. “I’m okay. What’s going to happen?”

“I can’t tell you, exactly,” Doctor Scheckles said in her soft, smooth voice. “The experience is different for everyone. But, if we’re successful, you should feel very relaxed and at peace. The memories are there, somewhere in your mind. You’re simply going to let them come to the surface where you can retrieve them. Do you think you can handle that?”

Hugo looked down at his prison-issue shoes, thinking for a moment. “I...don’t know,” he answered finally. “I guess it depends on what’s there.”

“If you are having second thoughts, you don’t need to do this,” Giselly piped up from his corner. “I still don’t think you should. If you do, there may be very little I can do to defend you. As it is, Detective Harris has no witnesses and no tangible evidence that you had anything to do with it. The unknown in this case is your advantage.”

Harris turned toward Giselly, the hackles on his neck rising at the challenge. “Munson was at the scene of the crime, covered in the victims’ blood. He was apprehended red-handed...”

“Gentlemen, please!” Doctor Scheckles’ raised tone was in such sharp contrast to the even smoothness she had displayed until now. But it worked get their attention and she smiled, speaking more softly once again. “This is not a courtroom. I’m sure you’ll have ample

opportunity to argue with one another later.” She returned her dark eyes to Hugo, speaking directly to him once more. “Now, it’s your choice. We can proceed or stop.”

Hugo looked between the Detective and his lawyer. Both had been fully chastised into silence, but their arguments had been heard. He felt so very conflicted himself, the answer didn’t come easily, but he finally made his decision. “Let’s go on,” he said quietly in his low, rumbling voice. “Whether I’m guilty or innocent, defense won’t matter.” He understood that if he proved to himself he was guilty, he wouldn’t mind what punishment was dealt to him. If he was innocent, they would have no case.

Doctor Scheckles nodded and leaned back against the captain’s desk. “Very well. If you’re ready, I’d like you to make yourself as comfortable as possible. Feel free to lay back if you wish.” She waited a moment for Hugo to adjust himself on the couch, which gave a series of faint crackles. Harris and Giselly watched silently, their protests already aired. “That’s good. Now, please focus on a specific point, maybe a decoration or coat hook. Anything you can narrow in on.”

Hugo did as he was asked. His large, black eyes fell on a framed certificate the captain had hanging behind his desk. There was a shiny foil seal in the lower right hand corner and Hugo allowed himself to stare at the round patch as the lights reflected off it. “Okay,” he replied, letting the doctor know he had found what he was looking for.

Scheckles nodded once more. “Good. From now on, I don’t want you to speak until I ask you to.” She glanced over at Harris. “Could you please lock the door, Detective Harris? We don’t need someone walking in at the wrong time.”

Harris grumbled something under his breath, but made his way over to the office door to ensure it was locked. Giselly watched him shrewdly as the hyena secured the door then wandered back to his seat in the corner.

Doctor Scheckles waited for Harris to be seated once more then drew in a deep breath. She spoke again in her soothing tone, keeping her eyes on Hugo as she began the process. “Please listen to me very careful, Mr. Munson. Hugo. Focus on the point you are looking at, and listen to my voice. You’re going to slowly relax and go deep into your own mind.

“At the count of three, I want you to close your eyes. 1...2...3,” Doctor Scheckles began the process. Hugo closed his eyes and focused on her voice, unsure whether this would really result in anything more than nap. “Concentrate on your breathing. In and out...In and out. Breathe in nice long, deep breaths then let them out very slowly.”

Everyone’s attention had turned to Hugo now as he sat on the couch with his eyes closed, and his chest slowly rising and falling with each breath. The elephant tried to forget the others in the room and their purpose for being here. Doctor Scheckles glanced at the cop and lawyer in turn, smiling as their arguments gave way to fascination. “That’s it. Please open your eyes again and find the focus point once more.” Hugo did as he was asked, and the doctor continued. “You’re feeling it harder to keep your eyes open now, but concentrate on that point and focus. Keep breathing slowly in and out. When I count to three, close your eye again. 1...2...3.”

Once again, Hugo's eyes slid closed, blocking out the harsh reality of the police station. Doctor Scheckles watched, giving a pause until his eyelids had settled. "Continue breathing slowly in and out. Notice how your arms and legs are starting to feel very heavy as if you couldn't move them if you tried. You're starting to relax now. You have a deep feeling of peace and calm." As she spoke, he could feel his limbs growing heavy and tired, much like the moments before falling asleep, and his doubts began to falter.

"Open your eyes one more time, and focus on your spot," she said softly. Hugo struggled this time to open his eyes, and the doctor smiled as the hypnosis began to work. "It's harder to keep your eyes open now. Harder to focus. That's all right. Go ahead and let your eyes close for the final time. You should be feeling very relaxed now, almost as if you could sleep. Your arms and legs are feeling numb; far away."

Doctor Scheckles allowed a glance to Harris and Giselly, who both seemed to be drifting as well at the sound of her soothing voice. Both the jackal and hyena were falling into almost as relaxed a state as Hugo. Whether they remained conscious would be up to them, but at least they had given up the argument. She went on, returning her gaze to Hugo. "I want you to picture a doorway in your mind. Through this door is a set of stairs, and in a moment you will be going through the door. Once you step through and start down the stairs, you become even more relaxed. When I count to three, you will move through the door. 1...2...3."

Another pause was given to allow Hugo the time to mentally start on his journey. His concentration was palpable, seeming to silence even the busy police station outside the office. He no longer heard anything but the gentle flow of the doctor's voice. Scheckles continued once more, leading Hugo further into trance. "Now you're going to walk down the stairs very slowly. With each step, you will become more relaxed. There are ten steps, and I'm going to count down each one as you walk. 1...2...you are becoming more relaxed. 3...4...you hear nothing but my voice. 5...6...your body feels so very numb, as if it is no longer there. 7...8...focus on your breathing. Slowly in...and slowly out. 9...10...you're in your own mind now, and as relaxed and calm as you can possibly be."

Doctor Scheckles took a deep breath before going on. For Hugo, this would be where the real work began if the memories were still somewhere in his mind. "Take a look around your mind," Scheckles said softly. "What do you see?"

Hugo had been following the zebra's directions precisely, as if he had no free will of his own, and now he saw himself standing in a dark place surrounded by a thousand doors. From somewhere in the distance he heard the soft voice of Doctor Scheckles speaking to him. Had she asked a question? The atmosphere here was quiet and calm. He didn't want to break that by speaking, but there had been a question and it demanded an answer. He hesitated before finally speaking. "A...a room. With doors. Many doors."

Hugo's voice was low, barely audible if not for the quiet of the room. But Doctor Scheckles heard it well enough and nodded. "The doors are your memories. Every piece of your life is there, waiting for you to look inside and see them. Most of them are unlocked; easy to access. Go ahead. Try one."

Hugo looked around once more at the mass of doors. He was relatively young; just beyond juvenile in the eyes of his peers, but he had so many memories. The only thing to do was try the first door he could reach. So, he raised one of his dream-like arms, and pushed slightly on the nearest door. It opened with no effort, letting through a brilliant glare from whatever was beyond. He had to squint to see what was there, but soon it came into focus.

The scene before him was the vast open plains, and the sun was beating down overhead. He was walking between the much taller, gray limbs of his family. He was very young, and there were a few other calves as well; his cousins. This was his first time traveling to the sacred grounds they would go to again and again, year after year. There was so much excitement among the younger elephants, as the annual gathering was the only time all the members of their vast family came together.

A smile spread across Hugo's face as he witnessed the feelings and sights of this long forgotten memory. Giselly and Harris both looked at Doctor Scheckles, neither seeming sure what was going on. The doctor smiled along with Hugo. "There are likely many wonderful memories behind those doors, and many other not so wonderful ones. Your whole life is there, waiting for you to look back and remember it. The secret is, nothing we ever experience is really forgotten. It just gets lost in the crowd. It's time for you to search the doors, Hugo. Find the one that's locked. There may be more than one, but you'll know the right one when you find it."

The expression changed on Hugo's face from pleasure to concern as he gazed at all the doors. There were so many; they were countless. And they all looked the same as far as he could tell. He sighed and started walking between the floating doorways, occasionally reaching out to push at one of them. Memories flooded his mind as he opened doors; things he hadn't thought about in years, old faces of long past relatives, places and events that he had experienced years ago. All of them were there, but they weren't what he had been tasked to find.

And then he saw it. There, standing far in the back of his mind, was a door that glowed red around the edges, as if something inside wanted to get out. He looked at it for a moment, hesitant to approach. Did he really want to know what was in there? Whatever it was had to be painful, perhaps even frightening. But it could also help. Hugo approached the doorway and raised his round hand to press on it. The door was hot to the touch, but it refused to open. He jerked his hand away again. "I...I don't have the key. I can't open it," he said aloud in a quivering voice.

"It's okay, Hugo," Doctor Scheckles said quietly. "You can open it if you really want to. You have the key with you. Try looking in your pocket."

Hugo could feel himself shaking, though he had no idea if it was only the version of himself in his head, or if he was on the outside as well. He was barely aware that he still had an outside and that there was an audience watching that outer-self. The door remained before him, glowing and silent, taunting him with the secret hidden behind it. He had come all this way to learn the secret thought. To be free, or to be accountable.

The decision was made. Hugo reached slowly into his pocket and felt something press against the pad of his hand. He pulled it out again, and a small glowing dot the same deep red of

the door, rested in the center of his palm. Reaching out, he pressed the glow against the door, and heard an audible click as it unlocked. He closed his eyes and pushed against the hot surface, feeling it give way under the pressure.

On the outside, Hugo pressed his eyes closed tightly, and began to shutter as the doorway opened to him. “Everything is all right,” Doctor Scheckles said in her calm tone. “You’re not alone. Let yourself see the memory. Tell us what’s there.”

No, he was not alone. And he had come here for this purpose alone. Hugo took a deep, steadying breath and forced his eyes open. His outer, physical eyes also opened, but he stared blankly across the room, still under the relaxing influence of the hypnosis. The red glow surrounded him as he looked through the doorway, and he realized it was not light, but the red of blood. So much blood. Then redness was drawn away from him, and he realized that the memory was actually flowing backward. Silence turned into screams and motion, blurring in front of him too fast for him to follow.

The entire scene rewound until he was there, in the center of a crowd that was filtering into a deep, round valley. This is where it had all began. At first he forgot Doctor Scheckles request to tell them what happened over the over the mass of feelings the new memory brought him. It took effort for him to speak of it as he relived it once again, but finally the words came through the dream-like haze. “I was with them. The others. Dozens of us. We have arrived in the Valley of the Ancestors for our annual gathering. Our family; mothers, fathers, siblings, cousins, aunts and uncles.”

Hugo’s physical eyes slid closed once more as he recalled the events of the day, and his watchers listened in awed silence of the recovered tale. “It was hot; hotter than it had even been before. I was late. I had been traveling with Kurtis. My brother Kurtis. He had an injury on his leg. He said...he couldn’t remember how he got it. But it slowed him down. So we were behind many of the others, except the elderly matrons.”

The elephant was fully inside the memory now, living it as if it were happening again. Much to the relief of Harris, Hugo’s body went motionless now that he had broken through to the truth. “I’d been to the valley many times over the years. Everything was as I remembered it. Green, lush. It was hard to imagine that other families had gathered there at different times as well. The place always seemed pristine.”

Hugo lingered for some time simply marveling in the beauty of the valley. It was the last pleasant thing he could remember, and he didn’t want to lose it for what was to come next. If he could simply freeze time here in the tranquility of this place and company of his family, he would do so. But there were people waiting on the outside for the answer to questions all of them had. Just like time itself, the memory wound on.

“We were going to be there for a week,” he continued, his voice drifting lazily as he spoke about what he was seeing. “It was a time for saying goodbye to those who had past, and welcoming those who were new. The eldest matron oversaw it all. She welcomed everyone; mourned with everyone.”

The others had little experience with the elephant's culture, and listened in awe as he described what had become custom for him. There were few other species that had the closeness Hugo talked about. But it was all about to go horribly wrong, and Hugo shuttered again as he realized just how close the painful memories were. "It...it happened on the third day."

Hugo paused, quivering slightly. Doctor Sheckles nodded toward him, though he couldn't see the motion. "Go on," she coaxed softly. "It's okay. The memories can't hurt you now."

The elephant heard her voice, but he knew she was wrong. So very wrong. They would hurt him all over again, deep to the core. Maybe this had been a mistake. He could have taken his chances that no tangible evidence one way or another would be found, and he would be let free. But the nagging feeling of never knowing himself would remain with him. That alone spurred him to continue. "It was Kurtis," he said softly, letting that rest in the air for a moment before he clarified.

"We need more than that," Harris growled from his corner of the room. "How do we even know this guy isn't just playing us?" Giselly glared at him, but said nothing.

"Detective, please," Doctor Scheckles shot the hyena a cutting glance, silencing any further words as Harris opened his mouth to say something further. "You'll break his concentration." She looked back to Hugo, but Hugo still appeared to be deep in trance. "Please, Hugo. Tell us what happened with Kurtis."

Hugo gave a slight nod. Tears were starting to leak from his closed eyes as he watched the scene in his head. "It was his leg. An infection. He had grown weaker over those three days, and passed right there in the valley."

Another long silence followed with the three listeners looking at one another. When Hugo continued, his voice was so low, they could barely hear him. "We mourned. Many tears were shed for his passing, as they would be for any other. He was one of us. He was of us."

Hugo's eyes opened then, and he looked directly at Doctor Sheckles, a sudden awareness in his dark orbs. But his face and voice grew cold and emotionless. "I'm not sure why. I had known my cousin for many years. He was a little younger, more like a brother. We travelled together in the same circles. Something in me snapped. Maybe someone said something. Maybe I heard something in my own head."

He was fully aware now, and looked down at his large hands as he finished the story for the others. All the memories were there and there was nothing he could do to deny them. They played out in his mind, looping over and over as he recalled the story. "No. There were a thrumming. Others who didn't know Kurtis as well were murmuring about how he should have stayed away. He had corrupted the valley and the gathering by coming in that condition. I couldn't tell where the voices were coming from. They seemed to be all around me.

“I lashed out at the nearest body. I couldn’t even tell you who it was. That one action became a chain reaction. I was struck back, it turned into a fight. Some were defending the one I struck, while others had taken my side; they were as angry as I felt. Emotions rose, and while some tried to hold us back, they merely ended up getting involved in the fight. Soon, we were all fighting and screaming. It was defend yourself or be killed.”

Hugo swallowed and looked toward Giselly who was scowling more than ever that that truth had been laid out before them. “Somehow I was the last one standing. My senses were gone. There was only rage and sadness when I wandered out of that valley. That’s...that’s all there is to it.”

“Insanity,” Giselly said with a huff. “Innocent by mental incapacitation. You have no case, Harris.”

Detective Harris grinned and looked toward Hugo. “No? You said yourself anything he admits to under hypnosis isn’t admissible in court.”

“If I may interrupt,” Doctor Scheckles said, keeping her own eyes on Hugo. “Mr. Munson, are you completely awake?”

Hugo looked back to her and nodded again. “Yes. I had to wake up. I couldn’t stand being surrounded by that anymore.”

Scheckles smiled and nodded in return. “Of course. Then everything you just said about snapping and the fight; that was said with conscious effort, correct?”

“Yes,” Hugo replied quietly. He didn’t like what was now in his head, but he couldn’t deny it either.

“Then, Mr. Giselly,” Doctor Scheckles turned toward him. “It is my professional opinion not only as an experienced hypnotherapist, but criminal psychologist, that you are correct. Mr. Munson was not in his right mind at the time of the incident. My report on this case will state as much, and I will testify to that should this continue to court.” At that, she looked pointedly at Harris.

Harris growled and stood up. “That’ll be up to the prosecutors,” he said moving toward the door to the office. “In the mean time, Munson will continue enjoying our hospitality.” He opened the door and motioned for a pair of officers to take Hugo back to his cell.

Giselly stood up as well, nodding to Hugo. “Fine. I will be back tomorrow to start working on strategy.” Then he looked at Doctor Scheckles, seeming to soften now that he had something to work with. “Thank you, doctor. You’ve given Mr. Munson a fighting chance.”

“No,” she replied, shaking her head. “It was always in him. I just helped bring it out.” She stepped over to Hugo, placing a hoof encouragingly on his hand. “There’s still more to come, Mr. Munson. But I think you’ll be all right. I’m so very sorry for your loss.”

Hugo nodded and stood as the officers came to take him out of the room. They recuffed his large hands, and started for the door. Harris led the way out, and Doctor Scheckles and Giselly followed behind Hugo. The elephant closed his eyes as he was taken away, a strange mix of emotions playing through his mind. The rage was gone, but there was a deep sadness as well as relief that it was all out in the open now.

Hugo took a deep breath and focused on the beauty of the valley as he had first looked upon it as a child. There had been many happy times in this place. He knew he would never return there again, even if he was freed. So, he held onto this single image, feeling it would be the one thing that would keep him going. He whispered a soft prayer to the lives lost there, and opened his eyes again, looking now ahead to the future, whatever it would hold for him.