THE TALE OF
PUPILY-EYEBALLS-THING

A TRUK GHOST STORY

As told by BOUTAU K. EFOT

Translator’s note. In 1964-65 I spent ten months
with my wife and two sons on leave from the
University of Pennsylvania doing ethnographic
research in Truk, an island group in the Trust
Territory of the Pacific Islands. The story of
Pupil-Eyeballs-Thing (Niféwûnmeseccawerccawer-
wer) was told me there by Boutau K. Efot of
Romónum Island.

About 47 years old at the time, he had already
served as mayor of Romónum, as Romónum’s
representative to the Truk District legislature,
and as its municipal judge, and had just recently
been elected traditional chief of Corog, one of
Romónum’s two villages, an office to which he
also happened by traditional hereditary succes-
sion to be heir apparent. He made a tape record-
ing of the story, and he and I together transcribed
it in Trukese. He then assisted me while I trans-
lated the text into English. As presented here,
the story closely follows the Trukese original, ex-
cept that I have abridged it slightly in two places
where it seemed overly repetitious by our stand-
ards.

The story belongs to a class of tales called
tutumnep in Trukese. Such tales, unlike wuruu,
do not recount presumably real happenings. They
are told for entertainment. In this story, however,
Lord-Above-Iras (Sowuwoóniïras) is a figure who
is prominent in wuruu that recount the origin of
Truk’s people. He is the legendary first chief and
is said to have been high chief over all of Truk.
Iras is a village on Wéené Island today. All other
names in the story refer to islands in Truk’s
lagoon.

I call this a ghost story, but use the word ogre
instead of ghost in translation. The Trukese word
soope in its broadest, but less usual, sense may
refer to any kind of invisible being; but most often
it designates either the shadow-soul (by contrast
with the good or mirror-soul) of a dead person,
which is malevolent, or some other kind of evil
spirit. Shadow-souls and other evil spirits are
feared because they feed on human beings, there-
by causing illness and possible death. In ghost
stories this spiritual cannibalism is portrayed in
very concrete terms, and the evil spirit is depicted
as a completely amoral, other-than-human being,
single-mindedly following its appetites, possessed
of superhuman powers but itself mortal. The
English word ogre seems most appropriate for
this kind of soope.

Another version of the same tale has been pub-
lished by William Lessa (Tales from Ulithi Atoll,
1961, pp. 60-61), who recorded it in Ulithi, some
800 miles west of Truk. It is probable, therefore,
that the tale is known through the chain of atolls
in between. In the Ulithi version, however, the
young woman escapes safely, and the ogre, on
returning home, is eaten by his ogre friends, whom
he had invited to a feast and who were not to be
put off because the expected dinner had got away.
The Trukese version ends quite differently and
goes on to point a moral.

Pointing a moral is characteristic of much
Trukese storytelling, at least today. In this case
it relates to mweceniya, which I have translated as
“unreasonable desire.” But this does not do the
word full justice. Mweceniya refers to the con-
tdition of being discontented with what one can
legitimately expect to have and of wanting things
that are inappropriate to one’s prospects and sta-
tion in life. There is an element of overweening,
of hubris, in it. Mweceniya is always included in
any listing of serious vices by Truk’s people.

—WARD H. GOODENOUGH
Boutan K. Elot, narrator of this story, is hereditary chief of Carol (Chowon) District of Rovitaim Island in Truk. He has held public office as Rovitaim’s elected mayor, municipal judge, and representative to the Truk District legislature. In World War II he served in the Japanese navy.

Truk’s islands, seen as one looks east from the summit of Mt. Wikpwee on Toon Island.
Once upon a time, on the mountain of Wééné named Wittipwen, there lived a young woman, daughter of Lord-Above-Iras. On this mountain that chief whose name was Lord-Above-Iras had his house, and in that house dwelt the young lady, his daughter. From all Truk’s lands men came to her, wanting to marry her; but come as they would, she just didn’t care for any of them.

In time, an ogre from Westoubach heard of this. He may have seen, too, for being an ogre, no matter where his body happened to be, he could observe what was far away. He thought to have this young woman for his wife. And it may be, he was also thought to have her for his dinner.

He set about telling his sisters to perfume a loincloth, and they went looking for sweet-smelling plants to work in. They wrapped it up and put it away for a few days before opening it; but then only all the plants on their own land were used. At the time, they decided that the loincloth was not fragrant enough. So they packed it away again and left it for an entire week. Now, when they unwrapped it, the plants of virtually all the lands of Truk wilted away from the loincloth’s fragrance.

Then the ogre, whose name was Pupipi-Eyeball-Thing and who had many heads on his body, took his loincloth one night and set out. Leaving Westoubach, he traveled east until he came to Inuk. He took off the first of his heads there and deposited it on Inuk. He went on to Paota and took off one of his heads there, too. Then he went to Wöney and deposited one there. He came to Fanapeg and left one; he came to Wééné and left one; he came to Éétt and left one. When he came to Seefen, he deposited one there; and now he had only one head left. From Seefen he proceeded to Néewá-wé village on Wééné, and from Néewá-wé to Mwán. Then he went to the young woman’s house under Wittipwen.

Once in the house and woke her. Everyone in the house was struck with the odor of his perfume. They marveled and wondered whose it could be, for of all the men who had come to the house on previous nights none had a fragrance like this.

The young woman opened her eyes and asked the ogre who he was.

"Don’t ask me again who I am," he said. "You wouldn’t know me, because mine is a distant land. But tell me one thing only. If you are willing for me to come in under your canopy with you, then tell me so. But if you are unwilling, then tell me that, too, and I shall depart."

At this, the young woman told him to come in with her. So he entered and stayed with her under her canopy, and they slept together there that night.

Afterwards, the ogre said to the young woman, "Now, if you really loved me in your heart, we shall go away together to my land this very night." After a bit she said, "Very well, I agree to it. I shall go with you and we shall be married."

Then they went out of the young woman’s house. They left her house, took the Mwán road to the village of Néewá-wé, and came out on the beach. There they saw a driftwood log. The ogre told the young woman that it was his canoe. They got aboard, and he undertook to paddle them.

Away they went and arrived at Seefen. The ogre’s head there called out, saying, "Pupipi-Eyeball-Thing, Sir!" And the ogre answered, "Ho, Sir!"

"Whence take you your companion, Sir?"

"Don’t call! Don’t call! Lord-Above-Iras’s child, by me beguiled! Down hither, my head!"

They went on to Páreén, and there, too, his head called out, "Pupipi-Eyeball-Thing, Sir!" Again the ogre answered, "Ho, Sir!"

"Whence take you your companion, Sir?"

"Don’t call! Don’t call! Lord-Above-Iras’s child, by me beguiled! Down hither, my head!"

This head, too, came out and fastened onto him.

They continued on to Éétt. His head there called out as before.

"Pupipi-Eyeball-Thing, Sir!"

"Ho, Sir!"

"Whence take you your companion, Sir?"

"Don’t call! Don’t call! Lord-Above-Iras’s child, by me beguiled! Down hither, my head!"

By this time the young woman felt there was something strange about what the man was saying. So she asked him, "Say, what is that you are saying?"

"I’m just talking to this calm, for it’s very fine weather we’re having tonight."

They continued on to Wééné, Wörüy, and Paota. At each place, the head he had deposited there called out, and he replied in the same way. And at each place, the head attached itself to him once more, so that the top of him now cast a big shadow over the land.

The last of his heads was on Inuk. It, too, called out, "Pupipi-Eyeball-Thing, Sir!" And once again the ogre answered, "Ho, Sir!"

"Whence take you your companion, Sir?"

"Don’t call! Don’t call! Lord-Above-Iras’s child, by me beguiled! Down hither, my head!"

Then this last head of his came out, and they set off from Inuk.

The young woman was observing now how very big the ogre’s head had become, for all of his heads had returned to him. "Say, what have you done to yourself?" she asked. "Is that how big your head is?"

"Not really," the ogre told her. "It’s just as it was."

But she said to him, "No! Please don’t make yourself look ugly again. For it wasn’t someone else who asked me to come with you. I have come with you because you asked me."

To this the ogre replied, "But what did you expect?"

On they went, on and on.

After a while, the ogre addressed the young woman, "Give me a look at me now." He turned toward her, and she looked up into his face; whereat the ogre let down his tongue and hugged out his eyes.

The young woman cried out in distress and said, "Please don’t worry me! Don’t hurt me, for I have come with you as your betroth."

On they went, in that canoes of theirs. Looking about, they no longer could see land. They had come really far away from Truk.

Then they came to the ogre’s place. He said to her, "This is my land here. But the girl saw no land and asked him, "Where is the land? For here there is none."

"Get off the boat, for it is here. We shall get off here."

They got off in the deep sea.

The ogre told the young woman, "Drivel!" And the two of them dived. They hit bottom on a slab of beachrock. But the ogre said, "Open, Rockhouse! Open!" And the beachrock opened out.

In they went, the two of them. They went in under the beachrock and entered the ogre’s house.

The people of the ogre’s household were asleep when they came in and went to bed. No one in the house was aware of their arrival.

From then on until morning, their sleep was very restless on account of their continually waking up all through the night. At length the ogre’s sisters took it up: "Who has this fellow been sleeping so restless? Someone let up his canopy there and have a look at him, for it is just as we heard the breathing of two from outside the canopy here."

Then one of them lifted up the canopy. She said to the others, "Who’s this fellow has company? A woman is here with him."

At this the ogre’s sisters were much distressed and cried the young woman that she should be with her ogre brother. They said to that one among them, "Rouse that woman. Wake her up so she can run away."

The ogre’s sister roused her, and the young woman awoke. She said, "What is it?"

"Have you any idea where you are?"

"I don’t know."

Then the woman of the house, the ogre’s sister, told the young woman, "Get up! Get up and run away. For that is really an ogre you are with."

The young woman then said to the other, "Save me!"

"As soon as you have waked up, come out and run away."

The young woman came out. She came out and joined the woman of the house, who said to her,
"You must take all of our weaving equipment here and carry it with you."

Thereupon the ogre’s sisters gave the young woman the pieces of their mother’s loom—all the parts they gave her; their mother’s things that belonged to her loom. They also gave her a powerful medicine and a bottle of stinging black ants.

She took them and went from their house. When she came to the beachrock, she remembered the ogre’s words and repeated them, “Open, Rockhouse! Open!” The beachrock opened and she went out. She daubed the medicine on the bottom of her feet, and then she was able to walk on the sea.

She ran. She ran and ran and ran. On and on and on and on. From here all the way to who knows where was the distance she had run, when the ogre awoke from his sleep. He reached out his hand, but the young woman was no longer there. He snapped open his eyes and did not see her. He turned up, raised his canopy, and called to his sisters and their mother.

“Where is that human I was going to eat?” he asked.

“We don’t know.” they answered.

Then he said, “Would you were dead for your lying! You probably told that human to run away.”

“No, really,” they said.

He went outside. He ascended to the surface of the sea. He stretched up, stretching himself up to the clouds, and then bent down. There was the young woman right under his eyes.

“Stay right where you are and die!” he said. The young woman retorted, “Come and catch me!”

The ogre was about to reach out and grab her by the head, when the young woman took the loom’s heddle and threw it at him. The ogre snatched it up. “Would you were dead, you pig! Here you’ve taken my mother’s heddle, and she’ll be in a fix without it.”

Then the ogre returned home and tossed it into his house. “Hey, you there, how is it you didn’t see that woman taking our mother’s things?”

With that, he went back again, straightened himself up, and bent down. Again the young woman was right under his eyes. This time she took her mother’s weaving sword and hurled it at him. This too, the ogre picked up. And this time, too, he returned to his house and threw it back in.

Then he set out once more, straightened himself up again, and bent down, and was about to reach out and seize the girl, when she took one of the loom beams and threw it at him. And again he took it and went back to his house, where he angrily scolded his sisters: why hadn’t they looked after this equipment, for that woman had stolen it.

By this time, the young woman was just below Inik. A fourth time the ogre straightened up, bent down, and was about to reach out and grab her, when the young woman threw the other loom beam at him. And a fourth time, he went back and tossed it into his house.

So it continued, on and on, with the things the young woman had taken from the ogre’s house. She battled and battled against him—she throwing something at the ogre and he taking it back to his house.

By and by, the young woman arrived at the edge of Pauta. The ogre had returned once again and was about to grasp her, when she threw at him the bottle of stinging black ants.

The ants crawled over his hair, down into his eyes. They overflowed out of his ears into his mouth. The ogre dove down under the sea and worked away at putting the ants out of his hair, his eyes, his mouth, and his ears.

As for the young woman, she kept running harder than ever. On and on and on. At length the ogre swam up to the surface, but the young woman was no longer in sight. She had reached Wëncë and had come up into her house.

From then on, the young woman gave careful thought lest she be tricked again by the ogre, should he come back for her. And after a while, the ogre did come back to Wëncë. There he stayed, going about in concealment. But the young woman did not walk abroad any more.

She was sure that the ogre would come back for her. And once he found her, he could easily kill her.

The ogre then caused a strong desire to surge in the hearts of the women of Mwän village, a desire to organize a fishing party for a catch to present to the chief. And on that very day, a woman began to organize a chief’s fishing party. She set about gathering women from all the houses and summoned them to go fishing with her that night.

This time the young woman accompanied the fishing party. She had been very careful not to go walking about, knowing that the ogre was just waiting for a chance to meet her. But the ogre had managed to cause in her, too, an irresistible desire to go with the fishing party. That is why she joined the other women that night and went off fishing with them.

They fished in the waters of Mwän. They went on from Neepwokos and fished all the way out to Neewcë, to the place where the ogre was staying. Then they turned back, all the women in the fishing party. The young woman went with them, too. But the ogre took a strand of the young woman’s hair and held it in his hand. She had very long hair.

The young woman continued on her way home. She entered her house and was about to go to her mat, when the strand of her hair pulled taut. She reached up and grasped it. “Oh! Where has this strand of my hair got caught?”

The people of her house told her, “Break it off.”

But she said, “No, I shan’t break it, for it would be a pity to waste it.” Then she went back alone, following out the strand of her hair, on and on to Neewcë. She was about to go farther . . . but there was the ogre, holding the strand of her hair.

The young woman said to the ogre. “Say! Who are you who holds that strand of my hair there?”

“Me. But come here, I want to talk to you.”

“Who are you?”

“Me!” Then he said, “What did you mean by running away from me that night?”

Then the young woman treated him, “Spare me!”

“Very well,” he said. “Come here, for I won’t eat you any more.”

Then the young woman went out again to the ogre.

The ogre grabbed hold of her and said, “Now I am really going to eat you to pay you back for making me so angry that day. Why did you run away from me when I had only been nice to you right up to the time we went to sleep? You treated me badly by running away from me. So now I am going to eat you.”

He seized the young woman, and they struggled and struggled. Because women are weak, that is why the young woman was overcome by the ogre. The ogre just plucked out the young woman’s eyebrows. He ate them only, but the young woman died.

Then the ogre went back again to his place in Westoombuck.

This story reminds us again that we should not desire unreasonable. For it was her unreasonable desire that killed the young woman. Finished and ended, complete as of now!