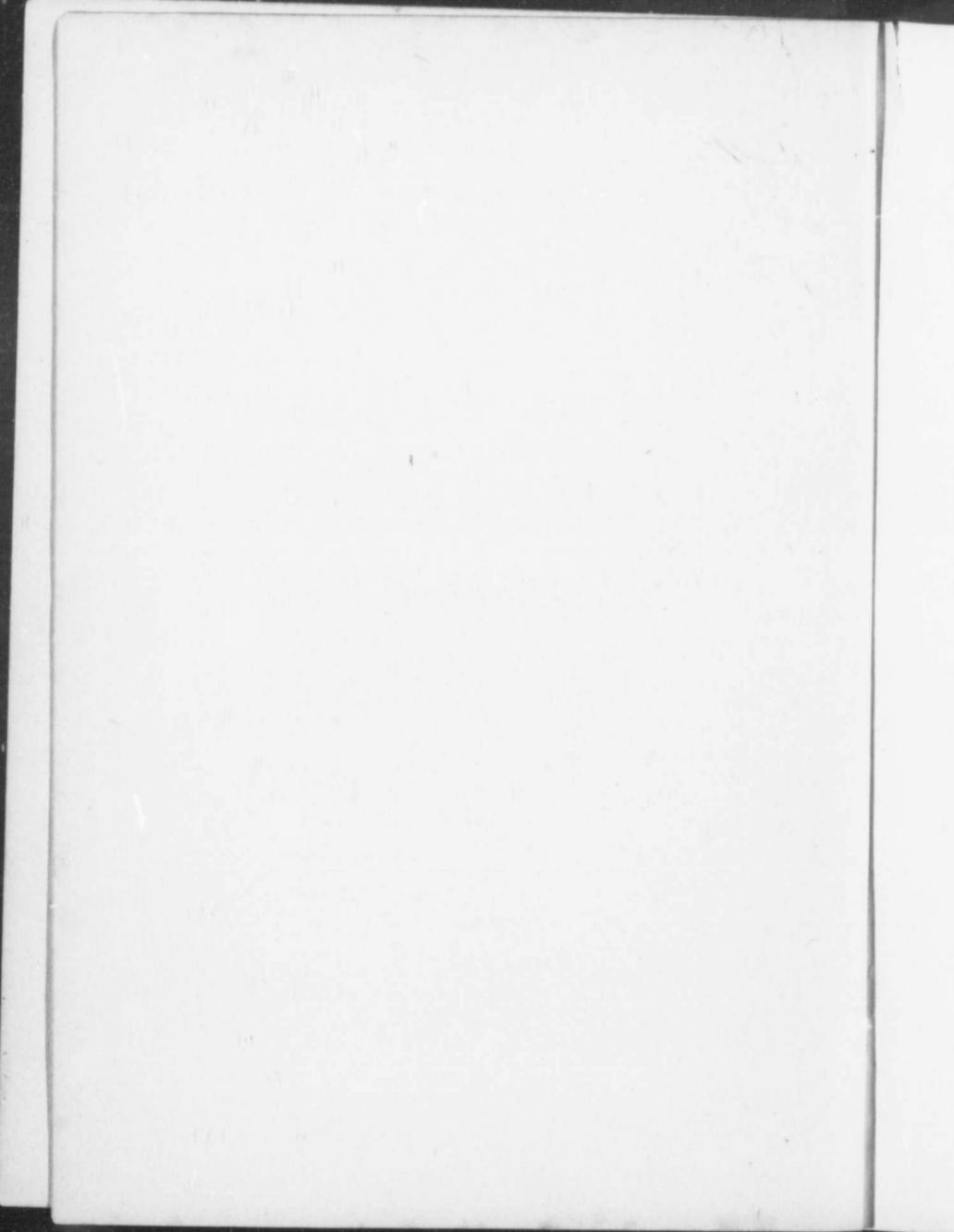
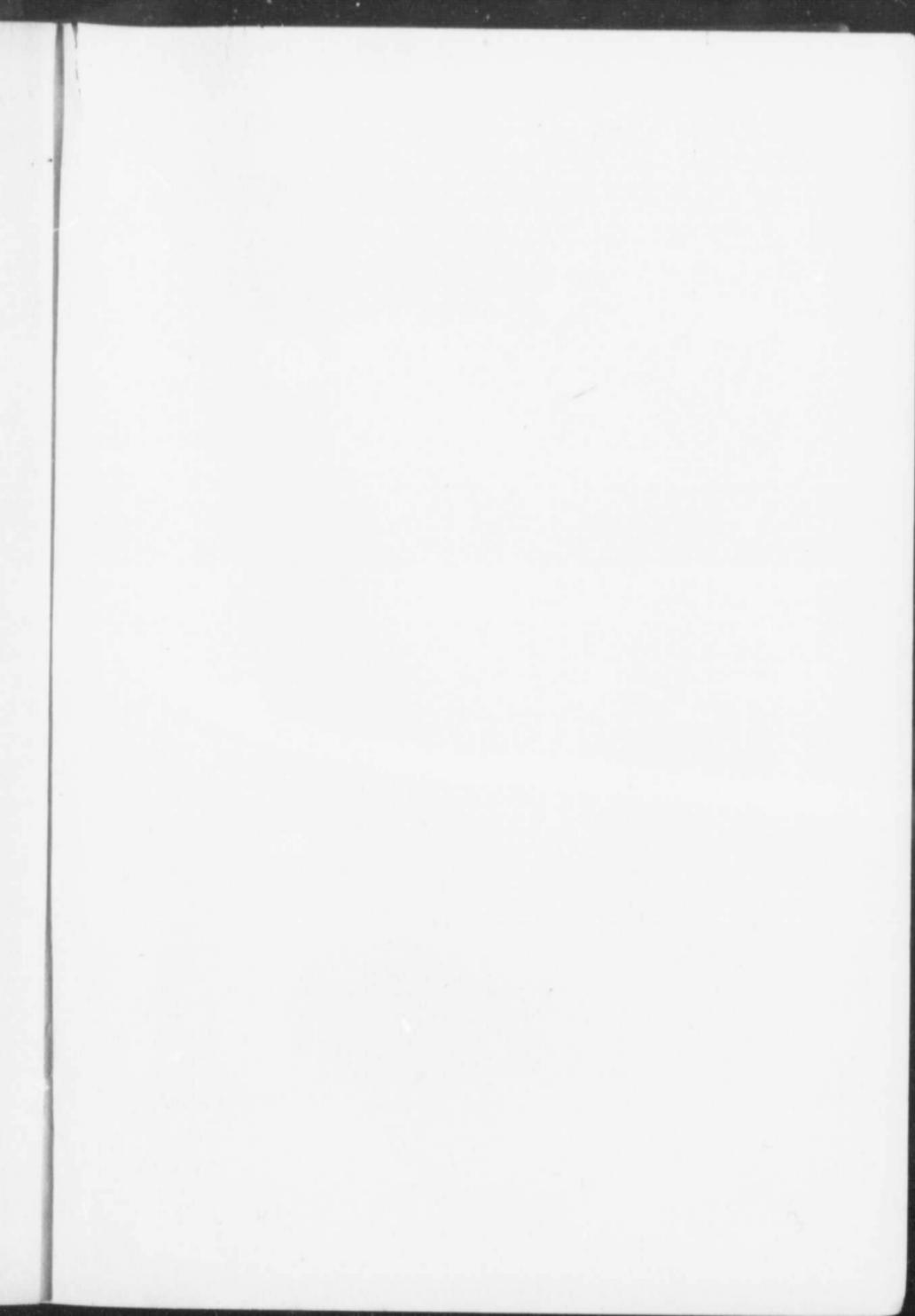


In the Morning of Time







"Mawg swung the limp form across his shoulder with a grin of satisfaction."

In the Morning of Time

By *Charles G. D. Roberts* Author of

"*The Backwoodsman*," "*The Forge in the Forest*,"

"*A History of Canada*," "*More Kindred of the*

Wild," etc., etc. :: :: :: :: / :: :: ::

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CHAPTER I

THE WORLD WITHOUT MAN

IT lay apparently afloat on the sluggish, faintly discoloured tide—a placid, horse-faced, shovel-nosed head, with bumpy holes for ears and immense round eyes of a somewhat anxious mildness.

The anxiety in the great eyes was not without reason, for their owner had just arrived in the tepid and teeming waters of this estuary, and the creatures which he had already seen about him were both unknown and menacing. But the inshore shallows were full of water-weeds of a rankness and succulence far beyond anything he had enjoyed in his old habitat, and he was determined to secure himself a place here.

From time to time, as some new monster came in sight, the ungainly head would shoot up amazingly to a distance of five or ten, or even fifteen feet, on a swaying pillar of a neck, in order to get a better view of the stranger. Then it would slowly sink back again to its repose on the water.

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The water at this point was almost fresh, because the estuary, though fully two miles wide, was filled with the tide of the great river rolling slowly down from the heart of the continent. The further shore was so flat that nothing could be seen of it but an endless, pale green forest of giant reeds. But the nearer shore was skirted, at a distance of perhaps half a mile from the water, by a rampart of abrupt, bright, rust-red cliffs. The flat land between the waterside and the cliffs, except for the wide strip of beach, was clothed with an enormous and riotous growth of calamaries, tree-ferns, cane and palm, which rocked and crashed in places as if some colossal wayfarers were pushing through them. Here and there along the edge of the cliffs sat tall beings with prodigious, saw-toothed beaks, like some species of bird conceived in a nightmare.

Far out across the water one of these creatures was flapping slowly in from the sea. Its wings—eighteen feet across from tip to tip—were not the wings of a bird, but of a bat or a hobgoblin. It had dreadful, hand-like claws on its wing-elbows; and its feet were those of a lizard.

As this startling shape came flapping shoreward, the head afloat upon the water eyed it with interest, but not, as it seemed, with any great apprehension. Yet it certainly looked formidable enough to excite misgivings in most creatures. Its flight was not the steady, even winging of a bird, but spasmodic and violent. It came on at a height of perhaps twenty feet above the sluggish tide, and its immense, circular eyes appeared to

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take no notice of the strange head that watched it from the water's surface. It seemed about to pass a little to one side, when suddenly, with a hoarse, hooting cry, it swerved and swooped, and struck at the floating head with open jaws.

Swift as was that unexpected attack, the assailant struck nothing but a spot of foam where the head had disappeared. Simultaneously with the lighting disappearance, there was a sudden boiling of the water some eighty-odd feet away. But the great bird-lizard was either too furious to notice this phenomenon or not sagacious enough to interpret it. Flopping into the air again, and gnashing his beaklike jaws with rage, he kept circling about the spot in heavy zigzags, expecting the harmless-looking head to reappear.

All at once his expectations were more than realized. The head not only reappeared, but on a towering, leather-coloured column of a neck it shot straight into the air to a height of twenty feet. The big, placid eyes were now sparkling with anger. The flat, shovel jaws were gaping open. They seized the swooping foe by the root of the tail, and, in spite of screeches and wild flappings, plucked him down backwards. At the surface of the water there was a convulsive struggle, and the wide wings were drawn clean under.

For several minutes the water seethed and foamed, and little waves ran clattering up the beach, while the owner of the harmless-looking head trod his assailant down and crushed him among the weeds of the bottom. Then the foam

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slowly crimsoned, and the mauled, battered body of the great bird-lizard came up again; for the owner of the mysterious head was a feeder on delicate weeds and succulent greenstuff only, and would eat no blood-bearing food. The body was still struggling, and the vast, dark, broken wings spread themselves in feeble spasms on the surface. But they were not left to struggle long.

The water, in the distance, had been full of eager spectators of the fight, and now it boiled as they rushed in upon the disabled prey. Ravenous, cavern-jawed, fishlike beasts, half-porpoise, half-alligator, swarmed upon the victim, tearing at it and at each other. Some bore off trailing mouthfuls of dark wing-membrane, others more substantial booty, while the rest fought madly in the vortex of discoloured foam.

At the beginning of the fray the grim figures perched along the red ramparts of the cliff had shown signs of excitement, lifting their high shoulders and half unfolding the stiff drapery of their wings. As they saw their fellow overwhelmed they launched themselves from their perch and came hooting hoarsely over the rank, green tops of the palms and feathery calamaries. Swooping and circling they gathered over the hideous final struggle, and from time to time one or another would drop perpendicularly downward to stab the crown or the face of one of the preoccupied fish-beasts with his trenchant beak. Such of the fish-beasts as were thus disabled were promptly torn to pieces and devoured by their companions.

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Some fifty feet away, nearer shore, the harmless-looking head which had been the source and inspirer of all this bloody turmoil lay watching the scene with discontent in its round, wondering eyes. Slowly it reared itself once more to a height of eight or ten feet above the water, as if for better inspection of the combat. Then, as if not relishing the neighbourhood of the fish-beasts, it slowly sank again and disappeared.

Immediately a heavy swirling, a disturbance that stretched over a distance of nearly a hundred feet, began to travel shoreward. It grew heavier and heavier as the water grew shallower. Then a leather-coloured mountain of a back heaved itself up through the smother, and a colossal form, that would make the hugest elephant a pigmy, came ponderously forth upon the beach.

The body of this amazing being was thrice or four times the bulk of the mightiest elephant. It stood highest—a good thirteen feet—over the haunches (which were supported on legs like columns), and sloped abruptly to the lower and lighter-built fore-shoulders. The neck was like a giraffe's, but over twenty feet in length to its juncture with the mild little head, which looked as if Nature had set it there as a pleasantry at the expense of the titanic body. The tail, enormous at the base and tapering gradually to a whip-lash, trailed out to a distance of nearly fifty feet. As its owner came ashore, this tremendous tail was gathered and curled in a semi-circle at his side—perhaps lest the delicate tip, if left too distant,

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might fall a prey to some insignificant but agile marauder.

For some minutes the colossus (he was one of the Dinosaurs, or Terrible Lizards, and known as a Diplodocus) remained on all-fours, darting his sinuous neck inquiringly in all directions, and snatching here and there a mouthful of the rank, tender herbage which grew among the trunks of fern and palm. Apparently the spot was to his liking. Here was a wide beach, sunlit and ample, whereon to bask at leisure. There were the warm and weed-choked shallows wherein to pasture, to wallow at will, to hide his giant bulk from his enemies if there should be found any formidable enough to make hiding advisable. Swarms of savage insects, to be sure, were giving him a hot reception—mosquitoes of unimaginable size, and enormous stinging flies which sought to deposit their eggs in his smooth hide, but with his giraffe-like neck he could bite himself where he would, and the lithe lash of his tail could flick off tormentors from any corner of his anatomy.

Meanwhile, the excitement off-shore had died down. The harsh hootings of the bird-lizards had ceased to rend the air as the dark wings hurtled away to seek some remoter or less disturbed hunting-ground. Then across the silence came suddenly a terrific crashing of branches, mixed with gasping cries. Startled, the diplodocus hoisted himself upon his hind-quarters, till he sat up like a kangaroo, supported and steadied by the base of his huge tail. In this position his head, forty feet

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above the earth, overlooked the tops of all but the tallest trees. And what he saw brought the look of anxiety once more into his round, saucer-eyes.

Hurling itself with desperate, plunging leaps through the rank growths, and snapping the trunks of the brittle tree-ferns in its path as if they had been cauliflowers, came a creature not unlike himself, but of less than half the size, and with neck and tail of only moderate length. This creature was fleeing in frantic terror from another and much smaller being, which came leaping after it like a giant kangaroo. Both were plainly dinosaurs, with the lizard tail and hind-legs; but the lesser of the two, with its square, powerful head and tiger-fanged jaws, and the tremendous, rending claws on its short forearms, was plainly of a different species from the great herb-eaters of the dinosaurian family. It was one of the smaller members of that terrible family of carnivorous dinosaurians which ruled the ancient cycad forests as the black-maned lion rules the Rhodesian jungles to-day. The massive iguanodon which fled before it so madly, though of fully thrice its bulk, had reason to fear it as the fat cow fears a wolf.

A moment more, and the dreadful chase, with a noise of raucous groans and pantings, burst forth into the open, not fifty feet from where the colossus stood watching. Almost at the watcher's feet the fugitive was overtaken. With a horrid leap and a hoot of triumph, the pursuer sprang upon its neck and bore it to the ground, where it lay bellowing hoarsely and striking out blunder-

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ingly with the massive, horn-tipped spur which armed its clumsy wrist. The victor tore madly at its throat with tooth and claw, and presently its bellowing subsided to a hideous, sobbing gurgle.

The diplodocus, meanwhile, had been looking down upon the scene with half-bewildered apprehension. These creatures were insignificant in size, to be sure, as compared with his own colossal stature, but the smaller one had a swift ferocity which struck terror to his dull heart.

Suddenly a red wrath mounted to his small and sluggish brain. His tail, as we have seen, was curled in a half-circle at his side. Now he bent his body with it. For an instant his whole bulk quivered with the extraordinary tension. Then, like a bow released, the bent body sprang back. The tail (and it weighed at least a ton) struck the victor and the victim together with an annihilating shock, and swept them clean around beneath the visitor's feet.

Down he came upon them at once, with the crushing effect of a hundred steam pile-drivers; and for the next few minutes his panicky rage expended itself in treading the two bodies into a shapeless mass. Then he slowly backed off down into the water where the weedy growths were thickest, till once more his whole form was concealed except the insignificant head. This he reared among the swaying tufts of the "mares' tails," and waited to see what strange thing would happen next.

He had not long to wait. That hideous, mangled

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heap there, sweating blood in the noon sun, seemed to have some way of making its presence known. Crashing sounds arose in different parts of the forest, and presently some half-dozen of the leaping, kangaroo-like flesh-eaters appeared.

They were of varying sizes, from ten or twelve feet in length to eighteen or twenty, and they eyed each other with jealous hostility. But one glance at the weltering heap showed them that here was feasting abundant for them all. With a chorus of hoarse cries they came hopping forward and fell upon it.

Presently two vast shadows came overhead, hovering a moment, and a pair of the great bird-lizards dropped upon the middle of the heap. Hooting savagely, with wings half uplifted, they struck about them with their terrible beaks till they had secured room for themselves at the banquet. Other unbidden guests came leaping from among the thickets ; and in a short time there was nothing left of the carcasses except two naked skeletons, dragged apart and half dismembered by mighty teeth. In the final *mêlée* one of the smaller revellers was himself pounced upon and devoured.

Then, as if by consent of a mutual distrust, the throng drew quickly apart, each eyeing his neighbour warily, and scattered into the woods. Only the two grim bird-lizards remained, seeming to have a sort of understanding or partnership, or possibly being a mated pair. They pried into the cartilages and between the joints of the skeletons with the iron wedges of their beaks, till there was

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not another tit-bit to be enjoyed. Then, hooting once more with satisfaction, they spread their batlike vanes and flapped darkly off again to their red watch-tower on the cliff.

When all was once more quiet the giant visitor fell to pasturing among the crisp and tender water-weeds. It took a long time to fill his cavernous paunch by way of that slender neck of his, and when he was satisfied he went composedly to sleep, his body perfectly concealed under the water, his head resting on a little islet of matted reeds in a thicket of "mares' tails." When he woke up again the sun was half-way down to the west, and the beach glowed hotly in the afternoon light. Everything was drenched in heavy stillness. The visitor made up his drowsy mind that he must leave his hiding-place and go and bask in that delicious warmth.

He was just bestirring himself to carry out his purpose, when once more a swaying in the rank foliage of the cycads caught his vigilant eye. Discreetly he drew back into hiding, the place being, as he had found it, so full of violent surprises.

Suddenly there emerged upon the beach a monster even more extraordinary in appearance than himself. It was about thirty-five feet in length, and its ponderous bulk was supported on legs so short and bowed that it crawled with its belly almost dragging the ground. Its small head, which it carried close to the earth, was lizard-like, shallow-skulled, feeble-looking, and its jaws cleft back past the stupid eyes. In fact, it was an inoffensive-looking head for such an imposing

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body. At the base of the head began a system of defensive armour that looked as if it might be proof against artillery. Up over the shoulders, over the mighty arch of the back, and down over the haunches as far as the middle of the ponderous tail, ran a series of immense flat plates of horn, with pointed tips and sharpened edges. The largest of these plates, those that covered the centre of the back, were each three feet in height, and almost of an equal breadth. Where the diminished plates came to an end at the middle of the tail, their place was taken by eight immense, needle-pointed spines, set in pairs, of which the chief pair had a length of over two feet. The monster's hide was set thick with scales and knobs of horn, brilliantly coloured in black, yellow, and green, that his grotesque bulk might be less noticeable to his foes among the sharp shadows and patchy lights of the fern jungles where he fed.

The sluggish giant moved nervously, glancing backwards as he came, and seemed intent upon reaching the water. In a few moments his anxiety was explained. Leaping in splendid bounds along his broad trail came two of those same ferocious flesh-eaters whom the great watcher among the reeds so disliked. They ranged up one on each side of the Stegosaur, who had halted at their approach, stiffened himself, and drawn his head so far back into the loose skin of his neck that only the sharp, chopping beak projected from under the first armour-plate. One of the pair threatened him from the front, as if to engross his attention, while

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the other pounced upon one of his massive, bowed hind-legs, as if seeking to drag it from beneath him and roll him over on his side.

But at this instant there was a clattering of the plated hide, and that armed tail lashed out with lightning swiftness, like a porcupine's. There was a tearing screech from the rash flesh-eater, and he was plucked back sidewise, all four feet in air, deeply impaled on three of those gigantic spines. While he clawed and writhed, struggling to twist himself free, his companion sprang hardily to the rescue. She hurled herself with all her weight and strength full upon the stegosaur's now unprotected flank. So tremendous was the impact that, with a frightened grunt, he was rolled clean over on his side. But at the same time his sturdy fore-arms clutched his assailant, and so crushed, mauled and tore her that she was glad to wrench herself away.

Coughing and gasping, she bounded backwards out of reach; and then she saw that her mate, having wriggled off the spines, was dragging himself up the beach toward the forest, leaving a trail of blood behind him. She followed sullenly, having had more than enough of the venture. The triumphant stegosaur rolled himself heavily back upon his feet, grunted angrily, clattered his armoured plates, jerked his terrible tail from side to side as if to see that it was still in working order, and went lumbering off to another portion of the wood, having apparently forgotten his purpose of taking to the water. As he went, one of the grim bird-lizards from the cliff swooped down and

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hovered, hooting, over his path, apparently disappointed at his triumph.

The watcher in the reeds, on the other hand, was encouraged by the result of the combat. He began to feel a certain dangerous contempt for those leaping flesh-eaters, in spite of their swiftness and ferocity. He himself, though but an eater of weeds, had trodden one into nothingness, and now he had seen two together overthrown and put to flight. With growing confidence he came forth from his hiding, stalked up the beach, coiled his interminable tail beside him, and lay down to bask his dripping sides in the full blaze of the sun.

The colossus was at last beginning to feel at home in his new surroundings. In spite of the fact that this bit of open beach, overlooked by the deep green belt of jungle and the rampart of red cliffs, appeared to be a sort of arena for titanic combats, he began to have confidence in his own astounding bulk as a defence against all foes. What matter his slim neck, small head and feeble teeth, when that awful engine of his tail could sweep his enemies off their feet, and he could crush them by falling upon them like a mountain! A pair of the great bird-lizards flapped over him, hooting malignantly and staring down upon him with their immense, cold eyes, but he hardly took the trouble to look up at them.

Warmed and well fed, his eyes half-sheathed in their membraneous lids, he gazed out vacantly across the waving herbage of the shallows, across

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the slow, pale tides whose surface boiled from time to time above the rush of some unseen giant of a shark or ichthyosaur.

In the heavy heat of the afternoon the young world had become very still. The bird-lizards, all folded in their wings, sat stiff and motionless along the ramparts of red cliff. The only sounds were the hiss of those seething rushes far out on the tide, the sudden droning hum of some great insect darting overhead, or the occasional soft clatter of the long, crisp cycad leaves as a faint puff of hot air lifted them.

At the back of the beach, where the tree-ferns and the calamaries grew rankest, the foliage parted noiselessly at a height of perhaps twenty feet from the ground, and a dreadful head looked forth. Its jaws were both long and massive, and armed with immense, curved teeth like scimitars. Its glaring eyes were overhung by eaves of bony plate, and from the front of its broad snout rose a single horn, long and sharp. For some minutes this hideous apparition eyed the unconscious colossus by the waterside. Then it came forth from the foliage and crept noiselessly down the beach.

Except for its horned snout and armoured eyes, this monster was not unlike in general type to those other predatory dinosaurs which had already appeared upon the scene. But it was far larger, approaching thirty-five feet in length, and more powerfully built in proportion to its size; and the armoury of its jaws was more appalling. With a stealthy but clumsy-looking waddle, which was

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nevertheless soundless as a shadow, and his huge tail curled upwards that it might not drag and rattle the stones, he crept down until he was within some fifty feet or more of the drowsing colossus.

Some premonition of peril, at this moment, began to stir in the heavy brain of the colossus, and he lifted his head apprehensively. In the same instant the horned giant gathered himself, and hurled himself forward. In two prodigious leaps he covered the distance that separated him from his intended prey. The coiled tail of the colossus lashed out irresistibly, but the assailant cleared it in his spring, fell upon the victim's shoulders, and buried his fangs in the base of that columnar neck.

The colossus, for the first time, was overwhelmed with terror. He gave vent to a shrill, bleating bellow—an absurdly inadequate utterance to issue from this mountainous frame—writhed his neck in snaky folds, and lashed out convulsively with the stupendous coils of his tail. But he could not loosen that deep grip, or the clutch of those iron claws.

In spite of the many tons weight throttling his neck, he reared himself aloft, and strove to throw himself over upon his assailant. But the marauder was agile, and eluded the crushing fall without loosing his grip. Then, bleating frightfully, till the sounds re-echoed from the red cliffs and set all the drowsing bird-lizards lifting their wings, he plunged down into the tide and bore his dreadful

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adversary out of sight beneath a smother of ensanguined foam.

Now, the horned giant was himself a powerful swimmer and quite at home in the water, but in this respect he was no match for his quarry. Refusing to relinquish his hold, he was borne out into deep water; and there the colossus, becoming all at once agile and swift, succeeded in rolling over upon him. Forced thus to loose his grip, he gave one long, ripping lunge with his horn, deep into the victim's flank, and then writhed himself from under. The breath quite crushed out of him, he was forced to rise to the surface for air. There he rested, recovering his self-possession, reluctant to give up the combat, but even more reluctant to expose himself to another such mauling in the depths. As he hesitated, about a hundred feet away he saw the mild little head of the colossus, apparently floating on the tide, and regarding him anxiously. That decided him. With a crashing bellow of rage and a sweep of his powerful tail he darted at the inoffensive head. But it vanished instantly, and a sudden tremendous turmoil, developing into a wake that lengthened out with the speed of a torpedo-boat, showed him the hopelessness of pursuit. Turning abruptly, he swam back to the shore and sulkily withdrew into the thickets to seek some less unmanageable quarry.

The colossus, so deeply wounded that his trail threw up great clots and bubbles of red foam, swam onward several miles up the estuary. He realized now that that patch of sunny beach was

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just a death-trap. But in the middle of the estuary, far out from either shore, far removed from the unseen, lurking horrors of the fern forests, spread acre upon acre of drowned marsh, overgrown with tall green reeds and feathery "mares' tails." Through these stretches of marsh he ploughed his way, half-swimming, half-wading, and felt that here he might find a safe refuge as well as an unfailing pasturage. But the anguish of his wounds urged him still onwards.

Beyond the reed-beds he came to a long, narrow islet of wet sand, naked to the sun. This appeared to him the very refuge he was craving, a spot where he could lie secure and lick his hurts. He dragged himself out upon it eagerly. Not until he had gained the very centre of it did he notice how his ponderous feet sank in it at every stride. As soon as he halted he felt the treacherous sands sucking him down. In terror he struggled to free himself, to regain the water. But now the sands had a grip upon him, and his efforts only engulfed him the more swiftly. He reared upon his hind legs, and immediately found himself swallowed to the haunches. He fell forward again, and sank to his shoulder-blades. And then, the convulsive thrashings of his tail hurling the sands in every direction, he lifted his head and bleated piteously.

The struggle had already drawn the dreadful eyes of those grim, folded figures perched along the cliff-tops miles away; and now, as if in answer to his cry, they came fluttering darkly over him. Seeing his helplessness, they flapped down upon

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him with hoots of exultation. Their vast beaks tore at his helpless back, and stabbed at the swiftly writhing convolutions of his neck. One, more heedless than his fellows, came within reach of the thrashing tail, and was dashed, half stunned, to earth, where the sands got him in their hold before he could recover himself. With dreadful screeches, he was sucked down, but his fellows paid no attention to his fate. And meanwhile, in a ring about the islet, not daring to come nearer for terror of the quicksand, crocodiles and alligators and ichthyosaurs, with upturned, gaping snouts, watched the struggle greedily.

As the lower part of his neck was drawn down into the quicksand, the colossus lost the power to move his head quickly enough to evade the attacks of his horrid assailants. A moment more, and he was blinded. Then he felt his head enfolded in the strangling membranes of wings and borne downwards. Once or twice the convulsions of his neck threw his enemies off, and the bleeding, sightless head re-emerged to view.

But not only his force, but his will to struggle, was fast ebbing away. Presently, with a thunderous, gasping sob, the last breath left his mighty lungs, and his head dropped on the sand. It was trodden under in an instant; and then, afraid of being engulfed themselves, the hooting revellers abandoned it, to crowd struggling upon the arched hump of the back. Here they tore and gorged and quarrelled till, some fifteen minutes later, their last foothold sank beneath them. Then, with

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dripping beaks and talons, they all flapped back to their cliffs; and slowly the fluent sand smoothed itself to shining complacency over the tomb of the diplodocus, hiding and sealing away the stupendous skeleton for half a million years.

CHAPTER II

THE KING OF THE TRIPLE HORN

IT was a little later in the Morning of Time—later by perhaps some two or three hundred thousand years. Monstrous mammals now held sway over the fresh, green round of the young earth, so exuberant in her youthful vigour that she could not refrain from flooding the Poles themselves with a tropical luxuriance of flower and tree. The supremacy of the Giant Reptiles had passed.

A few representatives of their most colossal and highly-specialized forms still survived, still terrible and supreme in those vast, steaming, cane-clothed savannahs which most closely repeated the conditions of an earlier age. But Nature, pleased with her experiments in the more promising mammalian type, had turned her back upon them after her fashion, and was coldly letting them die out. Her failures, however splendid, have always found small mercy at her hands.

But it was little like a failure he looked, the giant who now heaved his terrible, three-horned

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front from the lilled surface of the lagoon wherein he had been wallowing, and came ponderously ploughing his way ashore. As he emerged upon dry ground, he halted—with the tip of his massive, lizard-like tail still in the water—and shook a shower from the hollows of his vast and strangely armoured head.

His eyes, coldly furious, and set in a pair of goggle-like projections of horn, peered this way and that, as if suspecting the neighbourhood of a foe. His gigantic snout—horned, cased in horn, and hooked like the beak of a parrot—he lifted high, sniffing the heavy air. Then, as if to end his doubts by either drawing or daunting off the unknown enemy, he opened his grotesquely awful mouth and roared. The huge sound that exploded from his throat was something between the bellow of an alligator and the coughing roar of a tiger, but of infinitely vaster volume.

The next moment, as if in deliberate reply to the challenge, an immense black beast stepped from behind a thicket of pea-green bamboo, and stood scrutinizing him with wicked little piglike eyes.

It was the old order confronted by the new, the latest, most terrible and perhaps most efficient of the titanic but vanishing race of the Dinosaurs, face to face with one of those monstrous mammalian forms upon which Nature was just now trying her experiments.

And the place of this meeting was not unfitted to such a portentous encounter. The further shore of the lagoon was partly a swamp of rankest

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growth, partly a stretch of savannah clothed with rich cane-brake and flowering grasses that towered fifteen or twenty feet into the air. But the hither shore was of a hard soil mixed with sand, carpeted with a short, golden-green herbage, and studded with clumps of bamboo, jobo, mango and mahogany, with here and there a thicket of canary-flowered acacia, bristling with the most formidable of thorns.

They were not altogether ill-matched, these two colossal protagonists of the Saurian and the Mammal. The advantage of bulk lay altogether with the Dinosaur, the three-horned King of all the Lizard Kind. His armament, too, whether for offence or for defence, was distinctly the more formidable. Fully twenty feet in length, and perhaps eight feet high at the crest of the massively-rounded back, he was of ponderous breadth, and moved ponderously on legs like columns.

His splotched brown and yellow hide was studded along the neck and shoulders with pointed knobs of horn. His enormous, fleshy tail, some seven feet long and nearly two feet thick at the base, tapered very gradually to a thick tip, and dragged on the ground behind him. But the most amazing thing about this King of the Lizards was his monstrous and awe-inspiring head.

Wedge-shaped from the tip of its cruel parrot-beak to its spreading, five-foot-wide base, its total length was well over seven feet. Its three horns, one on the snout and two standing out straight forward from the forehead just above the eyes, were immensely thick at the base and fined down

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smoothly to points of terrible keenness. The one on the snout was something over a foot in length, while the brow pair were nearly three feet long.

Almost from the roots of these two terrific weapons protruded the huge horn goggles which served as sockets for the great, cold, implacable lizard-eyes. Behind the horns, outspreading like a vast ruff from three to four feet wide upwards and laterally, slanted a smooth, polished shield of massive shell like the carapace of a giant turtle, protecting the neck and shoulders from any imaginable attack.

The antagonist who had come in answer to the giant's challenge was less extravagant in appearance and more compact in form. He was not much over a dozen feet in length, but this length owed nothing to the tail, which was a mere wriggling pendant. He was, perhaps, seven feet high, very sturdy in build, but not mountainous like his terrible challenger. His legs and feet were something like those of an elephant, and he looked capable of a deadly alertness in action. But, as in the case of the King Dinosaur, it was his head that gave him his chief distinction. Long, massive and blunt-nosed, it was armed not only with six horns, set in pairs, but also with a pair of deadly, downward-pointing tusks—like those of a walrus, but much shorter, sharper and more effective.

Of the six horns, the first pair, set on the tip of the broad snout, were mere bony points, of no use as weapons, and employed by their owner for rooting in the turf after the fashion of a tuber-

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hunting pig. The second pair, set about the middle of the long face, just over the eyes, were about eighteen inches in length, and redoubtable enough to make other weapons seem superfluous.

The third pair, however, were equally formidable, and set far back at the very base of the skull, like those of an antelope. The eyes, as has been already stated, were small, deep-set and vindictive. The sullen black of his colouring added to the portentousness of his swift appearance around the clump of pea-green bamboo.

For several minutes the two monsters stood eyeing each other, while the rage of an instinctive hatred mounted slowly in their sluggish brains. To the King Dinosaur, this stranger was a trespasser on his domain, where no other creature, unless of his own kind, had ever before had the presumption to confront him. The suddenness of the black apparition, also, exasperated him; and he loathed at once the sickly sour smell, so unlike the pungent muskiness of his own kindred, which now for the first time met his sensitive nostrils.

The Dinoceras, on his part, was in a chronic state of rage. He was a solitary old bull, driven out, for his bad temper, from the comfortable herd of his fellows, and burning to find vent for his bottled spleen. The herd, in one of its migrations, had just arrived in the neighbourhood of the great lagoons, and he, in his furious restlessness, was unconsciously playing the part of vanguard to it.

He had never, of course, conceived of so terrible

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an adversary as this splotched brown and yellow monster before him. But he was in no mood to calculate odds. For all his blind rage, however, he was a crafty fighter, always. Seeing that the challenger made no move, he gave voice to a huge, squealing grunt, like the noise of a herd of raging pigs. Then he dug his armed snout into the turf and hurled a shower of sod into the air.

In the eyes of the King Dinosaur this was apparently an intolerable insult. With a roar he came lumbering forward, at a slow, rolling run which seemed to jar the earth. Grunting again, and moving at thrice his speed, the black beast rushed to meet him, head down, like a charging bison.

They met under the spreading branches of an immense hoy-a-tree. But they did not meet fairly, head to head, as the Dinosaur intended. Had they done so the battle would have been decided then and there, for the black beast's horns and unprotected front were no match for the impenetrable armour and levelled lances of the King's colossal head. But they did *not* meet fairly. The black stranger was much too crafty for that. At the last moment he swerved nimbly aside, wheeled with an agility that was marvellous for a creature of his bulk, and thrust at the shoulders of the colossus with a fierce, rooting movement like the stroke of the wild boar.

But he struck the rim of that impenetrable defence, the spreading ruff of horn. And he might as well have struck a mountain-side. That enormous bulk, firm-based on the wide-set columns

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which formed its legs, merely staggered an instant, coughed from the jarring of the blow, and swung about to present his terrific horns against another such attack. The black stranger, meanwhile, as if disappointed at the meagre result of his tactics, had drawn back out of reach. He stood rooting the turf and squealing defiance, in the hope of luring the giant into a second charge.

The stupendous duel had two interested spectators. On the top of the next tree sat an extraordinary-looking bird, about the size of a pheasant, coloured blue and rose like a macaw. Its tail was like a lizard's, long and fully-vertebrated, with a pair of flat feathers standing out opposite each other at right angles from each joint, for all the world like an immense acacia-frond done in red. At the tips of its wing-elbows it carried clutching, handlike claws, resembling those of the flying reptiles; and its straight, strong beak was armed with pointed teeth. It kept opening and shutting its beak excitedly and uttering sharp cries, as if calling everyone to come and see the fight.

The other spectator was not excited at all. He was a large, apelike man—one would have said, rather, a manlike ape, had it not been for the look in his eyes.

This enigmatic figure sat on a branch immediately over the combatants, and held on with one powerful, hairy hand to the branch just above him. He was covered with thick, brown hair, like fur, from head to foot, but that on his head was true hair, long and waving. His shoulders were mas-

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sive, his chest of great depth, his arms so long that if he had been standing erect they would have hung to his knees, his legs short, massive and much bowed. His hands were furred to the second joint of the fingers, but they were the hands of a man, not those of an ape, for the huge thumb was opposed to the fingers instead of being set parallel with them like another finger. His head was low in the arch of the skull, low and narrow in the forehead, with a small facial angle and hardly any bridge to the broad, flat, wide-nostrilled nose; and the jaws were heavy and thrust forward brutishly. But the eyes, under the roof of the heavy, bony brows, held an expression profoundly unlike the cold, mechanical stare of the giant Dinosaur or the twinkling, vindictive glare of the black stranger. They gazed down at the battle with a sort of superiority, considerate, a little scornful, in spite of the obvious fact that either of the two, as far as mere physical bulk and prowess were concerned, could have obliterated him by simply setting foot upon him. In his free hand he grasped a branch of acacia set with immense thorns, the needle-like points of which he touched contemplatively from time to time, as if pondering what use he could put them to. He had no marked prejudice, for the moment, in favour of either side in the battle below him. Both monsters were his foes, and the ideal result, in his eyes, would have been for the two to destroy each other. But if he had any preference, it was for the black mammalian beast, the lizard monster

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appearing to him the more alien, the more incomprehensible and the more impregnable to any strategy that he might devise.

For perhaps a couple of minutes, now, the King kept his place, wheeling ponderously to face his agile opponent, who circled about him at a distance of ten to twelve yards, seeking an opportunity to get in a rush upon his open flank. This wheeling and circling made the cool watcher in the tree impatient. Wrenching off a heavy branch, he hurled it down with all his force upon the King's face. To the King this seemed but another insult from his black antagonist, and his rage exploded once more. With a roar he wallowed forward, thinking to pin the elusive foe to earth and tread the life out of him.

This gave the black beast his opportunity. Doubling nimbly like a wild boar, he dashed in and caught his colossal opponent fairly on the side, midway between the shoulder and the haunch. The impact shocked the breath from the monster's lungs, with a huge, explosive cough, and brought him to a bewildered standstill, though it could not throw him from his feet. But the armoured hide proved too tough for the black beast's horns to penetrate. Perceiving this on the instant, the latter reared, and brought down the two awful daggers of his tusks upon the monster's ribs. They penetrated, but they failed to rip as far and as conclusively as their owner intended. And while he struggled to free himself for another attack, the monster recovered from his daze.

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Now the stranger had taken count only of those weapons which the King Dinosaur bore on his terrible front; and these for the moment were out of reach. But he had forgotten the massive and tremendous tail. Suddenly it lashed out, nearly half a ton in weight, and with the force of a pile-driver. It struck the black beast on the legs, and swept them clean from under him.

Before he could pick himself up the Dinosaur had swung about and buried all three horns, to the sockets, in his throat and chest. His life went out in one ear-splitting squeal of rage and anguish. The red blood streaming from horns and ruff, the monster wrenched himself free, and then moved irresistibly over his victim, like a rolling mountain.

When satisfied that his triumph was complete, the King drew back a pace or two, and examined the mangled heap with his cold, unchanging stare. Then he sniffed at it contemptuously, and prodded it with his nose-horn, and tore it with his extravagant parrot-beak. But, being a feeder on herbage only, he had not thought of tasting the red flesh. The smell of it was abominable to him; and presently he moved closer under the trees to wipe his beak, as a bird might, on a clump of coarse grasses.

As he did so, the lowering of his head threw his horny ruff far forward, exposing the folds of naked hide on the back of his neck. The silent man-creature on the branch above was quick to note the opportunity. He was displeased at the monster's triumph. He was also interested to see

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if he had any power to hurt so colossal and well protected a foe. Swinging down by his legs and one hand, he thrust the thorned branch of acacia deep in under the ruff. The monster, jerking his head up sharply at this unexpected assault, drove the long thorns well home.

In an instant he was beside himself with rage and pain. Roaring till the blue-and-crimson bird on the tree-top flew off in a panic, he shook his head desperately, and then almost tried to stand upon it. He started to roll over on his back, hoping thus to dislodge the galling thing beneath the carapace, but thought better of it at the first added pressure. His contortions were so vehement that the man discreetly drew himself up to a higher branch, a slow grin widening his heavy mouth, as he marked his power to inflict injury on even such an adversary as the King Dinosaur. The experiment had been successful beyond his utmost anticipations. Like Nature herself, he was continually experimenting, but by no means always with satisfactory results.

Suddenly the monster made off, with head held as low as possible, for the edge of the lagoon. Ploughing his way in with a huge splashing, he disappeared beneath the water. A minute later he returned to the surface and swam rapidly towards the jungle on the opposite shore, probably intending to find some projecting stump of a dead limb on which he could scratch the torment from under his ruff. At the edge of the jungle he was joined by another monster, like himself, but smaller

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—probably one of his mates—and together they disappeared, with heavy crashings, in the rank tangle of the swamp-growths.

The man-creature descended from his refuge, carrying in one hand a heavy fragment of branch, which he held awkwardly, as if not over-familiar with the idea of an artificial weapon. He seemed to be groping his way towards some use of it, either as a club or as a stabbing instrument. During the fight, while he was experimenting with the thorn branch, he had evidently had this weapon lodged in some safe crotch. And now he kept handling it with a curious interest.

Standing erect, he might easily have been mistaken for a slightly built and shapelier variety of gorilla but for the true man-hands and the steady, contemplative, foreseeing look in the eyes. He came and examined the mangled bulk of the *Dinoceras*, scrutinized the horns and tusks minutely, and strove with all his force to wrench one of the latter from its socket, as if hoping to make some use of it. Then, fastidiously selecting a shred of the victim's torn flesh, he sniffed and nibbled at it, and then threw it aside. He could eat and enjoy flesh-food at a pinch. But just now fruit was abundant; and fruit, with eggs and honey, formed the diet he preferred. As he stood pondering the lifeless mass before him, a shrill call came to his ears, and, turning sharply, he saw his mate, with her baby in the crook of her hairy arm, standing at the foot of a tree, and signalling him to come to her. As soon as she saw

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that he understood, and was coming, she swung herself lightly up into the branches. He ran to the tree, climbed after her, and followed her to the very top, where she awaited him. The tree was taller than any of its neighbours, and commanded a clear view of the meadow-lands that lay a half mile back from the lagoon. His mate was pointing eagerly to these meadows. He saw that they were dotted and spotted with groups of great, black, horned and tusked beasts like the one whose destruction he had just witnessed. These were the migrant herds of the Dinoceras, just arrived at their new pasturage. The man eyed them with discontent. He had seen a specimen of their temper; and he congratulated himself that he and his mate knew how to live in trees.

The man-creature himself was a new-comer to the shores of the great lagoon. The place suited him admirably by reason of the abundance of its fruit. Along the banks of the lagoon were innumerable little groves of plantain, the rich sustaining fruit of which was of all foods his favourite. And he had found no trace whatever of his most dangerous enemies, the gigantic and implacable black lion of the caves, the red bear and the sabre-tooth.

Such an irresistible giant as the King of the Triple Horn he might wonder at, and hate, but he thought he had little cause to fear him. It is easy enough, if one is prudent, to avoid a mountain.

Having found the place good, and resolved to stay, the man had built a refuge for himself and

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his family in this tall watch-tower of a tree. With interwoven branches he had made a rude but substantial platform, and carpeted it to something like softness with smaller branches and twigs. A similar but lighter platform overhead made him a roof that was anything but waterproof, and a few bushy branches served for walls. Such as it was, it was at least the beginning of a home. He loved it; and in defence of the little hairy brown mate and downy brown baby who shared it with him he would have fought both Dinosaur and Dinoceras with his naked hands.

For some days nothing more was seen of the two Dinosaurs, the King being probably occupied, in the depths of the jungle, with the nursing of his wrath and his hurts. The herds of the Dinoceras, meanwhile, kept to their meadows, having better drinking-water in a slow stream which traversed the pastures than in the brackish tide of the lagoon.

Then came a morning when the brown mother, babe on arm, was gathering plantains not far from the water-side, while the man chanced to be away exploring the limits of his new domain. The woman looked up suddenly; and there, almost upon her, was the giant horror of the Dinosaur, his cold, expressionless eyes gaping at her immovably from their goggling sockets. She turned to flee; and there was the monster's mate, not quite so huge, but equally appalling. Behind her was an impenetrable wall of thorn-acacia. There was only one refuge—a tree, all too small, but lofty enough

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to take her beyond the reach of those horrifying horned and immobile masks. Up the little tree she went, nimbly as a monkey, and crouched shivering in a crotch. The slender trunk swayed beneath her weight. She clutched the brown baby to her heart, and sent shriek after shriek through the glades.

A mile away the man heard it. He gave one deep-chested shout in answer, and then came running in silence, saving his breath.

But it was a mile he had to come. The female Dinosaur, the more instantly malignant of the two, hurled herself upon the trunk of the tree. It swayed horribly, but did not yield at once. Thereupon the two began to root beneath it with their horns, having often used this method to obtain fruits which were above their reach. The tree leaned far over. The giant straddled it as a moose straddles a poplar sapling, and bore it down irresistibly. Its top touched earth.

The brown mother sprang forth with a tremendous leap, clearing the horns with a twist which nearly broke her back. She thought herself free. And then a gigantic tail struck her and felled her senseless. A second more, and the female Dinosaur's great foot crushed her and the wailing babe out of existence together.

The swift end of the tragedy the man had seen as he came racing down a stretch of open glade. He did not need to look at the awful thing beneath the monster's foot to know that all was over. Beyond one hoarse groan he uttered not a sound.

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But blindly—for he had never yet practised such an art—he hurled his ragged club at the nearest monster. It rebounded like a baby's rattle from the vast horn-armoured head. But a lucky chance had guided it. One of its sharp, splintered knots struck fairly in the Dinosaur's eye, and smashed it in the socket. She roared with agony; and the two, side by side, came lunging towards him.

The man ran back slowly. His despairing grief had changed suddenly into a cold hate and a resolve for vengeance. It was so easy for him to outstrip these lumbering monsters who were spouting their fetid, musky breath close upon his heels. He stumbled carefully at every other step. He let them feel that at the next stride they would transfix him. He led them on, the earth shaking beneath their tread, till another fifty feet would have brought them out upon the skirts of the meadow. But at this point, wearied by such an unwonted burst of effort, the King halted sulkily. He had not had an eye put out. He wanted to give it up. But his mate came right on, thirsting for her revenge.

The man was not content with her pursuit alone. Spurting ahead, he gathered up two handfuls of sand and gravel, whirled about, and drove them with all his strength into the King's cold eyes. It worked. Smarting and half blinded, the monster forgot his weariness, and came charging along furiously in the trail of his mate.

They were stupid, these Lizard Kings, with more brains in their pelvic arches than in their

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giant skulls. Because the puny man-creature went stumbling almost within reach of their beaks, they imagined they were going to catch him. That he would go dodging around thickets which they crashed over blindly, and would then return to present himself again deliberately before them, did not strike them as at all suspicious. Their dull but relentless hate once thoroughly aroused, as long as he was in sight and they could move the mighty columns of their legs, they would pursue him.

Through the last heavy fringe of bush and leafage they pursued him, and with a great crashing of branches came out upon the open, short-grass meadow. Still the man-creature stumbled on, straight out into the open, and still they followed, raging silently.

The black herds of the Dinoceras stopped feeding all at once, and raised their vicious heads and stared.

There were countless cows in the herd, horned like the bulls, but smaller, and without the rending tusks. The cows, at this season, all had young. After one long, comprehending stare at the two gigantic mottled shapes bearing down upon them, the herd put itself in motion. The man-creature they hardly noticed, he seemed so insignificant.

With eyes that took in everything, coolly and sagaciously, the man observed that the motion of the herd was an ordered one. The black beasts were deftly sorting themselves out to meet the danger. The bulls came thrusting themselves to

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the front—a terrific array which might have struck panic to the hearts of even the colossal Dinosaurs had they not been too stupid with rage for any new impression to pierce their brains. The cows, meanwhile, pushing their calves into a huddled mass behind them, formed themselves into a second array, a reserve of less mass and strength than the ranks of the bulls, but of an invincible mother-fury.

The man, with a wise fearlessness, ran on straight through the gathering line of bulls, the nearest of whom thrust at him carelessly and then paid him no more heed. Behind their ranks, hidden now from the sight of his pursuers, he swerved, avoiding the line of cows, ran sharply to the right, and came back around the end of the line to see what was going to happen. For all his grief, his heart was thumping almost to suffocation as his titanic vengeance moved to its end.

When the two raging Dinosaurs lost sight of their prey they stopped short, stupidly bewildered. Then they noticed the array of black beasts charging upon them. This, in their mad mood, afforded a new object to their rage. They plunged wallowing forward to meet the new foe. And at that moment the man, appearing round the wing of the black ranks, halted abruptly, and laughed.

It was a strange, disconcerting sound, that laughter, and the nearest Dinoceras, disturbed by it, edged away and crowded against his neighbour's flank in an inexplicable apprehension.

The next moment the stupendous opposing

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forces met with a shock that, to the man's overstrung senses, seemed to make the very daylight reel. There was no space for evasion or manoeuvre. The two ponderous bulks went straight through the ranks of the black bulls, ripping them with beak and horn from shoulder to rump, treading them down like corn, and trampling them under foot as they rolled on. The bulls on either side charged on their flanks, rearing, grunting, squealing insanely and ripping with the massive daggers of their tusks. But as this terrific assault came from both sides at once, the two monsters were in reality supported by it, so that they were not swept off their feet. Almost without a check, as it seemed, they ploughed straight on, lashing with their mighty tails, and leaving a trail of disabled victims behind them, and so wore their way right up to the line of the cows.

But here they were stopped. The calves were behind that line.

The black mothers simply heaped themselves upon those impaling horns and armoured fronts, bearing them down, smothering, engulfing them in an avalanche of screaming and monstrous bulks. The bulls, meanwhile, were rending, tearing, stabbing, on flank and rear. The two Dinosaurs disappeared from view. The dreadful mountain of writhing, gigantic shapes heaved convulsively for some minutes. Then the great columns that were the Dinosaurs' legs seemed to crumble beneath the weight. The awful, battling heap sagged, fell apart, and let in the glare of the sunlight upon

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what had been the two colossal monarchs of the early world. The dreadful, unrecognizable things still moved, still heaved and twisted ponderously among the bodies of their slain, but it was mere aimless paroxysm, the blind life struggling to resist its final expulsion and dissipation. The wounded *Dinoceras* drew away, to die or recover as curious Nature might decree. The surviving cows returned to assure themselves that their young had come to no hurt. And the great black bulls who had escaped serious injury in the struggle stood about in a ring, thrusting and ripping at the unresponsive mountains of flesh. As they satisfied themselves, one after another, that the victory was complete, and that there was nothing more to battle against, they fell to devouring their prey. Ordinarily feeders on herbage and roots, they were like pigs and rats and men, more or less without prejudice in their diet, and they seemed to think that dinosaur went very well with grass.

At a distance of not more than fifty paces from these destroying hosts, the man-creature stood carelessly, and stared and considered. He had no fear of them. He knew he could avoid them with ease. So insignificant that in their excitement they hardly noticed him, so small that in bulk he was no greater than the least of their calves, he nevertheless despised the gigantic beasts and felt himself their lord. He had played with the two monarchs of all the early world, led them into his trap, and taken such dreadful vengeance upon them that his grief was almost assuaged by

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the fulness of it. The black herds of the Dinoceras he had used as the tools of his vengeance. No doubt, if necessary, he could use them again in some such fashion.

He turned his back upon them, knowing that his fine ear would inform him at once if any should take it into their heads to pursue him, and stalked away with deliberation towards the wooded ground. But he avoided his tree. He would never more go near that empty home. He would return to the regions beyond the head of the lagoon, where he would find scattered members of his kindred. He would find another mate; and in a dim, groping way he harboured a desire for new offspring, for sons, in particular, who should be inquiring and full of resource, like himself. At the edge of the wood he turned, and gave one more long, musing look at the invincible black herds whom he had used. The idea of sons came back upon him insistently. A faint sense of the immeasurable vastness of what was to be done swept over his soul. But he was not daunted. He would at least do something. And he would teach his children, till they should learn, perhaps, by taking thought, even to overcome the ferocity of the sabre-tooth and foil the malice of the great red bear.

CHAPTER III

THE FINDING OF FIRE

I

THE People of the Little Hills were in extremity. Trouble after trouble had come upon them, blow after blow had stricken them, till now there were but three score fighting-men, with perhaps twice that number of women able to bear children, left to the tribe. It looked as if but one more stroke such as that which had just befallen them must wipe them out of existence. And that, had ruthless Nature suffered it, would have been a damage she might have taken some thousands of years to repair. For the People of the Little Hills had climbed higher from the pregnant ooze than any other of the man or half-man tribes at that time struggling into being on the youthful Earth.

First and not least formidable to the tribe had been an incursion from the east of beings who were plainly men, in a way, but still more plainly beasts. Had the tribe of the Little Hills but known it, these Ape-men were much like their own ancestors except for the blackness of their

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skins beneath the coarse fur, the narrow angle of their skulls and the heavy forward thrust of their lower jaws.

Soon afterwards, appearing from no man could say just where, came a scattered incursion of mammoth cave-bears, sabre-toothed tigers and a few gigantic cave-lions. These ravenous monsters not only slaughtered wholesale the game on which the Hillmen most depended, but strove—each for himself, fortunately—to seize the caves. As they raged against each other no less desperately than against their human adversaries, the issue of the war was never in doubt. The Hillmen stood together solidly, fought with all their cunning of pitfall and ambush, and overwhelmed the mightiest by sheer weight of numbers. But again the victory was dear bought. When the last of the monsters, sullen and amazed, withdrew to seek less difficult encounters, he left mourning and lamentation in the caves.

This war had been a matter of some seasons. Then had followed a summer of peace and good hunting, which had given wounds time to heal. But with winter had swept down another dreadful invasion, again from the unfriendly east—wolves, wolves of gigantic stature, and hunting in such huge packs that many outlying sections of the tribe were cut off and devoured before the Hillmen could combine to withstand them. Fortunately, the different packs had no combined action, so after the first shock the sagacious warrior who ruled the men of the Little Hills was able to get

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his diminished followers together, along with most of their stored supplies, and mass them in the amphitheatre of the central caves.

So dragged by half the desperate winter. Then suddenly the wolves, having exterminated or driven off all the game among the Little Hills, once more took the trail, though with diminished ranks, and swept off ravaging to the south-westward. The People of the Little Hills were free once more to come out into the sun. But there was no more game to hunt, neither in the forest, nor on the upland slopes, nor in the reeking marshes by the estuary. The tribe was driven to fumbling in the pools at low tide for scallops and clams and mussels, a diet which their souls despised and their bodies resented.

The fact that the invasion of the wolves had forced the tribe to concentrate, however, presently proved to have been a painfully disguised blessing. Had they remained as before, scattered all over their domain for the convenience of the chase, their next and hardest trial would surely have annihilated them.

It was once more out of the east that it came upon them, by the trail of the vanished Ape-men and the ravaging wolves. About sunrise of a summer's day a woman of the tribe was grubbing for roots with a pointed stick by the banks of a brook when she was pounced upon by a pair of squat, yellow-brown, filthy men with enormous shoulders, short bow-legs and flat faces with gaping, upturned nostrils. Young and vigorous, she fought

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like a tigress till stunned by a blow on the head, which was not before both her assailants were streaming with blood from the jabs of her sharp digging-stick. Her cries had aroused the tribe, however, and her captors, appreciating in her a shapeliness and fairness beyond anything they had ever seen in their own females, hastened to make sure of their prize by dragging her off into the woods. Three of the Hillmen, raging in pursuit, were intercepted by a horde of the squat strangers suddenly leaping from the thickets, surrounded, pulled down after a heaving convulsion of struggle, torn to pieces and trodden into the earth.

The Chief of the tribe, from his vantage at the top of the slope which led up to the little amphitheatre of caves wherein he had gathered his people, saw and understood. The perils of the past two years had made him cool and provident. One look at those foul and shaggy hordes, leaping like beasts, had told him that this was to be a battle to the death. Angrily beating back the hotheads who would have rushed down to avenge their kin and inevitably to share their fate, his shouts, bellowed sonorously from his deep and hairy chest, called up the whole tribe to the defence of the bottle-neck pass which led into the amphitheatre. At a word, passed on breathlessly from mouth to mouth, the old men and the old women, with some of the bigger children, swarmed up among the rocks and ledges which formed the two walls of the pass, while others raced about collect-

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ing stones to hand up to them. The younger women and grown girls, armed, like the men, with stone-headed clubs and flint-tipped spears, took their places in the hinder ranks at the mouth of the pass.

The Bow-legs, their yellow skin showing through the clotted tufts of coarse, clay-coloured hair which unevenly clothed their bodies, came plunging irregularly through the brook and gathered in confused masses along the foot of the slope, jabbering shrilly to each other and making insolent gestures toward the silent company at the top. The hair of their heads was stringy, coarse and scant, and of an inky blackness, in contrast to the abundant locks of the Hillmen, which were for the most part of a dark brown or ruddy hue.

In other respects the contrast was still more striking. The Hillmen, erect and straight, were taller than their bestial-looking opponents by a foot or fifteen inches. With less breadth of shoulder and heaviness of trunk, they had great depth of chest, great muscular development in arm and leg, and a leanness of flank that gave them a look of breed. Their skins, very hairy in the case of the mature men, were of a reddish-tan colour, paling to pink and cream in the children and younger women. They had ample foreheads under the wild thatch of their hair, and high, well-bridged noses, and fierce, steady eyes of green, blue or brown-grey. Outnumbered nearly ten to one, and shrewd enough to see at a glance what ferocious power lurked in those misshapen frames at the

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foot of the slope, they stood staring down upon them in silence, with an undaunted loathing.

For some minutes the hordes of the Bow-legs clustered together, jabbering and waving their crude but massive clubs excitedly. They seemed to have no chief, no plan of attack, no discipline of any sort. Some of them even squatted down on the turf and scratched themselves like monkeys, glaring malignantly but stupidly at the little array of their opponents, and snorting through their hideous upturned nostrils, which were little more than wide, red pits in their faces. Then some of those who were squatting, on the ground began to play with a dreadful red ball which had some wisps of hair yet clinging to it.

A snarling roar went up from the ranks of the Hillmen, and some of them would have rushed to accept the ghastly challenge. But the Chief held them back sternly. Then he himself, half a head taller than all but one or two of his followers, with magnificent chest and shoulders, and a dark, lionlike mane thick-streaked with grey, strode out three or four paces to the front and stood leaning on his huge, porphyry-headed club while he glared down contemptuously over the gesticulating horde.

The Bow-legs stilled their jabbering for a moment to stare with interest at this imposing figure. Then one of those who were seated on the ground seized the ghastly ball that they were playing with, whirled it by the hair and hurled it two-thirds of the way up the slope. As it fell and rebounded, two young women sprang from the

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ranks, their thick locks streaming like a cloud behind them, and dashed down the hill to meet it. The foremost caught it up, clutched it to her naked breast, and screamed a curse upon the gaping murderers. Then the two fled back, and were lost in the ranks of the Hillmen.

The sight of the two women, with their bright skins, their strong, straight limbs and their rich, floating hair, appeared to give the Bow-legs just the spur to concerted action that they were needing. They rightly judged there were more of those desirable beings in the crowd behind that tall, contemptuous chief. Those on the ground scrambled eagerly to their feet, and with shrill, bestial yells the whole horde charged up the slope.

As the leaping and hideous forms approached the top the pent-up fury of the Hillmen, in spite of all the Chief could do, broke loose, and with a roar the foremost ranks bounded forth to meet them. At the first crash of contact the enemy were crushed back, the stone-headed clubs and flint-tipped spears working havoc in the reeking masses. But, as the Chief had foreseen it would be, that forward rush was a mistake, exposing the flanks; and sheer weight of numbers presently forced the Hillmen back till their front was once more level with the jaws of the pass. Here, however, with their flanks protected, they were solid as a wall of granite.

Upon this narrow wall the yelling wave of the attack surged and recoiled, and surged again, and made no impression. The clumsy weapons of

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the enemy were no match for the pounding swing of the stone clubs, the long, lightning thrust of the flint-headed spears. But the Bow-legs, their little pig-eyes red with lust for their prey, fought with a sort of frenzy, diving in headlong and clutching at the legs of the Hillmen with their apelike, sinewy arms, dragging them down and tearing them with crooked, clawlike fingers.

Many of the Hillmen, and some women, died in this way. But no woman was dragged away alive; for if this fate threatened her, and rescue was impossible, she was instantly speared from her own ranks to save her from a fate which would have dishonoured the tribe. And the women indeed, in this battle were no less formidable than the men themselves, for they fought with the swift venom of the she-wolf, the cunning fury of the mad heifer, intuitive and implacable. Their instincts of motherhood, the safeguard of the future, made them loathe with a blind, unspeakable hate these filthy and bestial males who threatened to father their children.

The centre of the Hillmen's front was securely held by the great Chief, whose massive club, wielded with the art acquired in many battles, kept a space cleared before him across which no foe could pass alive. As his followers went down on either side, others from the ranks behind stepped eagerly into the gaps. At the extreme left, where the walls of the pass, lower and less abrupt than on the right, invited an attack as fierce as that upon the centre, the defence was led by a warrior

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named Grôm, who seemed no less redoubtable than the Chief himself. He, too, like the Chief, fought in grim silence, saving his breath, except for an occasional incisive cry of command or encouragement to those about him. And his club also, like that of the Chief, kept a zone of death before him.

But his club was much smaller than that shattering mace of porphyry wielded by the Chief—smaller and lighter, considerably longer in the handle and quite of another pattern. The head was of flint, a sort of ragged cone set sideways into the handle, so that one end of the head was like a sledge-hammer and the other like a pick. Grasping this neat weapon nearly half-way up the handle, he made miraculous play with it, now smashing with the hammer front, now tapping with the pick, now suddenly swinging it out to the full length of the long handle to reach and drop an elusive adversary. The weapon was both club and spear to him; and to guard against any possibility of its being wrenched from him in the mêlée, he held it secured to his wrist by a thong of hide.

This warrior, though his renown in the tribe, both as hunter and fighter, was second only to that of the great Chief himself, had never aroused the Chief's jealousy. This for several reasons. He had always loyally supported the Chief's authority, instead of scheming to undermine it, and his influence had always made for tribal discipline. He was not so tall as the Chief, by

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perhaps half a handbreadth, and for all his huge muscles of arm and breast he was altogether of a slimmer build; wherefore the Chief, while vastly respecting his counsels, was not suspicious of his rivalry. Moreover, up to the time of the invasion of the wolves, he had always dwelt in a remote cave, quite on the outskirts of the tribe, constituting himself a frontier defence, as it were, and avoiding all the tribal gossip. Slightly younger than the Chief, and with few grey streaks as yet in the dense, ruddy-brown masses of his hair and beard, his face nevertheless looked older, by reason of its deeper lines and the considering gravity of the eyes.

In his remote cave Grôm had had the companionship of his family, consisting of his old mother, his two wives, and his four children—three sons and a daughter. It was while he was absent on a hunting expedition that the wolves had come. They had surprised the little, isolated family, and after a terrible struggle wiped it out.

Conspicuous among the fighters at Grôm's back was a young girl, tall, with a fair skin and masses of long, very dark hair. Armed with a spear, she fought savagely, but at the same time managed to keep an eye on all the warrior's movements.

Suddenly from the rocks above came a shrill cry. To Grôm's ears it seemed like the voice of one of his dead children. At the end of a long stroke, when his arms and the club were outstretched full length, he glanced upwards in spite of himself. Instantly the club was clutched by

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furious hands. He was pulled forward. At the same time one of the enemy, ducking under his arms, plunged between his legs. And he came down upon his face.

With a piercing scream, the tall girl bounded forth and stood across him; and her spear stabbed his nearest assailant straight through the flat and grinning face. So lightning swift was the rage of her attack that for one vital moment it held the whole horde at bay. Then the Hillmen swarmed forward irresistibly, battered down the foremost of the foe, and dragged the fallen warrior back behind the lines to recover. In half a minute he was once more at the front, fighting with renewed fury, his head and back and shoulders covered with blood. And close behind him stood the girl, breathless, clutching at her heart and staring at him with wide eyes, unaware that the blood which covered him was not his but her own.

Although to the invaders, their every charge broken and hurled back with terrific slaughter, it must have seemed that their tall opponents had all the best of the battle, to the wise old men and women up among the rocks it was clear that their warriors were being rapidly worn away as a bank is eaten by the waves. But now from a high ledge on the right, where the wall of the pass was a sheer perpendicular, came two shrill whistles. It was a signal which the Chief, now bleeding from many wounds, had been waiting for. He roared a command, and his ranks, after one surge forward to recover their wounded, gave back sullenly till

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their front was more than half-way down the pass. With yells of triumph the Bow-legs followed, trampling their dead and wounded, till the bottle-neck was packed so tightly that there was no room to move.

From the left wall a ceaseless shower of stones came down upon their heads; but from the right, for a few moments, only a rain of pebbles and dust, which blinded them and choked their hideous, upturning nostrils.

Above that dust a band of greybeards heaved upon a lever. They grunted and strained, with eyes staring and the sweat jumping forth on their foreheads. Then something gave. A great slice of the rock-face began to slip. Some of the toilers scrambled back to safety, their long, white hair flying behind them. But others, unable to recover themselves in time, fell sprawling forward. Then with a thunderous growl a huge slab of rock and earth and débris crashed down upon the packed hordes in the neck of the pass. A long shout of triumph went up from the Hillmen. The outer ranks of the invaders stood for a second or two petrified with horror. Then they turned and fled, screaming, down the slope. On their heels the Hillmen pursued, slaughtering, till the brook-bed was choked with the dead. Of that filthy horde hardly a score escaped, and these fled back, gibbering, to meet the migrant hosts of their kin who were following on their trail. The story they told was of a tribe of tall, fair-skinned demons, invincible in war, who tore up mountains

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to hurl them on their adversaries. And thereafter, for a time, the Bow-legged hosts changed the path of their migration, sweeping far to the southward to avoid the land of the Little Hills.

II

A white, high-sailing moon streamed down into the amphitheatre, where the scarred remnant of the tribe of the Little Hills, squatting before their cave-mouths, took counsel. Their dead had all been reverently buried, under heaps of stones, on the bare and wind-swept shoulder of the downs. Outside the pass the giant jackals, cave-hyenas and other scavengers of the night, howled and scuffled over the carcasses of the slain invaders.

Endless and tumultuous was the talk, the white-haired, bent old men and the women who had borne children being listened to as attentively as the warriors. The Chief, sitting on a rock which raised him above the rest, spoke only a word now and then, but gave ear to all, glancing from speaker to speaker with narrowed eyes, weighing all suggestions. On the outskirts of the circle stood Grôm, leaning on his club, staring at the moon, apparently lost in dreams.

Suddenly the Chief uttered a sharp word, and the tribe fell silent. He rose, yet stiff from his wounds, and, towering masterfully over the council, announced his decision.

"I have heard much foolishness," said he, "but also some wisdom. And the greatest wisdom has

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come from the lips of my father yonder, Alp the old." He pointed to a decrepit figure, whose bowed head was hidden under a mass of white hair. "My father's eyes are blind with age," he continued, "but behind their darkness they see many things that we cannot see. They have seen that all these disasters which have lately come upon us have come out of the east. They see that there must be a reason. They see that other terrible dangers must also be coming out of the east, and that we People of the Little Hills lie in their path. How many more can we withstand, and live? Not one more. Therefore, I say, we will leave this place, this home of our fathers, and we will go toward the setting sun, and find a new home far from our enemies till we can grow strong again. I have said it."

As he sat down there was a low murmur, many thinking he was right; while others, not daring to dissent quite openly, yet were angry and afraid at the idea of leaving their familiar dwellings. But Grôm, who had turned on his club and listened to the Chief with shining eyes, now stepped forward into the circle and spoke.

"Bawr is our Chief," said he, in a clear, calm voice; "not only because he is our mightiest in war, but because he is also our wisest in counsel. When do we go?"

The Chief thought for a moment. For the murmurs of the dissidents he cared nothing, having made up his mind. But he was glad of Grôm's support.

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"Two moons hence," he answered presently. "Our wounded must be healed, for we must be strong on the journey. And as we go far, and know not where we go, we must gather much food to carry with us. When the moon is twice again full, we leave these caves and the Land of the Little Hills."

"Then," said Grôm, "if Bawr will allow me, I will go and find a place for us, and come again quickly and lead the tribe thither by the shortest way."

"It is good!" said Bawr, quick to see what dangerous wanderings might be spared to the tribe by this plan. "When will you go?"

"In to-morrow's morning-red," answered Grôm.

At Grôm's words, the young girl, A-ya, who had been watching the warrior where he stood aloof, sprang to her feet in sharp agitation and clutched her dark hair to her bosom in two great handfuls. At this a huge youth, who had been squatting as close as possible to the girl, and eyeing her averted face greedily, jumped up with a jealous scowl.

"Grôm is a traitor!" he cried. "He deserts us in our need. Let him not go, Chief!"

A growl of protest went up from his hearers. The girl faced round upon him with blazing eyes. Grôm gave him an indifferent glance, and turned away, half smiling. The Chief struck the rock with his club, and said coldly:

"Mawg is young, and his words are foolish. Grôm is a true man. He shall do as he will."

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The youth's heavy features worked angrily for a moment as he sought words for a further attack. Then his face smoothed into a grin as he remembered that from so perilous a venture it was most unlikely his rival would ever return. He gave a crafty side-glance at the girl, and sat down again, while she turned her back upon him. At a sign from the Chief the council broke up, and all slipped off, chattering, into their caves.

* * * * *

As the first pink light crept up the sky, Grôm set forth on his mysterious venture. It was just such a venture as his sanguine and inquiring spirit, avid of the unknown, had always dreamed of. But never before had he had such an object before him as seemed to justify the long risk. There was all a boy's eagerness in his deep eyes, under their shaggy brows, as he slipped noiselessly out of the bottle-neck, picked his way lightly over the well-gnawed bones of the slain invaders, turned his back on the sunrise, and took his course up the edge of the stream. The weapons he carried were his war-club, two light, flint-headed hunting-spears and a flint knife hung from his wolfskin girdle.

All that day, till mid-afternoon, he journeyed swiftly, straight ahead, taking no precaution save to keep always a vigilant watch and to avoid dark coverts whence tiger or leopard might spring upon him. He was in a region which he had often hunted over, and where he felt at home. He

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travelled very swiftly, at a long, noiseless lope ; and when he wished to rest he climbed into a tree for security.

Several times during the day he had had a sensation of being followed ; and, turning quickly, he had run back, in the hope of detecting his pursuer. But when he found no one, he concluded that it was merely one of the ghosts the tribe so feared, but whom he himself rather held in contempt as futile.

Long before noon he had forsaken the brook, because its course had ceased to lead him westward. In the afternoon he reached a river which marked the limit of his former explorations. It was a wide, swift water, but too shallow and turbulent for swimming, and he forded it with some difficulty. Once across, he went with more caution, oppressed with a sense of strangeness, although the landscape as yet was in no way greatly changed.

As the sun got low, Grôm cast about for a safe tree in whose top to pass the perilous hours of dark. As he stared around him a cry of fear came from the bunch of woods which he had just quitted. The voice was a woman's. He ran back. The next second the trees parted, and a girl came rushing towards him, her dark hair streaming behind her. Close after her came three huge cave-wolves.

Grôm shouted, and hurled a spear. It struck one of the wolves full in the chest, splitting the heart. At this the other two halted irresolutely.

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But as Grôm's tall figure came bounding down upon them, their indecision vanished. They wheeled about, and ran off into the thickets. The girl came forward timorously, and knelt at Grôm's feet.

At first with wonder and some annoyance, the warrior looked down upon her. Then recognition came into his eyes. He saw the tip of a deep wound on her shoulder, and knew that it ran, livid and angry, half-way down her bosom. It was the young girl A-ya. His eyes softened, for he had heard how it was she who had saved him in the battle, fighting so furiously over him when he was down—she in whose blood he had found his shoulders bathed. Yet up to that time he had never noticed her, his mind being full of other matters than women. Now he looked at her and wondered. He was sorely afraid of being hampered in his great enterprise, but he asked her gently why she had followed him.

"I was afraid for you," she answered, without looking up. "You go to such great dangers. I could not stay with the tribe, and wait."

"You think I need help?" he asked, with a self-confident look in his eyes.

"You did need me in the battle!" answered the girl proudly.

"True!" said Grôm. "But for you I should now have been sleeping under the stones and the wind."

He looked at her with a feeling that surprised himself, a kind of thrilling tenderness, such as he

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had never felt toward a woman before. His wives had been good wives and dutiful, and he had been content with them. But it occurred to him that neither of them would ever have thought to come with him on this expedition.

"I could not stay without you," said the girl again. "Also, I was afraid of Mawg," she added cunningly.

A wave of jealous wrath surged through Grôm's veins.

"If Mawg had troubled you, I would have killed him!" said he fiercely. And, snatching the girl to her feet, he crushed her for a moment vehemently to his great breast.

"But why," he went on, "did you follow me so secretly all day?"

"I was afraid you would be angry, and send me back," she answered, with a sigh of content.

"I could not have sent you back," said Grôm, his indifference quite forgotten. "But come, we must find a place for the night."

And hand in hand they ran to a great tree which Grôm had already marked for his retreat. As they climbed to the upper branches, dusk fell quickly about them, some great beast roared thunderously from the depths of the forest, and from a near-by jungle came sudden crashing of the undergrowth.

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III

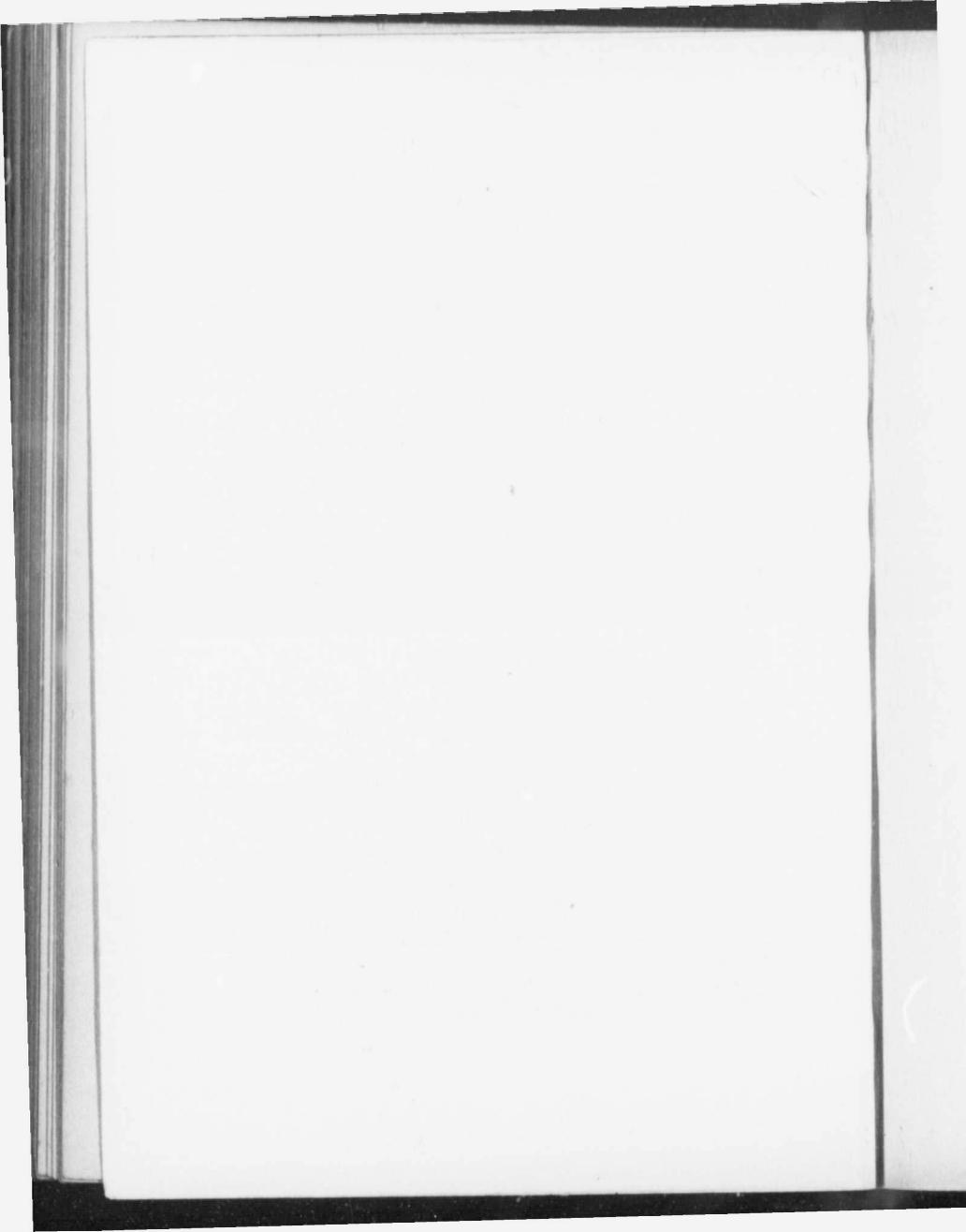
For three weeks Grôm and the girl pressed on eagerly, swinging north to avoid a vast lake, whose rank and marshy shores were trodden by monsters such as they had never before set eyes upon. Of nights, no matter how high or how well hidden their tree-top refuge might be, they found it necessary to keep vigil turn and turn about, so numerous and so enterprising were the enemies who sought to investigate the strange human trail.

Had Grôm been alone he would soon have been worn out for want of sleep. The girl, however, her eyes ever bright with happiness, seemed utterly untiring, and Grôm watched her with daily growing delight. He had never heard or dreamed of a man regarding a woman as he regarded the lithe, fierce creature who ran beside him. But he had never been afraid of new things or new ideas, and he was not ashamed of this sweet ache of tenderness at his astonished heart.

Beyond the lake and the morasses they came to a strange, broken land, a land of fertile valleys, deep-verdured and teeming with life, but sown with abrupt, conelike, naked hills. Along the near horizon ran a chain of those sharp, low summits, irregularly jagged against the pale blue. From several of the summits rose streamers of murky vapour; and one of these, darker and



"A grey bear, of a bulk beyond that of the hugest grizzly, was almost upon him."



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more abundant than the others, spread abroad at the top on the windless air till it took the shape of a colossal pine-tree. To the girl the sight was portentous. It filled her with apprehension, and she would have liked to avoid this unfamiliar-looking region. But, seeing that Grôm was filled with interest at the novel phenomena before them, she thrust aside her fears and assumed a like eagerness on the subject.

In the heat of the day they came to a pair of trees, lofty and spreading, which stood a little apart from the rest of the forest growth, in a stretch of open meadows. An ice-cold rivulet babbled past their roots. It was time for the noonday rest, and these trees seemed to offer a safe retreat. The girl drank, splashed herself with the delicious coolness, flung back her dripping hair, then swung herself up lightly into the branches. Grôm lingered a few moments below, letting the water trickle down and over his great muscles by handfuls. Then he threw himself down upon his face and drank deep.

While he was in this helpless position—his sleepless vigilance for the moment at fault—from behind a near-by thicket rushed a gigantic, shaggy grey form, and hurled itself at him ponderously but with awful swiftness, like a grey boulder dashing down a hillside. The girl, from her perch in the lower branches, gave a shriek of warning. Grôm bounded to his feet, and darted for the tree. But the monster—a grey bear, of a bulk beyond that of the hugest grizzly—was almost upon him,

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and would have seized him before he could climb out of reach. A spear hurtled close past his head. It grazed, and laid open, the side of the beast's snout, and sank deep into its shoulder. With a roar, the beast halted to claw it forth. And in that moment Grôm swung himself up into the branches, dropping both his spears as he did so.

The bear, mad with pain and fury, reared himself against the trunk and began to draw himself up. Grôm struck at him with his club, but from his difficult position could put no force into his blow, and the bear hardly seemed to notice it.

"We must lead him up, then drop down and run," said Grôm. And the two mounted nimbly.

The bear followed, till the branches began to yield too perilously beneath his weight. Then Grôm and the girl slipped over into the next tree. As they did so, another bear, even huger than the first, and apparently her mate, appeared below, glanced up with shrewd, implacable eyes, and proceeded to climb the second tree.

Grôm looked at the girl with a piercing anxiety such as he had never known before.

"Can you run, very fast?" he demanded.

The girl laughed, her terror almost forgotten in her pride at having once more saved him.

"I ran from the wolves," she reminded him.

"Then we must run, perhaps very far," answered Grôm, reassured, "till we find some place of steep rocks where we can fight with some hope. For these beasts are obstinate, and will never give up

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from pursuing us. And, unlike the red cave-bears they seem to know how to climb trees."

When both bears were high in the two trees, Grôm and the girl slipped down by the bending tips of the branches, almost as swiftly as falling. They snatched up Grôm's two spears and A-ya's broken one, and ran, down along the brook toward the line of the smoking hills. The bears, descending more slowly, came after them at a terrific, ponderous gallop.

The girl ran, as she had said, well—so well that Grôm, who was famous in the tribe for his running, did not have greatly to slacken his pace in her favour. Finding that, at first, they gained slightly on their pursuers, Grôm bade her slow down a little till they did no more than hold their own. Fearing lest she should exhaust herself, he ran always a pace behind her, admonishing her how to save her strength and her breath, and ever warily casting his eyes about for a possible refuge. Warily, too, he chose the smoothest ways, sparing her feet. For he knew that if she gave out and fell he would stop and fight his last fight over her body.

For an hour or more the girl ran easily. Then she began to show signs of distress. Her face grew ashen, the breath came harshly from her open lips, and once or twice she stumbled. With the first pang of fear at his heart, Grôm closed up beside her, made her lean heavily on his rigid forearm, and cheered her with words of praise. He pointed to a spur of broken mountains now

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close ahead, with a narrow valley cleaving them midway.

"There will be ledges," he said, "where we can defend ourselves, and where you can rest."

Skirting a bit of jungle, so dense with massive cane and thorned creepers that nothing could penetrate it, they came suddenly upon a space of barren grey plain, and saw, straight ahead, the opening of the valley. It was not more than a couple of furlongs distant. And its walls, partly clothed with shrubbery, partly naked, were so seamed and cleft and creviced that they appeared to promise many convenient retreats. But across the mouth of the valley extended an appalling barrier. From an irregular fissure in the parched earth, running on a slant from one wall to the other, came tongues of red flame, waving upwards to a height of several feet, sinking back, rising again, and bowing as if in some enchanted dance.

Grôm's heart stood still in awe and amazement, and for a second he paused. The girl shut her eyes in unspeakable terror, and her knees gave way beneath her. As she sank, Grôm's spirit rose to the emergency. The bears were now almost upon them. He jerked the girl violently to her feet, and spoke to her in a voice that brought her back to herself. Dragging her by the wrist, he ran on straight for the barrier. The girl, obedient to his order, shrank close to his side and ran on bravely, keeping her eyes upon the ground.

"If they are gods, those bright, dancing things," said Grôm, with a confidence he was far from

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feeling, "they will save us. If they are devils, I will fight them."

A little to the right appeared a gap in the leaping barrier, an opening some fifty feet across. Grôm made for the centre of this opening. The fissure here was not more than three feet in width. The runners took it in their stride. But a fierce heat struck up from it. It filled the girl with such horror that her senses failed her utterly. She ran on blindly a dozen paces more, then reeled and fell in a swoon. Before her body touched the ground, Grôm had swung her up into his arms, but as he did so he looked back.

The bears were no longer pursuing. A spear's-throw back they had stopped, growling and whining, and swaying their mountainous forms from side to side in angry irresolution.

"They fear the bright, dancing things," said Grôm to himself; and added, with a throb of exultation, "which I do not fear."

Noticing for the first time in his excitement that the ground, here parched and bare, was uncomfortably hot beneath his feet, he carried his burden a few rods further on, to where the green began again, and laid her down on the thick herbage. Then he turned to see what the bears were going to do.

Seeing that their intended prey made no further effort to flee, the two monsters grew still more excited. For a moment Grôm thought they would dare the passage of the barrier, but he was reassured to see that the flames filled them

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with an insuperable roar. They dared not come nearer than the thin edges of the verdure. At last, as if the same notion had struck them both at once, they whirled about simultaneously, made off among the dense thickets to the right, and disappeared. Grôm knew too well the obstinate vindictiveness of their kind to think that they had given up the chase; but, feeling safe for the present, and seeing that the girl, recovered from her swoon, was sitting up and staring with awed eyes at the line of fire, he turned all his attention to these mysterious, shining, leaping shapes to which they owed their escape.

With an attitude of deference, yet carrying both club and spear in readiness, he slowly approached the barrier, at the point where the flames were lowest and least imposing. Their heat made him very uneasy, but under the eyes of the girl he would show no sign of fear. At a distance of six or eight feet he stopped, studying the thin, up-curling tongues of brightness. Their heat, at this distance, was uncomfortable to his naked flesh, but as he stood there wondering and took no further hurt, his confidence grew. At length he dared to stretch out his spear-tip and touch the flames, very respectfully. The green-hide thongs which bound the flint to the wood smoked, shrivelled and hissed. He withdrew the weapon in alarm, and examined the tip. It was blackened, and hot to the touch. But, seeing that the bright dancers had taken no notice, he repeated the experiment. Several times he repeated it, deeply pondering,

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while the girl, from her place at the edge of the grass, stared with the wide eyes of a child.

At last, though the green thongs still held, the dry wood burst into flame. Startled to find that when he drew the point back he brought a portion of the shining creature with it, Grôm dashed the weapon down upon the ground. The flame, insufficiently started, flickered and died. But it left a spark, winking redly on the blackened wood. Audacious in his consuming curiosity, Grôm touched it with his finger. It stung smartly, and Grôm snatched back his finger with an exclamation of alarm. But by that touch the spark itself was extinguished. That was an amazing thing. Sucking his finger, Grôm stood gazing down at the spear-tip, which had but now been so bright, and was now so black. Plainly, it was a victory for him. He did not understand it. But at least the Mysterious Ones were not invincible, however much the bears feared them. Well, he did not fear them, he said proudly in his heart. Aloud he said to A-ya :

“ The Shining Dancers are our friends, but they do not like to be touched. If you touch them, they bite.”

His heart swelled with a vast, unformulated hope. Ideas, possibilities which he could not yet grasp, seethed in his brain. Dimly, but overpoweringly, he realized that he had passed the threshold of a new world. He picked up the spear and turned to renew his experiments.

This time he let the fire take well hold upon

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the spear-tip before he withdrew it. Then he held it upright, burning like a torch. As he gazed at it raptly a scream from the girl aroused him. She had sprung to her feet and stood staring behind her, not knowing which way to run because of her fear of the fire. And there, not twenty paces from her, their giant grey bulks half emerging from the thicket, stood the bears, slaving in their fury but afraid to come nearer the flame.

With a shout, Grôm darted at them, and the wind of his going fanned his spear-point to a fierce blaze. The girl screamed again at the sight, but bravely stood her ground. The bears shrank, growled, then turned and fled. With a dozen leaps Grôm was upon them. The flame was already licking up the spear-shaft almost to his grip. With all his force he threw, and the flint tip buried itself in the nearest monster's haunch. The long fur blazed, and, in a frenzy of terror, the great beasts went crashing off through the coverts. The fire was speedily whipped out by the branches, but their panic was uncontrollable; and long after they had passed out of sight the sounds of their wild flight could be followed. Grôm's heart came near bursting with exultation, but he disdained to show it. He turned to the girl, and said quietly: "They will not come back." And the girl threw herself at his feet in adoration.

And now for hours Grôm sat motionless, pondering, pondering, and watching the line of flames with deep eyes. The girl did not dare to interrupt his thoughts. With the going of the sun came a

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chill breeze drawing down from the ridges. Grôm rose, led the girl nearer the flames, and reseated himself. As the girl realized the kindly and comforting warmth her fears diminished. She laughed softly, turned her shapely body round and round in the glow, and then curled herself up like a cat at Grôm's knees.

At last Grôm arose once more. Picking up his remaining spear, he approached the fire with decision, and thrust the butt, instead of the tip, into the flame. When it was well alight, he thrust it down upon a tuft of withered grass. The stuff caught at once, blazed up and died out. Then Grôm rolled the burning spear-butt on the earth till it, too, was quite extinguished. The sparks still winking in the grass he struck with his palm. They stung him, but they perished. He drew himself up to his full height, turned to the girl and stretched out his blackened hand. The girl sprang to her feet, thrilled and wondering.

"See," said Grôm, "I have made the bright Dancing Ones my servants. The tribe shall come here. And we shall be the masters of all things."

Once more the girl threw herself at his feet. He seemed to her a god. But remembering how she had twice saved his life, she laid her cheek against his knee. He lifted her into the hollow of his great arm, and she leaned against him, gazing up into his face, while he stood staring into the fire, his eyes clouded with visions.

CHAPTER IV

THE CHILDREN OF THE SHINING ONE

I

FROM the lip of the narrow volcanic fissure, which ran diagonally two-thirds of the way across the mouth of the valley, the line of fire waved and flickered against the gathering dark. Sometimes only a few inches high, sometimes sinking suddenly out of sight, and then again as suddenly leaping up to a height of five or six feet, the thin, gaseous flames danced elvishly. Now clear yellow, now fiery orange, now of an almost invisible violet, they shifted, and bowed their crests, and thrust out shooting tongues, till Grôm, sitting on his haunches and staring with fascinated eyes, had no choice but to believe that they were live things like himself. The girl, curled up at his side like a cat, paid little attention to the marvel of the flames. Her big, dark eyes, wild and furtive under the dark, tangled masses of her hair, kept wandering back and forth between the man's brooding face and the obscure black thickets which filled the valley behind him. The

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dancing flames she did not understand, but she understood the ponderous crashings, and growls, and savage cries which came from those black thickets and slopes of tumbled rocks. The man being absorbed in watching the wonder of the flames, and apparently all-forgetful of the perils prowling back there in the dark, it was plainly her duty to keep watch.

From time to time Grôm would drag his eyes away from their contemplation of the flames to study intently the charred spots on his club and the burned, blackened end of his spear. He looked down at the lithe figure of the girl, and laid a great, hairy hand on her shoulder in a musing caress, as if appraising her, and delighting in her, and finding in her a mate altogether to his desire, although but a child to his inmost thoughts. But those sounds of menace from the darkness behind him he affected not to hear at all. He could see from the girl's eyes that the menace was not yet close at hand; and since he had learned the power of the fire, and his own mastery over that power, he felt himself suddenly little less than a god. The fire was surely something of a god; and if he had any measure of control over the fire, so as to make it serve him surely, then still more of the god was there in his own intelligence. His heart swelled with a pride such as he had never before conceived, and his brain seethed with vague but splendid possibilities. Never before had he, though at heart the bravest of his brave clan, been able to listen to the terrible

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voices of the cave-bear, the cave-hyena, or the sabre-tooth without fear, without the knowledge that his own safety lay in flight. Now he feared them not at all.

A louder roaring came out of the shadows, closer than before, and he saw A-ya's eyes dilate as she clutched at his knee. A slow smile spread across his bony face, and he turned about, rising to his feet as he did so, and lifting the girl with him.

With a new, strange warmth at his heart he realized how fully the girl trusted him, how cool and steady was her courage. For there, along the edge of the lighted space, glaring forth from the fringes of the thickets, were the monstrous beasts whom man had most cause to dread. Nearest, his whole tawny length emerging from the brush, crouched a giant sabre-tooth, with the daggers of his tusks, ten inches long, a gleam in the light of the dancing flames. He was not more than thirty or forty paces distant, and his tail twitched heavily from side to side as if he were trying to nerve himself up to a closer approach to the fire. Some twenty paces further along the fringe of mingled light and shadow, their bodies thrust half way forth from the undergrowth, stood a pair of huge, ruddy cave-bears, their monstrous heads held low and swaying surlily from side to side as they eyed the prey which they dared not rush in and seize. The man-animal they had hitherto regarded as easy prey, and they were filled with rage at the temerity of

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these two humans in remaining so near the dreaded flames. Intent upon them, they paid no heed to their great enemy, the sabre-tooth, with whom they were at endless and deadly feud. Away off to the left, quite clear of the woods, but safely remote from the fire, a pack of huge cave-hyenas sat up on their haunches, their long, red tongues hanging out. With jaws powerful enough to crack the thigh-bones of the urus, they nevertheless hesitated to obtrude themselves on the notice either of the crouching sabre-tooth or of the two giant bears.

With neither the bears nor the great hyenas did Grôm anticipate any trouble. But he felt it barely possible that the sabre-tooth might dare a rush in. Snatching up a dry branch, and leading the girl with him by the wrist, he backed slowly nearer the flames. Terrified at their dancing and the scorching of their breath, the girl sank down on her naked knees and covered her face with her hair. Smiling at her terror, Grôm thrust the branch into the flames. When it was all ablaze he raised it above his head, and, carrying his spear in his right hand, he rushed at the sabre-tooth. For a few seconds the monster faced his approach, but Grôm saw the shrinking in his furious eyes, and came on fearlessly. At last the beast whipped about with a screeching snarl, and raced back into the woods. Then Grôm turned to the bears, but they had not stayed to receive his attentions. The sight of the flames bursting, as it seemed, from the man's shaggy head as he ran, was too

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much for them, and they had slunk back discreetly into the shadows.

Grôm threw the blazing stick on the ground, laid several more branches upon it, and presently had a fine fire of his own going. He seized a small branch and hurled it at the hyenas, sending them off with their tails between their legs to their hiding-places on the ragged slopes. Then he fed his fire with more dry wood till the fierce heat of it drove him back. Returning to the side of the wondering girl, he sat down, and contemplated his handiwork with swelling pride. When the flames died down he piled on more branches till they blazed again to the height of the nearest tree-tops. This he repeated, thoughtfully, several times, till he had assured himself of his power to make this bright, devouring god great or little at his pleasure.

This stupendous fact established clearly, Grôm brought an armful of grass and foliage, and made the girl take her sleep. He himself continued for an hour or two his experiments with the fire, building small ones in a circle about him, discovering that green branches would not burn well, and brooding with knit brows over each new centre of light and heat which he created.

Then, seated on his haunches beside the sleeping A-ya, he pondered on the future of his tribe, on the change in its fortunes which this mysterious new creature was bound to bring about. At last, when the night was half worn through, he awakened the girl, bade her keep sharp watch,

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and threw himself down to sleep, indifferent to the roars, and snarls, and dreadful cries which came from the darkness of the upper valley.

The valley looked straight into the east. When the sun rose, its unclouded, level rays paled the dancing barrier of flames almost to invisibility. Refreshed by their few hours' sleep in the vital warmth, Grôm and the girl stood erect in the flooding light and scanned the strange landscape. Grôm's sagacious eyes noted the fertility of the level lands at a distance from the fire, and of the clefts, ledges and lower slopes of the tumbled volcanic hills. Here and there he made out the openings of caves, half overgrown with vine and bush. And he was satisfied that this was the land for his tribe to occupy.

That it was infested with all those monstrous beasts which were Man's deadliest foes seemed to him no longer a fact worth considering. The bright god which he had conquered should be made to conquer them. Some inkling of his purposes he confided to the girl, who stood looking up at him with eyes of dog-like devotion from under the matted splendour of her hair. If he was still the man she loved, her mate and lover, yet was he also now a sort of demi-god, since she had seen him play at his ease with the flames, and drive the hyena, the sabre-tooth and the terrible red bear before him.

When the two started on their journey back to the Country of the Little Hills, Grôm carried with him a bundle of blazing brands. He had

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conceived the idea of keeping the bright god alive by feeding him continually as they went, and of renewing his might from time to time by stopping to build a big fire.

The undertaking proved a troublesome one from the first. The brands kept the great beasts at a distance, but time and again the red coals almost died out, and Grôm had anxious and laborious moments nursing them again into activity; and the care of the mysterious things made progress slow. Grôm learned much, and rapidly, in these anxious efforts. He discovered once, just at a critical moment, the remarkable efficacy of dry grass. A bear as big as an ox came rushing upon them, just when the flames were flickering out along the bundle of brands. A-ya started to run, but Grôm's nerve was of steel.

Ordering her to stop, he flung the brands to the ground, and snatched a double handful of grass to feed the dying flame. Luckily, the grass was dry. It flared up on the sudden. The bear stopped short. Grôm piled on more grass, shouted arrogantly, and rushed at the beast with a blazing handful. It was a light and harmless flame, almost instantly extinguished. But it was too mysterious for the monster to face.

Grôm was wise enough not to follow up his victory. Returning to the fire he fed it to a safe volume. And the girl, flinging herself down in a passion of relief and adoration, embraced his knees.

After this they journeyed slowly, Grôm tending

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the brands with vigilant care, and striving to break down the girl's terror of them. That night he built three fires about the base of a huge tree, gathered a supply of dry wood, taught the girl to feed the flames—which she did with head bowed in awe—and passed the hours of darkness, once so dreaded, in proud defiance of the great beasts which prowled and roared beyond the circle of light. He made the girl sleep, but he himself was too prudent to sleep, lest these fires of his own creation should prove false when his eye was not upon them.

The following day, about midday, when he slept heavily in the heat, the fire went out. It had got low, and the girl, attempting to revive it, had smothered it with too much fuel. In an agony of fear and remorse, she knelt at Grôm's side, awakened him, and showed him what she had done. She expected a merciless beating, according to the rough-and-ready customs of her tribe. But Grôm had always been held a little peculiar, especially in his aversion to the beating of women, so that certain females of the tribe had even been known to question his manhood on that account.

Furthermore, he regarded the girl with a tenderness, an admiration, an appreciation, which he could not but wonder at in himself, seeing that he had never heard of it as a customary thing that a man should regard a woman in any such manner. At the same time he was in a state of exaltation over his strange achievements, and hardly open,

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at the moment, to any common or base brutality of rage.

He gave the girl one terrible look, then went and strove silently with the dead, black embers. The girl crept up to him on her knees, weeping. For a few seconds he paid her no heed. But when he found that the flames had fled beyond recovery, he lifted her up, drew her close to him, and comforted her.

"You have let the Bright One escape," said he. "But do not be afraid. He lives back there in the valley of the bears, and I will capture him again."

And when the girl realized that he had no thought of beating her, but only wished to comfort and shield her, then she felt quite sure he was a god, and her heart nearly burst with the passion of her love.

II

It galled Grôm's proud heart to find himself now compelled, through loss of the fire, to go warily, to scan the thicket, to keep hidden, to hold spear and club always in readiness, and to climb into a tree at night for safety like the apes. But he let no sign of his chagrin, or of his anxiety, appear. Like the crafty hunter and wise leader that he was, he forgot no one of his ancient precautions.

They had by this time passed beyond the special haunts of the red bear and the sabre-tooth. Twice

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they had to run before the charge of the great woolly rhinoceros, against whose massive hide Grôm's spear and club would have been about as effective as a feather duster. But they had fled mockingly, for the clumsy monster was no match for them in speed. Once, too, they had been treed by a bull urus, a gigantic white beast with a seven-foot spread of polished horns.

But his implacable and patient rage they had cunningly evaded by making off unseen and unheard, through the upper branches. They came to earth again half a mile away, and ran on gaily, laughing at the picture of the furious and foolish beast waiting there at the foot of the tree for them to come down. Once a prowling leopard confronted them for a moment, only to flee in great leaps before their instant and unhesitating attack. Once a huge bird, nearly nine feet high, and with a beak over a foot in length, struck at them savagely, with a shrill hissing, through a fringe of reeds, because they had incautiously come too near its nest. But they killed it, and feasted on its eggs. And so, without further misadventure, they came at last to the skirts of their own country, and looked once more on the rounded, familiar, wind-swept tops of the Little Hills, sacred to the barrows of their dead.

It was toward sunset, and the long, rosy glow was flooding the little amphitheatre wherein the remnants of the tribe were gathered, when Grôm crossed the brook, and came striding up the slope, with A-ya close behind him. She had been

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travelling at his side all through the journey, but here she respected the etiquette of her tribe, and fell behind submissively.

Hardly noticing, or not heeding if he noticed, that the tribe offered no vociferous welcome, and seemed sullenly surprised at his appearance, Grôm strode straight to the Chief, whom he saw sitting on the judgment stone, and threw down spear and club at his feet in sign of fealty. But A-ya, following, was keen to note the hostile attitude of the tribe. Her defiant eyes darted everywhere, and everywhere noted black looks. She could not understand it, but she divined that there was some plot afoot against Grôm. Her heart swelled with rage, and her dark-maned head went up arrogantly, for she felt as if the strongest and wisest of the tribe were now but children in comparison with her lord. But, though children, they were many, and she closed up behind him for a guard, grasping more firmly the shaft of her short, serviceable spear. She saw the broad, black, scowling visage of young Mawg, towering over a little group of his kinsfolk, and eyeing her with mingled greed and rage, and she divined at once that he was at the back of whatever mischief might be brewing. She answered his look with one of mocking scorn, and then turned her attention to the Chief, who was sitting in grim silence, the customary hand of welcome ominously withheld.

A haughty look came over Grôm's face, his broad shoulders squared themselves, and he met the Chief's eyes sternly.

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"I have done the bidding of Bawr the Chief," he said, in a clear voice, so that all the tribe might hear. "I have found a place where the tribe may hold themselves secure against all enemies. And I have come back, as was agreed, to lead the tribe thither before our enemies destroy us. I have done great deeds. I have not spared myself. I have come quickly. I have deserved well of the people. Why has Bawr the Chief no welcome for me?"

A murmur arose from the corner where Mawg and his friends were grouped, but a glance from the Chief silenced it. With his piercing gaze making relentless inquisition of the eyes that answered his so steadily, he seemed to ponder Grôm's words. Slowly the anger faded from his scarred and massy face, for he knew men; and this man, though his most formidable rival in strength and prestige, he instinctively trusted.

"You have been accused," said he at length, slowly, "of deserting the tribe in our weakness——"

A puzzled look had come over Grôm's face at the word "accused"; then his deep eyes blazed, and he broke in upon the Chief's speech without ceremony.

"Show me my accusers!" he demanded harshly.

The Chief waved his hand for silence.

"In our weakness!" he repeated. "But you have returned to us. So I see that charge was false. Also, you have been accused of stealing the girl A-ya. But you have brought her back.

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I see not what more your accusers have against you."

Grôm turned, and, with a quick, decisive motion, drew A-ya to his side.

"Bawr the Chief knows that I am his servant, and a true man!" said he sternly. "I did not steal the girl. She followed me, and I had no thought of it."

Angry jeers came from Mawg's corner, but Grôm smiled coldly, and went on:

"Not till near evening of the second day, when she was chased by wolves, did she reveal herself to me. And when I understood why she had come, I looked on her, and I saw that she was very fair and very brave. And I took her. So that now she is my woman, and I hold to her, Chief! But I will pay you for her whatsoever is just, for you are the Chief. And now let Bawr show me my accusers, that I may have done with them quickly. For I have much to tell."

"Not so, Grôm," said the Chief, stretching out his hand. "I am satisfied that you are a true man. And for the girl, that will we arrange between us later. But I will not confront you with your accusers, for there shall be no fighting between ourselves when our warriors that are left us are so few. And in this I know that you, being wise, will agree with me. Come, and we two will talk of what is to be done."

He got up from his seat, an immense and masterful figure, to lead the way to his own cave, where they might talk in private. But Grôm hesitated,

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fearing lest annoyance should befall A-ya if he left her alone with his enemies.

"And the girl, Chief?" said he. "I would not have her troubled."

Bawr turned. He swept a comprehensive and significant glance over the gaping crowd.

"The girl A-ya," said he in his great voice which thundered over the amphitheatre, "is Grôm's woman. I have spoken."

And he strode off toward his cave door. Grôm picked up his club and spear. And the girl, with a haughty indifference she was far from feeling, strolled off toward the cave of certain old women, kinsfolk of the Chief.

But as the meaning of the Chief's words penetrated Mawg's dull wits he gave vent to a great bellow of rage, and snatched up a spear to hurl at Grôm. Before he could launch it, however, his kinsmen, who had no wish to bring down upon themselves both Grôm's wrath and that of the Chief, fell upon him and bore down his arm. Raging blindly, Mawg struggled with them, and, having the strength of a bull, he was near to wrenching himself free. But other men of the tribe, seeing from the Chief's action that their bitterness against Grôm had been unjustified, and remembering his past services, ran up and took a hand in reducing Mawg to submission. For a few seconds Grôm looked on contemptuously; then he turned on his heel and followed the Chief, as if he did not hold his rival worth a further thought. Mawg struggled to his feet. Grôm had

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disappeared. But his eyes fell on the figure of A-ya, s'lim and brown and tall, standing in the entrance of the near-by cave. He made as if to rush upon her, but a bunch of men stood in the way, plainly ready to stop him. He looked at his kinsmen, but they hung their heads sullenly. Blind with fury though he was, and slow of wit, he could not but see that the tribe as a whole was now against him. Stuttering with his rage, he shouted to the girl, "You will see me again!" Snatching up his club and spears, he rushed forth from the amphitheatre, darted down the slope, and plunged into the thick woods beyond the brook. His kinsmen withdrew sullenly into their cave, followed by two young women. And the rest of the people looked at each other doubtfully, troubled at this sudden schism in the weakened tribe.

"One more good warrior gone!" muttered an old man through his bush of matted white beard.

That night Grôm was too wary to sleep, suspecting that his enemy might return and try to snatch the girl from him under cover of the dark.

He was not attacked or disturbed, however, but just before dawn, against the grey pallor beyond the mouth of the pass, he marked four shapes slinking forth. As they did not return, he did not think it worth while to raise the alarm. When day came, it was found that two kinsmen of Mawg, with the two young women who were attached to them, had fled to join the deserter in the bush. The Chief, indignant at this further

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weakening of the tribe, declared them outlaws, and ordered that all—except the women, who were needed as mothers—should be killed as tribal traitors, at sight.

III

As was natural, since he was trying to present a totally new conception, with no known analogies save in the lightning and the sun, Grôm found it impossible to convey to the Chief's mind any real idea of the nature of his tremendous discovery. He did succeed, however, in making it clear to Bawr that there was a certain mighty Bright One, capable of putting even the sabre-tooth and the red bear to instant flight, and that he had somehow managed to subdue this powerful and mysterious being into the service of the tribe. Bawr had examined with deep musing the strange black bite of the Bright One on Grôm's club and spear. And he realized readily enough that with such an ally the tribe, even in its present state of weakness, would be able to defy any further invasions of the bow-legged beast-men from the east. There was a rumour, vague enough but disquieting, of another migration of the beast-men under way. So there was no time to lose. Bawr gave orders that the tribe should get together their scanty possessions of food, skins and weapons, and make a start on the morrow for their new home.

The attempts of the girl, meanwhile, to explain

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about the fire and Grôm's miraculous subjugation of it to his will, had only spread terror in the tribe. The dread of this unknown Bright One, which was plainly capable of devouring them all if Grôm should lose control of it, was more nerve-shaking than their dread of the beast-men. Moreover, there was the natural reluctance to leave the old, familiar dwellings for an unknown, distrusted land, confessedly the haunt of those monstrous beasts which they had most cause to fear. Then, too, there were not a few in the tribe who professed to think that the hordes of the Bow-legs were never likely to come that way again. No wonder, therefore, that there was grumbling, and protest, and shrill lamentation in the caves; but Bawr being in no mood, since the defection of Mawg and his party, to tolerate any opposition, and Grôm being now regarded as a dangerous wizard, the preparations for departure went on as smoothly as if all were of one mind. Packing was no great matter to the People of the Little Hills, the richest of whom could transport all his wealth on the back of the feeblest of his wives. So it came that before the sun marked noon the whole tribe was on the march, trailing forth from the neck of the amphitheatre at the heels of Grôm and A-ya, and picking their way over the bones of their slain enemies which the vultures and the jackals had already polished white. Bawr, the Chief, came last, seeing to it that there were no laggards; and as the tail of the straggling procession left the pass he climbed swiftly to the nearest pinnacle of rock to take

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observation. He marked Grôm and the girl, the tribe strung out dejectedly behind them, winding off to the left along the foot of the bare hills; and a pang of grief, for an instant, twitched his massive features. Then he turned his eyes to the right. Very far off, in a space of open ground by the brookside, he marked the movement of confused, living masses, of a dull brown on the green. A closer look convinced him that the moving masses were men—new hordes of the beast-men, the gaping-nosed Bow-legs.

“Grôm is a true man,” he muttered, with satisfaction, and went leaping like a stag down the slope to rejoin the tribe. When news of what he had seen was passed from mouth to mouth through the tribe, every murmur was hushed, and the sulkiest laggards pushed on feverishly, as if dreading a rush of the beast-men from every cleft and glade.

The journey proved, for the most part, uneventful. Travelling in a compact mass, only by broad day, their numbers and their air of confidence kept the red bear and the sabre-tooth, the black lion and the wolf-pack, from venturing to molest them. By the Chief's orders they maintained a noisy chatter, with laughter and shouting, as soon as they felt themselves safely beyond range of the beast-men's ears. For Bawr had observed that even the sabre-tooth had a certain uneasiness at the sound of many human voices together. At night—and it was their rule to make camp while the sun was yet several hours high—with the aid

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of their flint spearheads they would laboriously cut down the saplings of the long-thorned acacia, and surround the camp with a barrier which the monsters dared not assail. Even so, however, the nights were trying enough to the stoutest nerves. Half the tribe at a time was obliged to stand on guard, and there was little sleep to refresh the weariest when the shadows beyond the barriers were alive with mutterings and prowlings, and terrible, paling, gleaming eyes.

On the fourth day of the journey, however, the tribe met a foe whose dense brain was quite unimpressed by the menace of the human voice, and whose rage took no account of their numbers or their confidence. An enormous bull urus—perhaps the same beast which, some days earlier, had driven Grôm and the girl into the tree-tops—burst up, dripping and mud-streaked from his wallow in a reedy pool, and came charging upon the travellers with a roar. No doubt an outcast from the herd, he was mad with the lust of killing. With shouts of warning and shrieks of fear the tribe scattered in every direction. The nearest warriors hurled their spears as they sprang aside, and several of the weapons went deep into the monster's flanks, but without checking him. He had fixed his eyes on one victim, an old man with a conspicuous shock of snow-white hair, and him he followed inexorably. The doomed wretch screamed with despair when he found himself thus hideously selected, and ran, doubling like a rabbit. Just as the monster overtook him he fell, paralysed with

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his fright, and one tremendous horn pinned him to the earth. At this instant the Chief arrived, running up from the rear of the line, and Grôm, coming from the front. The Chief, closing in fearlessly, swung his club with all his strength across the beast's front, blinding one eye, and confusing him for the fraction of a moment. And in that moment, Grôm, calculating his blow with precision, drove his spear clean through the massive throat. As he sprang back, twisting his ragged weapon in the wound and tearing it free, the monster, with a hoarse cough, staggered forward across his victim, fell upon his knees, and slowly sank, while the blood emptied itself in enormous, smoking jets from the wound.

The incident caused a day's delay in the march ; for there was the dead elder to be buried, with heavy stones heaped over his body, according to the custom of the tribe, and there was also the meat of the slain bull to be cut up for carrying—a rank food, but sustaining, and not to be despised when one is on a journey with uncertainties ahead. And the delay was more than compensated for by the new spirit which now seized this poor, fugitive remnant of the Tribe of the Little Hills. The speedy and spectacular triumph over a foe so formidable as the giant bull urus was unanimously accepted as an omen of good fortune.

As they approached the valley whose mouth was guarded by the line of volcanic fire, Grôm purposely led the tribe by such a path that they should get no glimpse of the dancing flames until close upon

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them. Down behind a long line of woods he led them, with no warning of what was to come. Then suddenly around into the open ; and there, not a hundred paces distant, was the valley-mouth, and the long, thin line of flickering scarlet tongues drawn across it.

As the people came in sight of the incomprehensible phenomenon, they stared for a moment, gasping, or uttering low cries ; then they fell upon their faces in awe. Grôm remained standing, leaning upon his spear ; and A-ya stood with bowed head close behind him. When the Chief, shepherding and guarding the rear flanks, emerged around the elbow of woods and saw his people thus prostrate before the shining wonder, he too was moved to follow their example, for his heart went cold within him. But not without reason was he Chief, for he could control himself as well as others. A pallor spread beneath the smoky tan of his broad features, but without an instant's hesitation he strode to the front, and stood like Grôm with unbowed head, leaning calmly on his great club. His thought was that the Shining One must be indeed a god, and might, indeed, slay him from afar, like the lightning, but it could not make him afraid.

Grôm gave him a quick look of approval. " Tell the people," said he, " to follow us round through the open space yonder, and into the valley, that we may make camp, for there are many great beasts here, and very fierce. And tell them not to approach the Shining One, lest he smite them, but also not to fear, for he will not come at them."

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When the people—trembling, staring with fascinated eyes at the dancing array, and shrinking nervously from the strange warmth—had all been gathered into the open space between the fire and the thickets, Grôm led the Chief up to the flames and hurriedly explained to him what he had found out as to how they must be managed. Then, leaving him to ponder the miracle, and to experiment, he took A-ya to help him build other fires along the edge of the thickets in order to keep the monsters at bay. And all the while the tribe sat watching, huddled on their haunches, with mouths agape and eyes rolling in amazement.

Bawr the Chief, meanwhile, was revolving many things in his sagacious brain, as he alternately lighted and extinguished the little, eating flames which fixed themselves upon the dry wood when he held it in the blaze. His mind was of a very different order from that of Grôm, though, perhaps, not less capacious and capable. Grôm was the discoverer, the initiator, while Bawr was essentially the ruler, concerned to apply all he learned to the extension and securing of his power. It was his realization of Grôm's transparent honesty and indifference to power which made him so free from jealousy of Grôm's prestige. His shrewd perceptions told him that Grôm would far rather see him rule the tribe, so long as he ruled it effectually, than be troubled with the task himself. But there were others in the tribe whom he suspected of being less disinterested—who were capable of becoming troublesome if ever he should find his

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strength failing. One of these, in particular, a gigantic, black-browed fellow by the name of Ne-boo, remotely akin to the deserter Mawg, was now watching him with eyes more keen and considerate than those of his companions. As Bawr became conscious of this inquiring, crafty gaze, he made a slip, and closed his left hand on a portion of his branch which was still glowing red. With superb nerve he gave no sign of the hurt. And he thought quickly: he had taken a liberty with the Bright One, and been bitten by those mysterious, shining teeth which left a scar of black. Well, someone else should be bitten, also. Calmly heating the branch again till it was a live coal for three-quarters of its length, he called the crafty-eyed warrior to him. The man came, uneasy, but full of interest.

"Take this, and hold it for me," said Bawr, and tossed him the red brand. With shrinking hands Ne-boo caught it, to drop it instantly with a yell of pain and terror. It fell, scraping his leg, and his foot, and in his fright he threw himself down beside it, begging it not to smite him again.

"Strange," said Bawr, in a voice for all the tribe to hear, "the Shining One will not suffer Ne-boo to touch him." With the air of a high priest he picked the brand up, and held it again into the flames. And Grôm returning at this moment to his side, he commanded in a low voice: "Let none but ourselves attend or touch the Bright One."

Grôm, his mind occupied with plans for the

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settling of the tribe, agreed without asking the reason for this decree. He was thinking about getting the tribe housed in the caves which he had noticed in the steep sides of the valley. He knew well enough that these caves were the houses of the red bear, the sabre-tooth and the bone-crushing hyenas, but, as he explained to the Chief with thrilling elation, the Shining One would drive these monsters out, and teach them to keep their distance. To Bawr, who had had some experience in his day of the red bear and the sabre-tooth, and who had not yet seen all that these dancing tongues of gold and scarlet could do, the enterprise seemed a formidable one. But he sagaciously reserved his judgment, pondering things that he felt sure Grôm would not dream of.

That night, when all was thick darkness beyond the magic circle of the fires, the People of the Little Hills sat or crouched trembling and wondering, while monstrous dim shapes of such bears or tigers as they had never imagined in their worst nightmares prowled roaring all about them, held off by nothing more substantial than just those thin and darting tongues of flame. That the little, bright things could bite terribly they had evidence enough, both in the charred and corroded wood which the flames had licked, and in the angry wounds of Ne-boo. At the same time they saw their Chief and Grôm apparently handling the Terror with impunity, and the girl A-ya approaching it and serving it freely, though always with bowed head and every mark of awe.

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But what made the deepest, the most ineffaceable impression on the minds of the tribe was to see Grôm and the Chief, each waving a pair of dead branches all aflame, charge at a pair of giant sabre-tooths who had ventured too near, and drive them scurrying like frightened sheep into the bush. Repeating the tactics which he had previously found so effective, Grôm hurled one of his flaming weapons after the fugitives—an example which the Chief, not to be outshone, followed instantly. The result was startling. The brands chanced to fall where there was a great accumulation of dry wood and twigs and leaves. In a moment, as it seemed, the flames had leapt up into full fury, and were chasing the fugitives up the valley with a roar. In the sudden great glare could be seen sabre-tooths stretching out in panic-stricken flight, burly red bear fleeing with their awkward but deadly swift gallop, huge hyenas scattering to this side and that, and many furtive unknown creatures driven into a blind and howling rout. Grôm himself was as thunderstruck as anyone at the amazing result of his action, but his quick wits told him to disguise his astonishment, and bear himself as if it were exactly what he had planned. The Chief copied his attitude with scrupulous precision and unflinching nerve, though quite prepared to see the red whirlwind suddenly turn back and blot himself, the audacious Grôm, and the whole shuddering tribe from the face of the outraged earth. But no such thing happened. The torrent of flame raged straight up

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the valley, cutting a path some fifty odd paces in width, and leaving a track of smouldering, winking, red stems and stumps behind it. And all the beasts hid themselves in their terror, so that not one of them was seen again that night. As for the People of the Little Hills, they were now ready to fall down and put dust in their hair in utter abasement, if either Grôm or the Chief so much as looked at them.

Soon after sunrise the next day, the Chief and Grôm, bearing lighted brands, and followed close by A-ya with a bundle of dry faggots, twigs and grass, took possession of two great caves on the southward-facing slope of the valley. The giant bears which occupied one of them fled ignominiously at the first threat of the flames, having been scorched and thoroughly cowed by the conflagration of the previous night. The other cave had been already vacated by the hyena pack, which had no stomach to face these throwers of flame. Before the mouth of each cave, at a safe distance, a fire was lighted—a notice to all the beasts that their rule was at an end. The whole tribe was set to the gathering of a great store of fuel, which was heaped about the mouths of the caves as a shield against the weather. Then the people began to settle themselves in their new home, secure in the faith that not even the hordes of the Bow-legs, should they chance that way, would have the temerity to face their new and terrible protector.

When all was ordered to his satisfaction, the

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Chief called Grôm to his side. The two stood apart, and watched the tall figure of A-ya moving from the one fire to the other, and tending them reverently, as one performing a rite. Grôm's eyes took on a certain illumination at the sight of her, a look which the Chief had never observed in any man's eyes before. But he thought little of it, for his mind was full of other matters.

"It is well," said he presently, in a low voice, "that the service and understanding of the Bright One should not be allowed to the people, but should be kept strictly to ourselves, and to those whom we shall choose to initiate. I shall appoint the two best men of my own kin, and two others whom you shall select, as servants of the Bright One. And I will make a law that the people shall henceforth worship only the Bright One, instead of, as heretofore, the Thunder, and the Wind, and unknown Spirits, which, after all, as far as I can see, have never been able to do much either for or against us. But this Bright One is a real god, such as we can be sure of. And you and I shall be his priests. And only we shall be allowed to understand him."

"That is good," agreed Grôm, whose brain was busy devising other ways of making the wild flames serviceable to man. "But," he went on, "there is A-ya. She knows as much about it as you and I."

The Chief pondered a moment.

"Either the girl must die," said he, eyeing Grôm's face, "or she must be a priest along with us."

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" I think she will be a very good priest," said Grôm drily, his eyes resting upon her.

Then the Chief, ascending a rock between the two fires, spoke to the people, and decreed as he had said. He told a little about the Shining One, just so much as he thought it good for his hearers to know. He declared that the ones he had chosen for the great honour of serving the fires must tend them by turns, night and day, and guard them with their lives ; for that, if one or the other should be suffered to die out, some great disaster would assuredly come upon the tribe.

" And henceforth," he concluded, " you shall not be called the People of the Little Hills ; for these ridges, indeed, are not such hills as those whose bald and windy tops are keeping the bones of our fathers. But you shall be known and feared greatly by our enemies as ' The Children of the Shining One,' under whose protection I declare you."

CHAPTER V

THE PULLER-DOWN OF TREES

ON the broken hill-slope overlooking the Valley of Fire, in the two great caves known as the Cave of the Bears and the Cave of the Hyenas, the tribe of the Children of the Shining One now dwelt secure and began to recover heart. Before each cave-mouth, tended night and day, burned the sacred flame, its tongues licking upwards in gold and scarlet with a radiance from which all the tribe, with the sole exceptions of Bawr, the Chief, and Grôm, his right hand and councillor, were wont to avert their eyes in awe whenever they passed it in their comings and goings. Only from a distance would they presume to look at the flames directly; and ever as they looked their wonder and their reverence grew. Their trust in the protection of the Shining One came to have no bounds, for night after night would the great red bears return, prowling in the mysterious gloom just beyond the ring of light, with their dreadful eyes turned fixedly upon their former habitation, only to be driven off ignominiously when Grôm rushed

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at them with a shout and a flaming torch above his head. And night after night would the troops of the hyenas come back, their monstrous-jowled heads swinging low from their mighty shoulders, to sit and howl their devilish laughter above their ancient lair, only to slink off in cowed silence when the Chief would hurl a blazing brand among them. When the beasts were thus discomfited and abashed, the boldest of the warriors would go leaping after them and bring down the hindermost with spears. So it came about that presently the great animals knew themselves beaten, and sullenly withdrew to the other side of the hills.

It was just this country at the other side of the hills which most appealed to the restless imagination of Grôm. Within the valley—which widened out, as it receded from its fiery gateway, to enclose league upon league of fertile plain—was good hunting, along with an abundance of roots, fruits and edible herbs. But in Grôm's heart burned that spirit of unquenchable expectation which has led the race of Man upwards through all obstacles—the urge to find out ever what lies beyond. So the saw-toothed line of these dark, volcanic summits drew him irresistibly, with the promise of unknown wonders hidden behind them.

During these few weeks since coming to the Valley of the Fire, Grôm had been tirelessly experimenting with the bright element, trying this kind of fuel and that, one after another, in order to learn what food was most acceptable to it. He learned that certain substances it would devour

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in raging haste, only to fail and die soon after ; or not truly to die, he imagined, but to flee back unseen to its dancing, flickering source at the valley mouth. Other substances he found that it would consume slowly, but pertinaciously. While into yet others, such as dry turf and punk, it would eat its way and hide, maintaining therein for a long time a retired but potent existence, ready to leap into radiant life under certain provocation. His invention stimulated by these experiments, he had made himself several hollow tubes of a thick green bark whipped about with thongs, and had stuffed them with that mixture of turf and punk which he found best calculated to hold the furtive seeds of fire alive.

With one of these slow torches alight, and several spare ones slung over his shoulders, Grôm set out to cross the pointed hills and seek new wonders in the lands beyond. The tall girl, A-ya, went with him. This not being customary in the tribe, they gave reasons. Grôm said that he needed the girl because she alone knew how rightly to serve and tend the Shining One in combat. It was a good reason, but he was amazed to find in his heart so deep a desire for her that he was ill content whenever his eyes could not rest upon her. There was no one in the tribe with whom he could discuss this strange emotion, for no one, not even the wise and subtle-minded Chief, would have comprehended it—romantic love not yet having come openly to these men of the Morning of Time. So Grôm gave the lesser reason, which all, including

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himself, could understand. As for the girl, she said that whatever her lord commanded she must needs obey, which she did with a most seemly readiness. But in her heart she knew that if her man had commanded her to stay behind, she would have obeyed only so long as he remained in sight, and would then have followed him secretly.

Like Grôm, the girl carried two flint-headed spears. Both wore clumsy but effective slivers, flint, for knives, in their girdles of twisted skin. The girl, besides her weapons, carried a substantial burden of strips of meat dried hard in the sun, in case game should prove scarce or elusive in the land beyond the hills. But when they had got well out of sight of the caves, Grôm turned, relieved her of the burdens which, according to tribal conventions, it was her duty to carry for her man, and gave her instead the light but precious tube of fire.

As they ascended the ragged slopes, vegetation grew sparse, and when toward nightfall they gained the pass which Grôm was making for—a deep cleft between two steep red and purple peaks—the rock beneath their feet was naked but for a low growth of flowering herbs and thorn. The pass was too high for the aloe and mesembryanthemum to flourish, and the lava-bed which floored it was yet too new to have clothed itself in any of the larger mountain-loving trees. Here they passed the night, in a shallow niche of rock with a fire before it; and the fire being visible from a long way off, no prowlers cared even to approach it.

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On the following day they travelled swiftly, but the pass was long. It was near sunset again when at last the rocks fell away to either side, and they saw spread out below their feet the land which they had come to explore.

It was a vast, rolling plain, golden-green with rank, cane-like grasses, dotted with innumerable clumps of trees, and laced with full watercourses which lay in spacious loops of blue and silver. Here and there lay broad, irregular patches where the grass did not flourish, and these were of vivid emerald-green from some unknown growth.

Along the horizon to the north sparkled a great water. And half-way down the steep, toward the right, smoked and smouldered a shallow, saucer-shaped crater from whose broken lower rim a purple-brown serpent of comparatively recent lava descended in sluggish curves across the intense green.

Somewhat to the girl's apprehension, Grôm seemed anxious to investigate the smoking crater, but the only practicable path down the mountain led them away from it, so he was content to leave it for another time and another, perhaps less repellent, approach.

Descending presently into a region of ledges and ravines clothed with dense thickets, they found on every hand traces of the giant bears and the sabre-tooth tigers whom they had driven from the caves in the Valley of Fire. Grôm hurriedly whirled the smouldering torch into a flame, and from it lighted a couple of resinous brands, one

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for himself, and one for A-ya to carry. Thus armed, they fearlessly followed the broad trail of bears, which led them very conveniently down the steep. And bear and sabre-tooth alike, at sight of the flames thus apparently seeking them out, remembered their recent scorching discomfiture, and slunk off like whipped curs.

Grôm's immediate object was to make his way straight to the shores of that great water, whose gleaming on the horizon had been like an invitation to his inquiring spirit. But when early in the forenoon of the fourth day they reached the lowlands, he found that his way would be anything but straight. The immense grasses, a species of cane, grew so tall, so dense and so thick in the stem, that it was impossible to force a path through them just where he would.

He saw that he must use the trails of the wild beasts, which intersected it in all directions. There were the tracks of every animal he knew—the hunters and the hunted alike—and of many more which he did not know. But one broad trail in particular arrested his attention. It struck such fear to the heart of the girl, whose eyes were keen and understanding, that her knees trembled beneath her, and had she dared she would have begged Grôm to turn back from a land which held such monsters.

Even Grôm himself felt a thrill of awe as he stared at the trail which bespoke so mighty a traveller. Wherever it led, the sturdiest growths were crushed flat as if some huge boulder from

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the mountains had been rolled over them. And the monster footprints, which here and there stamped themselves clearly in the trail, were thrice the size of those of the hugest mammoth.

Grôm stooped and studied these footprints, pondering them with knit brows. What manner of giant it might be which moved on such colossal and misshapen members it was beyond his wits to guess. But of a surety it was a fine roadmaker!

With a confident arrogance born of the knowledge that he was the lord of Fire, he deliberately chose to pursue this dreadful trail. And the girl, hiding her terror lest it should diminish her credit in his sight, followed close at his elbow, her bright eyes tirelessly searching the jungle on either side.

Suddenly behind them came a confused, terrifying noise of panting breaths and trampling feet. It came sweeping down the broad trail. There were grunting cries, also; and Grôm understood at once that a herd of pig-tapirs—heavy-footed, timorous beasts, as tall as heifers—were sweeping down upon them in mad flight before some unknown pursuer.

Against that blind panic, that headlong frantic rush, he knew that blazing brands would avail nothing. He clutched the girl by the hand. "Come!" he ordered. And they fled side by side down the trail.

It was in their minds to climb the first suitable tree they should come to, and let the rout go by. In half a minute or so, over the tops of the giant

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grasses, they sighted such a tree, only a few hundred yards ahead. The trail, swerving opportunely, appeared to lead directly towards its foot, and they raced on, the girl now laughing softly with excitement, and forgetting her fear of the unknown because of the known peril behind her. It pleased her curiously to find that her man had not grown too divine to be ready to run away on fitting occasion; and she kept glancing at him from under her dark tangle of hair with eyes of passionate possession.

The wild uproar behind was drawing nearer swiftly, but the refuge was now not more than fifty paces ahead. All at once the way to it was barred. Out from a little side-track on the right came lumbering a gigantic rhinoceros, his creased and folded hide clothed in matted brown wool and caked with clay. He swung round into the trail, almost blocking it with his bulk, stared for a couple of seconds with evil little eyes at the two slim beings before him, then lowered the huge double horn that armed his snout, and charged at them with a grunt of fury.

Caught thus fairly between the devil before, and the deep sea of trampling hoofs behind, Grôm had no choice. A second's waving of the lighted brands convinced him that the rhinoceros was too dense of brain to fear the fire, or even to notice it. Once more clutching the girl's hand, he ran back a little way, seeking to draw the two perils together, and give them an opportunity to distract each other's attention.

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He ran back till the flying, plunging herd of the pig-tapirs came into full view around the curve of the trail. Then, with all his strength, he forced his way into the grass, on the left, shouldering aside the upright stems to make room for the girl to enter. She hurled her blazing brand full into the face of the rhinoceros, hoping to confuse or divert him for an instant, then thrust herself lithely in past Grôm.

The rhinoceros *was* diverted for an instant. The smoke and sparks half blinded him, and in a paroxysm of fury he checked himself to trample the strange assailant under foot. Then he thundered forward. But the tough stems of the grass had closed up again. The two fugitives were hidden. He saw the packed herd of the tapirs bearing down upon him ; and, forgetting the insignificant creatures who had first roused his anger, he charged forward at full speed to meet this new foe.

Realizing well enough that in three or four seconds more the crash would come, and that the struggle between the rhinoceros and the maddened herd would be little short of a cataclysm, Grôm and the girl struggled breathlessly to force themselves to a safe distance lest they should be crushed in the mêlée.

The sweat ran down into their eyes, and swarms of tiny insects, breeding in the giant stems, choked their throats and nostrils ; but they wrestled their way onwards blindly, foot by foot. Behind them, out in the trail, came a ponderous crash, and

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then an appalling explosion of squeals, screams, grunts and roars. The next instant the rigid stems gave way suddenly before them, and they fell forward, with a startled cry from the girl, into a deep and sunless water.

They came up, spluttering and choking; but as soon as she could catch breath the girl laughed, whereupon the grimness of Grôm's face relaxed. The water was a deep creek, perfectly overshadowed and hidden by the rank growth along its banks. But just opposite was the tree whose refuge they had been trying to gain. They swam across in half-a-dozen strokes, and drew themselves ashore, and shook themselves like a pair of retrievers. Through all the flight, the fierce effort among the grass-stems, and the unexpected ducking, they had kept tenacious hold of every one of their treasures. But—their fire was out! The brand was black; the precious tube, with the seeds of fire lurking at its heart, was drenched, saturated and lifeless.

For a moment or two Grôm looked into the girl's eyes steadily, conveying to her without a word the whole tremendous significance of their loss. The girl responded, after a second's dismay, with a look of trust and adoration which brought a rush of warmth to Grôm's heart. He smiled proudly, and shook his club as if to reassure himself. Then, climbing hurriedly into the tree, they stared back over the plumed tops of the grasses.

The sight that met their eyes was not one for weak nerves. The spot in the grass which they

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had just escaped from was a shambles. The foremost of the panic-stricken pig-tapirs, met by the charge of the rhinoceros, had been ripped and split by the rooting of his double horn, and hurled to either side as if by some titanic plough. A couple more had been trampled down and crushed before his charge was stayed by the irresistible pressure of the surging, squealing mass.

There he had stood fast, like a jagged promontory in the surges, tossing his mighty head and thrusting hideously, while the rest of the herd passed on, either scrambling clean over him or breaking down the canes and pouring around on either side. Of those that passed over him about one in every three or four got ripped by the tossing horn, and went staggering forward a few paces, only to fall and be trodden out by their fellows. Close behind the last of the squealing fugitives came the cause of their panic—two immense black lions, who had apparently been playing with their prey like cats.

When they came face to face with the rhinoceros where he stood among his victims, shaking the blood from horn and head and shoulder, they stopped abruptly. Together, perhaps, they would have been a match for him. But theirs was a far higher intelligence than his. They knew the almost impenetrable toughness of his hide, his Berserk rage, his imperviousness to reasonable fear; and they had no care to engage themselves without cause in so uncertain and unprofitable a combat.

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With a roar that rolled in thunder over the plain and seemed to set the very tree-tops quivering, they leaped lazily aside and went off in enormous bounds through the grass, circling about as if to intercept, in sheer wantonness of slaughter, the remnants of the fleeing herd. At the sight Grôm frowned anxiously, thinking how helpless he and the girl would be against such foes, now that they no longer had the Shining One to protect them.

Squealing to split the ears, the pig-tapirs came galloping past the tree, making for a piece of water some furlongs further on, where doubtless they hoped to evade both the lions and the rhinoceros. But they had yet another adversary to reckon with.

Just past the tree, at a thicket of immense scarlet poinsettias, the trail curved sharply. From behind the poinsettias arose a gigantic shape unlike anything that Grôm had ever dreamed of. And he knew that the maker of the mysterious trail and those tremendous footprints was before him.

With a trumpeting bray of indignation the monster sat upright on hind-quarters far more ponderous than those of a mammoth. Its tail, as thick at the base as the body of a bear, helped to support it, while its clumsy frame towered to a height of eighteen or twenty feet. Its hind legs were very short, thick like tree-trunks, grotesquely bowed; and its thighs like buttresses. Its fore legs were more arms than legs, of startling length and massive strength, draped in long, stiff hair,

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and terminated by colossal hands with immense hooked claws for fingers. The whole body was clothed with rusty hair of an amazing coarseness, like matting fibre. The vast head, flat on top and prolonged to a snout that was almost a proboscis, had the look of being deformed by reason of its fantastically exaggerated jowl, or lower jaw. This terrifying monster thrust out a narrow pink tongue, some three or four feet in length, stooped and turned, and gave a hurried look at something crouching behind its mighty thighs.

"It's baby!" muttered the girl, with a little indrawn breath of sympathy.

Then the strange being sat up again to meet and ward off the rush of the maddened pig-tapirs.

For a moment it beat off the assault, seizing the frantic beasts and hurling them this way and that as if they had been so many rabbits. Then it was completely surrounded by the reeking, squealing, bleeding horde, which paid no more personal attention to it than if it had been a mass of rock. They rolled over the little one, unheeding, and trod it flat. Its death cry split the air; and at that sound the mother seemed to sink down into her haunches. In her agony of rage and grief she literally tore some of her assailants in halves, throwing the awful fragments impatiently from her in order to lose no time in seizing a new victim. A few seconds more and the rush was past; and presently the mad rout was hurling itself with a tremendous splashing into the water. The monster

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ooked around for more victims—and was just in time to see the hideous vision of the rhinoceros charging down upon her. Triumphant from the encounter with the lions, he had rushed back to slake his still unsatisfied fury on the pig-tapirs. At any other time he would have given such an antagonist as the colossal megatherium a wide berth; but just now he was in one of his mad-nesses. His furious little swinish eyes blinking through the blood which dripped over them, he hurled himself straight onward. His horn was plunged into the monster's paunch; but at the same time one of those gigantic armed hands fell irresistibly on his neck, shattering the vertebræ through all their deep protection of hide and muscle. He collapsed with an explosive grunt; and the giant hands tossed him aside.

It was a frightful wound which the monster had received, but for a few moments she paid no attention to it, being occupied in licking the trampled body of her young one with that amazing tongue of hers. At length, apparently convinced that the little one was quite dead, she brayed again piteously, dropping forward upon all fours, and made off slowly down the trail, walking with grotesque awkwardness on the sides of her feet. For two or three hundred yards she kept on, drawing a wake of crimson behind her; and then, apparently exhausted by her wound, she turned off among the canes, and lay down, close beside the trail, but effectively screened from it.

From their place in the tree Grôm and the girl

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had followed breathlessly these astounding encounters. At last Grôm spoke :

"This is a country of very great beasts," he remarked, with the air of one announcing a discovery. As A-ya showed no inclination whatever to dissent from this statement, he presently went on to his conclusion, leaving her to infer his minor premise.

"We must go back and recover the Shining One. It is not well for us to go on without him."

"Yes," agreed the girl eagerly. For all her courage and her passionate trust in her man, the sight of those black lions bounding over the tops of the towering grasses had somewhat shaken her nerve. She feared no beasts but the swiftest, and those which might leap into the lower branches of the trees. "Yes!" she repeated. "Let us go back for the Shining One, lest he be angry at us for having put him in the water."

"But for yet a day more we will stay here in this tree, and rest and sleep in safety," continued Grôm, "that we may travel the more swiftly, till we get beyond the grasses."

Then, climbing higher into the tree, he proceeded to build a platform and roof of interlaced branches for their temporary home. In this task the girl did not help him, because of the great muscular strength which it required. She lay in a crotch, her hairy but long and shapely legs coiled under her like a leopard's, now gazing at her man with ardent eyes, now staring out apprehensively across the sun-drenched, perilous landscape.

Suddenly she gave a cry of amazement, and

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pointed excitedly down the trail. Beyond the water wherein the pig-tapirs had found refuge, beyond the lurking-place of the wounded megatherium, came three men, running desperately. Shading his eyes, Grôm made out that they were nearly exhausted. They were clearly men of the type of his own tribe, light-skinned and well shaped; and the leader, who carried a long club, was a man of stature equal to his own. Grôm's sympathies went out to them, and his impulse was to hasten to their assistance. Glancing further along the trail to learn the cause of their headlong flight, he saw two black lions in pursuit, probably the same two which had been driving the pig-tapirs a couple of hours earlier. They were coming on at such a pace that Grôm feared the weary fugitives would be overtaken before they could reach the tree of refuge. Instinctively he started to climb down. But, his eyes falling upon the girl, he remembered that he had no right to enter upon a venture so utterly hopeless while he had her to take care of. His eager clutch upon his spear relaxed.

"They are spent. They'll never get here!" he muttered anxiously.

"No!" said A-ya, with blank unconcern. "The lions will get them. It's Mawg, and his two cousins."

Grôm growled an exclamation of astonishment. The girl's eyes—or her intuitions—were keener than his. But he saw at a second glance that she was right.

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At this moment Mawg, running a few paces in advance by reason of his superior speed and stamina, passed the spot where the wounded megatherium lay hidden. The monster lifted her dreadful head. The next second the other two arrived, running elbow to elbow, with drooped shoulders of exhaustion. Through the screen of canes a gigantic hand shot out above their heads and came down upon them, crushing the two together. They had no time for outcry ; but it was clear that some sound caught the leader's ears, for he glanced back over his shoulder. He was near enough now for the keen-eyed watchers in the tree to see his face change with horror. He ran on without a pause, but now with fresh speed, as if the sight had shocked him into new vigour. Seeing that there was, after all, a good prospect of his reaching the tree in time, Grôm swung down to be ready to help him up. As he did so he saw the two lions approach the hiding-place of the monster.

That vast, clawed hand still lay there on the two crushed bodies in the middle of the trail. The lions saw it, and they checked themselves at a safe distance. They knew that just behind the grass-screen lurked another such shaggy and monstrous member, waiting to rend them as they would rend an antelope. They shrank, and drew back, snarling angrily. It is possible they feared lest the screen on either side of the trail might conceal more than one of the monsters ; for they sprang far aside as if to make a wide circuit of the perilous spot.

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"There's plenty of time!" muttered Grôm, and dropped upon his feet in the middle of the trail. The girl came in mad haste after him, but at his sharp command "Stay there!" she contented herself with slipping out upon the lowest branch, just over his head, and holding her spear ready.

"Kill him!" she cried. But Grôm seemed not to hear.

Staggering, and half blind with exhaustion, Mawg was within twenty paces before he noticed who was confronting him. Then his dull eyes blazed. With a snarl of fury he hurled his club straight at Grôm's face, missing him only by a hand's-breadth. But the effort, and the disappointment at finding himself thus baulked, as he imagined, on the very threshold of escape, seemed to finish him. He stumbled on with groping hands outstretched, and fell just at Grôm's feet.

Grôm hesitated, wondering how he could get this inert weight up into the tree. The girl did not understand his hesitation.

"Kill him!" she hissed, leaning down eagerly from her branch overhead.

"No, he's a great warrior, and the tribe needs him," answered Grôm, stooping to shake the prostrate form.

Mawg stirred, beginning to recover. Grôm shook him again.

"Up into the tree, quick!" he ordered in a loud, sharp voice. "The lions are coming."

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Mawg roused himself, sat up, and stared with a look of bewilderment changing swiftly into hate.

"Up!" shouted Grôm again. "The tree. They're coming!"

At this the fellow growled, but sprang up as if he had been jabbed with a spear, and clambered into the tree as nimbly as a monkey. Grôm followed, quickly but coolly. A-ya, who had waited with her eyes watchfully on Mawg, stepped close to Grôm's side; and all three swung upwards into the higher branches as the two lions arrived beneath.

Glaring up into the tree with shrewd, malevolent eyes, the great beasts realized that, for the present at least, the three man-creatures were quite out of reach. Lashing their tufted tails in disappointment, they turned aside to sniff, in surly scorn, at the dead, mountainous hulk of the rhinoceros, which lay with one ponderous foot stuck up in the air as if in clumsy protest at Fate. Comprehending readily the manner of its death, they came back and lay down under the tree, and fell to gnawing lazily at the body of one of the pig-tapirs which the megatherium had torn in two. They had the air of intending to stay some time, so Grôm presently turned his attention to his rescued rival.

Mawg was sitting on the next branch, a good spear's length distant, and glowering at A-ya's lithe shapeliness with eyes of savage greed. Grôm knit his brows, and significantly passed an arm about the girl's shoulders. Mawg shifted his attention to him.

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"What do you want of me?" he demanded, in a thick, guttural voice.

"I thought you ran as if you did not want the lions to eat you," answered Grôm.

Mawg stared with a stupid brutality and incomprehension; and the eyes of the two men, meeting fairly, seemed to lock in a duel of personalities.

They presented a significant contrast. Both, physically, superb specimens of their race—the highest then evolved upon the youthful earth—the elder man, in his ample forehead and calm, reasoning eyes, displayed all the promise of the future; while the youth, low-skulled and with his dull but pugnacious eyes set under enormous bony brows, suggested the mere brute from which the race had mounted. His hair was shorter and coarser than Grôm's, and foully matted; and his neck was set very far forward between his powerful but lumpy shoulders. The colour of his coarse and furrowed skin was so dark as to make the weathered tan of Grôm and A-ya look white by contrast.

In no way lacking courage, but failing in will and steadiness, in a dozen seconds Mawg involuntarily shifted his gaze, and looked down at the lions.

"What do you want of me?" he demanded again, as if he had had no answer before.

"The tribe has too few warriors left. I will take you back to the tribe!" replied Grôm with authority.

Mawg curled back his thick lips from his great

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yellow dog-teeth in a snarling laugh of incredulity.

"You want to kill me!" said he, nodding his head.

Grôm stared at him for a moment or two with a look of fatigued contempt, then tore off a substantial strip of dried flesh from the bundle hanging on the branch, and tossed it to him. The fellow snatched it, and hid it behind him, being too hungry to refuse it, but too savage to eat it under his captor's eye. Grôm smiled slowly, and fell to playing with a heavy strand of A-ya's hair which had fallen over his arm. But to this caress the girl paid no attention. She was puzzled and outraged at Grôm's action in protecting his rival. Her nostrils dilated, and a red spot glowed angrily under each cheek-bone.

Suddenly from down the trail came a noise of crackling grass-stems. The two lions got up from their meal, and turned their heads inquiringly toward the sound. The next moment they went stalking off the opposite way with an air of haughty indignation, ignoring all the bodies of the slain pig-tapirs. When they had rounded the first turn in the trail they leaped into the grass, and went bounding off in a straight line toward a large patch of wood some miles distant. The wounded megatherium was returning.

Perhaps stung into restlessness by the anguish of that rending thrust, the monster came dragging herself back toward the tree, crawling on the sides of her feet. Arriving at the scene of battle, she

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sniffed once more at her mangled young one, and brayed piteously over it. Then turning in an explosive fury upon the body of the rhinoceros, began to tear it limb from limb as one might pull apart a roast pigeon. While thus occupied, she chanced to turn her eyes upon the tree, and caught sight of the three figures looking down upon her.

On the instant her rage was diverted to them. Braying like a steam siren, she came under the tree, reared herself against it, flung her giant arms about it, and strove to pull it down. The tree rocked as if struck by a tornado; and Mawg, who had been too slow to notice what was about to happen, gave a yell of horror as he barely saved himself from falling. The girl laughed, whereupon he shot her a menacing look which so enraged her that she raised her spear as if to transfix him.

But there was too much happening below for her attention to remain on Mawg. Finding the tree quite too sturdy to be pulled down off-hand, the monster gripped the lowest main branch, a limb eight or ten inches through, and with one wrench peeled it down like a stalk of celery. Her first effort, upon the main trunk, had set the blood once more pumping from her wound, but she paid no attention to it. Reaching to the next great branch, she ripped that one down also, taking another great strip from the main trunk. Grôm saw that her purpose obviously was to pull the tree to pieces bit by bit, in order to get at her intended victims. Mawg apparently saw this also, and it was too much for him. Gripping his strip

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of dried meat between his teeth, he slipped around the trunk till he was sheltered from the monster's sight, dropped to a branch which stretched far over the water, ran out along it nimbly as an ape, and dived. The monster, her eyes fixed upon the two remaining in the tree, never noticed his escape. Mawg swam the creek, thrust his way through the grass-stems, darted back to snatch up his club, shook it at Grôm, and, yelling an obscene taunt, raced off to seek himself another retreat before nightfall.

Neither Grôm nor A-ya had any heed to spare him at that moment. The monster had just torn down a limb so huge that the main trunk was almost split in half by its loss. Grôm saw that unless he could stop this process of destruction, in a few moments more the tree would be overthrown. The monster was just rearing herself to clutch the next great bough. Spear in hand, Grôm slipped down to meet her, and halted on a branch just out of reach. The monster brayed vindictively, stretched to her full height, and then shot forth her tremendous muscular red coil of tongue, thinking evidently to lick down her insignificant adversary from his perch. She was within an inch of succeeding. Grôm just eluded the strange attack by stepping aside nimbly; and quick as thought A-ya's spear slashed the dreadful red tongue as it reached flickering after her lord's ankles. The next moment, seeing the monster's throat upstretched and unguarded, Grôm drove his spear full force, straight into the soft hollow of

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it. The weapon sank in to a depth of perhaps three feet, till the ragged flint lodged in the vertebrae of the monster's neck. Then the shaft was wrenched violently from his hand ; and the monster, blowing blood and foam from mouth and nostrils, fell with a crash among the litter of great branches which she had pulled down.

Grôm drew a deep breath of relief, and commended the girl for her timely and effective stroke at that terrible tongue. Then he set himself coolly to the task of completing their shelter for the night. As he wove leafy branches into the floor of the platform to make it soft, she contemplated his work with satisfaction. Presently he remarked :

" I'm glad we are rid of that Mawg."

" You should have killed him ! " said the girl curtly.

" But why ? " demanded Grôm, in some surprise. In his eyes the fellow was a valuable piece of property belonging to the tribe, a fighting asset.

" He wants *me* ! " answered the girl, meeting his eyes resentfully.

Grôm let his eyes roam all over her—face, hair and form—and such a look of passionate admiration glowed in their steady depths that her anger faded, her own eyes dropped, and her breast gave a happy, incomprehensible flutter. She had never seen such a look in any man's face before, or even dreamed of such a look as possible.

" Of course, he wants you," said Grôm, wondering, as he spoke, at the ring of his own voice. " You are the fairest thing, and the most desirable,

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on earth. All men whose eyes come to rest on you must want you. But none shall have you, ever, for you are mine, and none shall tear you from me."

And at that the girl forgot her anger, and forgave him for having neglected to kill Mawg.

That night sleep was impossible for them, though their lofty shelter was comfortable and secure. A vast orange moon, near the full, illuminated the spacious landscape; and beneath the tree came all the giant night-prowlers, gathering to the unparalleled banquet which the day had spread for them. Only the two black lions, perhaps already glutted, did not come. Wolves, a small pack of self-disciplined wild dogs, a troop of hyenas, and several enormous leopards, howled, snarled and wrangled in knots over the widely scattered carcasses, each group watching its neighbours with suspicion and deadly animosity.

A gigantic red bear came lumbering up, and all the lesser prowlers scattered discreetly but resentfully before him. He strode straight to the chief place, under the rent, dishevelled tree, and fell to tearing at the mountainous corpse of the megatherium. He was undisturbed till two sabretooths arrived, their tawny coats spectral in the moonlight, their foot-long tusks giving their broad masks a dreadful grin.

Before one sabre-tooth the bear would have stood his ground scornfully; but before the two he thought it best to defer. Slowly, and with a thunderous grumbling, he moved over to the body of the rhinoceros, pretending that he preferred it.

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The air was split and battered with the clamour of raving voices. Other sabre-tooths came, and then another bear.

There were swift, sudden battles, as swiftly dropped because neither combatant wished to fight to a finish when there was feasting so abundant for all. And once a leopard, dodging the paw of a sabre-tooth, sprang into the tree, only to fall back howling from the spears thrust at him through the floor of Grôm's platform.

Just before dawn the girl slept, while Grôm kept watch beside her lest another leopard should fancy to explore their refuge. An hour later, when the first pallor was spreading, she awoke with a cry of fear, and clung to Grôm's arm, shuddering strongly.

"But—what is it?" he asked, in a tender voice, stroking her heavy mane.

"I was afraid!" she answered, like a child.

"What were you afraid of?" asked Grôm humouring her.

"I was afraid of Mawg. I *am* afraid of him!" she answered, sitting up and shaking the hair from her eyes, and staring out fearfully over the grey, transparent plains.

"Why should you fear Mawg?" demanded Grôm proudly. "Am not I your man? And am not I always with you? Many such mad brutes as Mawg could not take you from me."

"I know," answered the girl, "that he and such as he would be as straw in my lord's hands. But—even Grôm must sometimes sleep!"

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Grôm laughed gently at her forebodings.

"He must sleep now, indeed, for we have a long and perilous journey before us," said he. Laying his great shaggy head in her lap, and stretching his limbs as far as the tiny platform would allow, he was asleep in two seconds. The girl, stooping forward till her rich hair shadowed the rugged, sleeping face, with its calm brows, pondered deeply over his inexplicable forbearance toward his rival. Her instincts all assured her that it was dangerous; but something else within her, something which she strove in vain to grasp, suggested to her that in some way it was noble, and made her glad of it. Then, all at once, the first of the sunrise, flooding into the tree-top, bathed her face with a rosy glow, and wonderfully transfigured it.

CHAPTER VI

THE BATTLE OF THE BRANDS

I

NOW for two years had the remnants of the tribe been settled in the Valley of Fire. They had prospered exceedingly. The caves were swarming with strong children; for at the Chief's orders every warrior had taken to himself either two or three wives, so that none of the widows had been left unmated. Grôm alone remained with but one wife, although his position in the tribe, second only to that of Bawr himself, would have entitled him to as many as he might choose.

Singularly happy with the girl A-ya, Grôm had been unwilling to receive other women into their little grotto, which branched off from the high arched entrance of the main cave. He might, however, have yielded, from policy and for the sake of the tribe, to pressure from the Chief, but for a look of startled anguish which he had seen leap into A-ya's eyes when he mentioned the matter to her. This had surprised him at the moment, but it had also thrilled him curiously. And as the girl made no objection to a step so

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absolutely in accordance with the tribal customs, Grôm thought about it a good deal. A few days later he excused himself to the Chief, saying that other women in his cave would be a nuisance, and would interfere with those studies of the Shining One which had proved so beneficial to the tribe. Bawr had accepted the excuse, though somewhat perplexed by it, and had accommodatingly taken the extra wives himself—a solution which had seemed to meet with the unqualified approval of A-ya.

The first winter in the Valley of Fire had been a wonderful one to the tribe, thanks to the fierce but beneficent element ever shining, dancing and whispering in its mysterious tongue before the cave doors. Bleak winds and driving, icy rains out of the north had no longer any power to distress them.

But when the storm was violent, with drenching and persistent rain, then it was found necessary to feed the fires before the cave-mouths lavishly with dry fuel from the stores which Grôm's forethought had caused to be accumulated under shelter. These contests between fire and rain were sagaciously represented by Bawr (who had by now to his authority as Chief added the subtle sanctions of High Priest) as the fight of the Shining One in protection of the tribe, his children.

On more than one occasion of torrential down-pour the struggle had almost seemed to hang for a while in doubt. But the Shining One lost no prestige, thereby, for always, down there across

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the valley-mouth, kept leaping and dancing those unquenchable flames of scarlet, amber and violet, fed by the volcanic gases from within the crevice, and utterly regardless of whatever floods the sky might loose upon them. This was evidence conclusive that the Shining One was master of the storm, no less than of the monsters which fled so terror-stricken before him.

In the early spring, the girl A-ya bore a child to Grôm ; a big-limbed, vigorous boy, with shapely head and spacious brow. In this event, and in the mother's happiness about it (a happiness that seemed to the rest of the women to savour of foolish extravagance), Grôm felt a gladness which dignity forbade him to betray.

But pondering over the little one with bent brows, and with deep eyes full of visions, he conceived such an ambition as had perhaps never before entered into the heart of man. It was that this child might grow up to achieve some wonderful thing, as he himself had done, for the advancement of his people. Of this baby, child of the woman toward whom he felt emotions so new and so profound, he had a premonition that new and incalculable things would come.

One day Grôm was following the trail of a deer some distance up the valley. Skilled hunter that he was, he could read in the trail that his quarry was not far ahead, and also that it had not yet taken alarm. He followed cautiously, up the wind, noiseless as a leopard, his sagacious eyes taking note of every detail about him.

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Presently he came to a spot where the trail was broken. There was a twenty-foot gap to the next hoofprints, and these went off at right angles to the direction which the quarry had hitherto been pursuing. Grôm halted abruptly, slipped behind a tree, crouched, and peered about him with the tense vigilance of a startled fox. He knew that something had frightened the deer, and frightened it badly. It behoved him to find out what that something was.

For some minutes he stood motionless as the trunk against which he leant, searching every bush and thicket with his keen gaze, and sniffing the air with expert nostrils. There was nothing perceptible to explain that sudden fright of the deer. He was on the point of slipping around the trunk to investigate from another angle. But stop! There on a patch of soil where some bear had been grubbing for tubers he detected a strange footprint. Instantly, he sank to the ground, and wormed his way over, silently as a snake, to examine it.

It was a human footprint, but much larger than his own, or those of his tribe; and Grôm's beard, and the stiff hairs on the nape of his corded neck, bristled with hostility at the sight of it.

The toes of this portentous print were immensely long and muscular, and the heel protruded grotesquely far behind the arch of the foot, which was low and flat. The pressure was very marked along all the outer edge, as if the author of the print had walked on the outer sides of his feet.

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To Grôm, who was an adept in the signs of the trail, it needed no second look to be informed that one of the Bow-legs had been here. And the trail was not five minutes old.

Grôm slipped under the nearest bushes, and writhed forward with amazing speed in the direction indicated by the strange footprint, pausing every other second to look, sniff the air, and listen. The trail was as clear as daylight to him. Suddenly he heard voices, several of them, guttural and squealing, and stopped again as if turned to stone. Then another voice, at which he started in amazement. It was Mawg's, speaking quietly and confidentially. Mawg, then, had gone over to the Bow-legs! Grôm's forehead wrinkled. A-ya had been right. He ought to have killed the traitor. He writhed himself into a dense covert, and presently, over the broken brink of a vine-draped ledge, was able to command a view of the speakers.

They were five in number, and grouped almost immediately below him. Four were of the Bow-legs, squat, huge in the shoulder, long-armed, flat-skulled, of a yellowish clay colour, with protruding jaws, and gaping, pit-like, up-turned nostrils to their wide, bridgeless noses. Grôm's own nose wrinkled in disgust as the sour taint of them breathed up to him.

They were all armed with spears and stone-headed clubs, such as their people had been unacquainted with up to the time of their attack upon the Tribe of the Little Hills. It was

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apparent to Grôm that the renegade Mawg, who towered among them arrogantly, had been teaching them what he knew of effective weapons.

Having no remotest comprehension of the language of the Bow-legs—which Mawg was speaking with them—Grôm could get little clue to the drift of their talk. They gesticulated frequently toward the east, and then again toward the caves at the valley-mouth, so Grôm guessed readily enough that they were planning something against his people.

It was clear, also, that this was but a little scouting party which the renegade had led in to spy upon the weakness of the tribe. This was as far as he could premise with any certainty. The obvious conclusion was that these spies would return to their own country, to lead back such an invasion as should blot the Children of the Shining One out of existence.

Grôm was quick to realize that to listen any longer was to waste invaluable time. All that it was possible for him to learn, he had learned. Writhing softly back till he had gained what he considered a safe distance from the spies, he rose to his feet and ran, at first noiselessly, and crouching as he went, then at the top of that speed for which he was famous in the tribe. Reaching the Caves, he laid the matter hurriedly before the Chief, and within five minutes they were leading a dozen warriors up the trail.

Besides their customary weapons, both Grôm and the Chief carried fire-sticks, tubes of thick,

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green bark, tied round with raw hide, filled with smouldering punk, and perforated with a number of holes toward the upper end. This was one of Grôm's inventions, of proved efficacy against sabretooth and bear. By cramming a handful of dry fibre and twigs into the mouth of the tube, and then whirling it around his head, he was able to obtain a sudden and most unexpected burst of flame which no beast ever dared to face, and which never failed to compel the awe and wonder of his followers.

Like shadows the little band went gliding in single file through the thickets and under the drooping branches, their passage marked only by the occasional upspringing of a startled bird or the frightened crashing flight of some timorous beast surprised by their swift and noiseless approach. Arriving near the hollow under the ledge, they sank flat and wormed their way forward like weasels till they had gained the post of observation behind the vine-clad rock.

But the strangers had vanished. An examination of their footprints showed that they had fled in haste; and to Grôm's chagrin it looked as if he had himself given them the alarm. The problem was solved in a few minutes by the discovery that Mawg—easily detected by his finer footprints—had scaled the ledge and come upon the place where Grôm had lain hidden to watch them. Seeing that they were discovered, and that their discoverer had evidently gone to arouse the tribe, they had realized that, the Bow-legs being slow runners,

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their only hope lay in instant flight. From the direction which they had taken it was evident that they were fleeing back to their own country.

The Chief ordered instant pursuit. To this Grôm demurred, not only because the fugitives had obtained such a start—as was shown by the state of the trail—but because he dreaded to leave the Caves so long unguarded. He foresaw the possibility of another band of invaders surprising the Caves during the absence of this most efficient fighting force. But the Chief overruled him.

For several hours was the pursuit kept up ; and from the trail it appeared, not only that Mawg was leading his followers cleverly, but also that the Bow-legs were making no mean speed. The pursuers were come by now to near the head of the valley, a region with which they were little familiar. It was a broken country and well fitted for ambuscade, where a lesser force, well posted and driven to bay, might well secure a deadly advantage. The tribe was too weak to risk its few fighting men in any uncertain contest ; and the Chief, yielding slowly to Grôm's arguments, was on the point of giving the order to turn back, when a harsh scream of terror from just ahead, beyond a shoulder of rock, brought the line to a halt.

Waving their followers into concealment on either side of the trail, the Chief and Grôm stole forward and peered cautiously around the turn.

Straight before them fell away a steep and

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rugged slope. Midway of the descent, with his back to a rock, crouched one of the Bow-legs, battling frantically with his club to keep off the attack of a pair of leopards. The man was kneeling upon one knee, with the other leg trailed awkwardly behind him. It seemed an altogether difficult and disadvantageous position in which to do battle.

"The fool!" said Bawr. "He doesn't know how to fight a leopard."

"He's hurt. His leg is broken!" said Grôm. And straightway, a novel purpose flashing into his far-seeing brain, he ran leaping down the slope to the rescue, waving his fire-stick to a blaze as he went.

The Chief looked puzzled for a moment, wondering why the deliberate Grôm should trouble to do what it was plain the leopards would do for him most effectually. But he dreaded the chance of an ambushade. Shouting to the men behind to come on, he waved his own fire-stick to a blaze, and followed Grôm.

One of the leopards had already succeeded in closing in upon the wounded Bow-leg; but at the sight of Grôm and the Chief leaping down upon them they sprang back snarling and scurried off among the thickets like frightened cats. The Bow-leg lifted wild eyes to learn the meaning of his deliverance. But when he saw those two tall forms rushing at him with flame and smoke circling about their heads, he gave a groan and fell forward upon his face.

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Grôm stood over him, staring down upon the misshapen and bleeding form with thoughtful eyes ; while the Chief looked on, striving to fathom his purpose. The warriors came up, shouting savage delight at having at last got one of their dreaded enemies into their hands alive. They would have fallen upon him at once and torn him to pieces. But Grôm waved them back sternly. They growled with indignation, and one, sufficiently prominent in the tribal counsels to dare Grôm's displeasure, protested hotly against this favour to so venomous a foe.

" I demand this fellow, Bawr, as my captive ! " said Grôm.

" It was you who took him," answered the Chief. " He is yours." He was about to add, " though I can't see what you want of him ; " but it was a part of his policy never to seem in doubt or ignorance about anything that another might perhaps know. So, instead, he sternly told his followers to obey the law of the tribe and respect Grôm's capture. Then Grôm stepped close beside him and said at his ear : " Many things which we need to know will Bawr learn from this fellow presently, as to the dangers which are like to come upon us."

At this the Chief, being ready of wit, comprehended Grôm's purpose ; and, to the amazement of his followers, he looked down upon the hideous prisoner with a smile of satisfaction,

" Well have I called you the Chief's Right Hand," he answered. " I shall also have to call

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you the Chief's Wisdom, for in saving this fellow's life you have shown more forethought than I."

The captive's wounds having been dressed with astringent herbs, and his broken leg put into splints in accordance with the rude but not ineffective surgery of the time, he was placed on a rough litter of interlaced branches and carried back by the reluctant warriors to the Caves.

None of the warriors were advanced enough to have understood the policy of their leaders, so no effort was made by either the Chief or Grôm to explain it. The Chief, doubly secure in his dominance by reason of Grôm's loyal support, cared little whether his followers were content or not, and he took no heed of their ill-humour so long as they did not allow it to become articulate.

But when, after an hour's sullen tramping, they suddenly grew merry at their task, and fell to marching with a child-like cheer under their repulsive and groaning burden, he was surprised, and made inquiry as to the reason for this sudden complaisance. It turned out that one of the warriors, accounted more discerning than his fellows, had suggested that the captive was to be nursed back to health in order that he might be made an acceptable sacrifice to the Shining One. As this notion seemed to meet with such hearty approval, the wise Chief did not think it worth while to cast any doubt upon it. In fact, as he thought, such a solution might very well arrive, in the end, in case Grôm's design should fail to come up to his expectations.

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To the presence of the hideous and repulsive stranger in her dwelling, A-ya, as was natural, raised warm objection. But when Grôm had explained his purpose to her, and the imminence of the peril that threatened, she yielded readily enough, the dread of Mawg being yet vivid in her imagination. She lent herself cheerfully to the duty of caring for the captive's wounds and of helping Grôm to teach him the simple speech of the tribe.

As for the captive, for some days he was possessed by a morose anticipation of being brained at any moment—an anticipation, however, which did not seem to interfere with his appetite. He would clutch eagerly all the food offered him, and crouch, huddled over it, with his face to the rock-wall, while he devoured it with frantic haste and bestial noises. But as he found himself treated with invariable kindness, he began to develop an anxious gratitude and docility. On A-ya's tall form his little round eyes, shy and fierce at the same time, came to rest with an adoring awe. The smell of him being extremely offensive to all this cleanly tribe, and especially to A-ya and Grôm, who were more fastidious than their fellows, A-ya had taken advantage of her office as priestess of the Shining One to establish a little fire within the precincts of her own dwelling, and by the judicious use of aromatic barks upon the blaze she was able to scent the place to her taste. And the Bow-leg, seeing her mastery of the mysterious and dreadful scarlet tongues which licked upwards

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from the hollow on their rocky pedestal, regarded her less as a woman than as a goddess—a being who, for her own unknown reasons, chose to be beneficent toward him, but who plainly could become destructive if he should in any way transgress. Toward Grôm—who regarded him altogether impersonally as a means to an end, a pawn to be played prudently in a game of vast import—his attitude was that of the submitted slave, his fate lying in the hollow of his master's hand. Toward the rest of the tribe—who, till their curiosity was sated, kept crowding in to stare and jeer and curse—he displayed the savage fear and hate of a lynx at bay.

But the babe on A-ya's arm seemed to him something peculiarly precious. It was not only the son of Grôm, his grave and distant master, but also of that wonderful, beautiful, enigmatic deity, his mistress, the fashioner and controller of the flames. The adoration which soon grew up in his heart for A-ya's beauty, but which his awe of her did not suffer him even to realize to himself, was turned upon the babe, and speedily took the form of a passionate and dog-like devotion. A-ya, with her mother instinct, was quick to understand this, and also to realize the possible value to her child of such a devotion, in some future emergency. Moreover, it softened her heart toward the hideous captive, so that she busied herself not only to help Grôm teach him their language, but also to reform his manners and make him somewhat less unpleasant an associate. His wounds soon healed.

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thanks to the vitality of his youthful stock ; and the bones of the broken leg soon knit themselves securely. But Grôm's surgery having been hasty and something less than exact, the leg remained so crooked that its owner could do no more than hobble about with a laborious, dragging gait. It being obvious that he could not run away, there was no guard set upon him.

But it soon became equally obvious that nothing would induce him to remove himself from the neighbourhood of A-ya's baby. He was like a gigantic watch-dog squatting at Grôm's doorway, chained to it by links stronger than any that hands could fashion. And those of the tribe who had been hoping to do honour to the Shining One, as well as to the spirits of their slain kinsmen back in the barrows on the windy hills, by a great and bloody sacrifice, began to realize with discontent that their hopes were like enough to be disappointed.

II

The captive said his name was Ook-ootsk—a clicking guttural which none but A-ya was able to master. When he had learned to make himself understood, he proved eager to repay Grôm's protection by giving all the information that he possessed. Simple-minded, but with much of a child's shrewdness, he quickly came to regard himself as of some importance when both the Chief

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and Grôm would spend hours in interrogating him. His own people he repudiated with bitterness, because, when he had fallen among the rocks and shattered his leg, his party had refused to burden their flight by helping him. It became his pride to identify himself with the interests of his master, and to call himself the slave of his master's baby.

The information which he was able to give was such as to cause the Chief and Grôm the most profound disquietude. It appeared that the Bow-legs, having gradually recovered from the panic of their appalling defeat in the Pass of the Little Hills, had made up their minds that the disaster must be avenged. But no longer did they hold their opponents cheap on account of their scanty numbers. They realized that if they would hope to succeed in their next attack they must organize, and prepare themselves by learning how to employ their forces better. To this end, therefore, when Mawg and his fellow-renegades fell into their hands, instead of tearing them to pieces in bestial sport, they had spared them, and made much of them, and set themselves diligently to learn all that the strangers could teach. And Mawg, seeing here his opportunity both for vengeance on Grôm and for the gratification of that mad passion for A-ya which had so long obsessed him, had gone about the business with shrewd foresight and a convincing zeal.

It was apparent from the accounts which Ookotok was able to give that the invasion would take place as soon as possible after their hordes were

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adequately armed with the new weapons. This, said Ook-ootsk, would be soon after the dry season had set in. In any case, he said, the hordes were bound to wait for the dry season, because the way from their country to the Valley of Fire lay through a region of swamps which became impassable for any large body of migrants during the month of rains.

As the dry season was already close upon them, Bawr and Grôm now set themselves feverishly to the arrangement of their defences. Counting the older boys who had grown into sizable youths since the last great battle and all the able-bodied women and girls, they could muster no more than about six score of actual combatants. They knew that defeat would mean nothing less than instant annihilation for the tribe, and for the women a foul captivity and a loathsome mating. But they knew also that a mere successful defence would avail them only for the moment. Unless they could inflict upon the invaders such a defeat as would amount to a paralysing catastrophe, they would soon be worn down by mere force of numbers, or starved to death in their caves. It was not only for defence, therefore, but for wholesale attack—the attack of six score upon as many thousands—that Bawr planned his strategy and Grôm wove unheard-of devices.

Of the two great caves occupied by the tribe one was now abandoned, as not lending itself easily to defence. To Bawr's battle-trained eye it revealed itself as rather a trap than a refuge, because

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from the heights behind it an enemy could roll down rocks enough to effectively block its mouth. But the cliff in which the other cave was hollowed was practically inaccessible, and hung beetling far over the entrance. Into this natural fortress all the tribe—with an infinite deal of grumbling—was removed. Store of roots and dried flesh was gathered within; and everyone was set to the collection of dry and half-dry fuel. The light stuff, with an immense number of short, highly-inflammable faggots, was piled inside the doorway where no rain could reach it. And the heavy wood was stacked outside, to right and left, in such a fashion as to form practical ramparts for the innermost line of defence.

Directly in front of the cave spread a small fan-shaped plateau several hundred square yards in area. On the right a narrow path, wide enough for but one wayfarer at a time, descended between perpendicular boulders to the second cave. On the left the plateau was bordered by broken ground, a jumble of serrated rocks, to be traversed only with difficulty. In front there was a steep but shallow dip, from which the land sloped gently up the valley, clothed with high bush and deep thickets intersected with innumerable narrow trails.

Directly in front of the cave, and about the centre of the plateau, burned always, night and day, the sacred fire, tended in turn by the members of the little band appointed to this distinguished service by the Chief. Under the Chief's direction the whole of the plateau was now cleared of under-

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brush and grass, and then along its brink was laid a chain of small fires, some ten or twelve feet apart, and all ready for lighting.

Meanwhile, Grôm was busy preparing the device on which, according to his plan of campaign, the ultimate issue was to hang. For days the tribe was kept on the stretch collecting dry and leafy brushwood from the other side of the valley, and bundles of dead grass from the rich savannahs beyond the valley-mouth, on the other side of the dancing flames. All this inflammable stuff Grôm distributed lavishly through the thickets before the plateau, to a distance of nearly a mile up the slope, till the whole space was in reality one vast bonfire laid ready for the torch.

While these preparations were being rushed—somewhat to the perplexity of the tribe, who could not fathom the tactics of stuffing the landscape with rubbish—Bawr was keeping a little band of scouts on guard at the far-off head of the valley. They were chosen from the swift runners of the tribe; and Bawr, who was a far-seeing general, had them relieved twice in the twenty-four hours, that they might not grow weary and fail in vigilance.

When all was ready came a time of trying suspense. As day after day rolled by without event, cloudless and hot, the country became as dry as tinder; and the tribe, seeing that nothing unusual happened, began to doubt or to forget the danger that hung over them. There were murmurs over the strain of ceaseless watching, murmurs which Bawr suppressed with small ceremony. But the

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lame Ook-ootsk, squatting misshapen in Grôm's doorway with A-ya's baby in his ape-like arms grew more and more anxious. As he conveyed to Grôm, the longer the delay the greater the force which was being gathered for the assault.

Having no inkling of Grôm's larger designs, he looked with distrust on the little heaps of wood that were to be fires along the edge of the plateau, and wished them to be piled much bigger, intimating that his people, though they would be terribly afraid of the Shining One, would be forced on from behind by sheer numbers and would trample the small fires out. The confidence of the Chief and Grôm, and of A-ya as well, in the face of the awful peril which hung over them, filled him with amazement.

Then, at last, one evening just in the dying flush of the sunset, came the scouts, running breathlessly, and one with a ragged spear-wound in his shoulder. Their eyes were wide as they told of the countless myriads of the Bow-legs who were pouring into the head of the valley, led by Mawg and a gigantic black-faced chief as tall as Bawr himself.

"Are they as many," asked Grôm, "as they who came against us in the Little Hills?"

But the panting men threw up their hands.

"As a swarm of locusts to a flock of starlings," they replied.

To their astonishment the Chief smiled with grim satisfaction at this appalling news.

"It is well," said he. Mounting a rock by the

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cave-door, he gazed up the valley, striving to make out the vanguard of the approaching hordes ; while Grôm, marshalling the servitors of the fire, stationed them by the range of piles, ready to set light to them on the given word.

It was nearly an hour—so swift had been the terror of the scouts—before a low, terrible sound of crashings and mutterings announced that the hordes were drawing near. It was now twilight, with the first stars appearing in a pallid violet sky ; and up the valley could be discerned an obscurely rolling confusion among the thickets. Bawr gave orders, rapid and concise ; and the combatants lined out in a double rank along the front of the plateau some three or four paces behind the piles of wood.

They were armed with stone-headed clubs, large or small, according to personal taste, and each carried at least three flint-tipped spears. At the head of the narrow path leading up from the lower cave were stationed half a dozen women, similarly armed. Bawr had chosen these women because each of them had one or more young children in the cave behind her ; and he knew that no adventurous foe would get up that path alive. But A-ya was not among these six wild mothers, for her place was at the service of the fires.

The ominous roar and that obscure confusion rolled swiftly nearer, and Bawr, with a swing of his huge club, sprang down from his post of observation and strode to the front. Grôm shouted an order, and light was set to all the crescent of

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fires. They flared up briskly; and at the same time the big central fire, which had been allowed to sink to a heap of glowing coals, was heaped with dry stuff which sent up an instant column of flame. The sudden wide illumination, shed some hundreds of yards up the valley, revealed the front ranks of the Bow-legs swarming in the brush, their hideous yellow faces, gaping nostrils and pig-like eyes all turned up in awe towards the glare.

The advance of the front ranks came to an instant halt, and the low muttering rose to a chorus of harsh cries. Then the tall figure of Mawg sprang to the front, followed, after a moment of wondering hesitation, by that of the head chief of the hordes, a massive creature of the true Bow-leg type, but as tall as Bawr himself, and in colour almost black. This giant and Mawg, refusing to be awed by the tremendous phenomenon of the fire, went leaping along the lines of their followers, urging them forward, and pointing out that their enemies stood close beside the flames and took no hurt.

On the front ranks themselves this reasoning seemed, at first, to produce little effect. But to those just behind it appeared more cogent, seconded as it was by a consuming curiosity. Moreover, the masses in the rear were rolling down, and their pressure presently became irresistible. All at once the front ranks realized that they had no choice in the matter. They sagged forward, surged obstinately back again, then gave like a bursting dam and poured, yelling and leaping, straight onward toward the crescent of fires.

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As soon as the rush was fairly begun, both Mawg and the Black Chief cleverly extricated themselves from it, running aside to the higher, broken ground at the left of the plateau whence they could see and direct the attack. It was plain enough that they accounted the front ranks doomed, and were depending on sheer weight of numbers for the inevitable victory.

Standing grim, silent, immovable between their fires, the Chief and Grôm awaited the dreadful onset. In all the tribe not a voice was raised, not a fighter, man or woman, quailed. But many hearts stood still, for it looked as if that living flood could never be stayed. Presently from all along its front came a cloud of spears. But they fell short, not more than half a dozen reaching the edge of the plateau. In instant response came a deep-chested shout from Bawr, followed by a discharge of spears from behind the line of fire.

These spears, driven with free arm and practised skill, went clean home in the packed ranks of the foe, but they caused no more than a second's wavering, as the dead went down and their fellows crowded on straight over them. A second volley from the grimly silent fighters on the plateau had somewhat more effect. Driven low, and at shorter range, every jagged flint-point found its mark, and the screaming victims hampered those behind. But after a moment the mad flood came on again, till it was within some thirty paces of the edge of the plateau.

Then came a long shout from Grôm, a signal

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which had been anxiously awaited by the front line of his fighters. Each fire had been laid, on the inner side, with dry faggots of a resinous wood which not only blazed freely but held the flame tenaciously. These faggots had been placed with only their tips in the fire. Seizing them by their unlighted ends, the warriors hurled them, blazing, full into the gaping faces before them.

The brutal, gaping faces screeched with pain and terror, and the whole front rank, beating frantically at the strange missiles, wheeled about and clawed at the rank behind, battling to force its way through. But the rolling masses were not to be denied. After a brief, terrible struggle, the would-be fugitives were borne down and trodden underfoot. The new-comers were greeted with a second discharge of the blazing brands, and the dreadful scene repeated itself. But now there was a difference. For many of the assailants, realizing that there was no chance of retreat, came straight on, heedless of brand or spear, with the deadly, uncalculating fury of a beast at bay.

For some seconds, under the specific directions of the Chief on the right centre and of Grôm far to the left, many of the blazing brands had been thrown, not into the faces of the front rank, but far over their heads, to fall among the tinder-dry brushwood. Long tongues of flame leaped up at once, here, there, everywhere, curling and licking savagely. Screeches of horror arose, which brought all the hordes to a halt as far back as they could be heard. A light wind was blowing up the valley,

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and almost at once the scattered flames, gathering volume, came together with a roar. The hordes, smitten with the blindest madness of panic, turned to flee, springing upon and tearing at each other in the desperate struggle to escape.

Shouting triumph and derision, the defenders bounded forward, down over the edge of the plateau, and fell upon the huddled ranks before them. But these, with all escape cut off, and far outnumbering their exultant adversaries, now fought like rats in a pit. And the men of the caves found themselves locked in a struggle to the death just when they had thought the fight was done.

A-ya, no longer needed at the fires, was just about to follow Grôm down into the thick of the reeking battle, when a scream from the cave-mouth made her whip round. She was just in time to see Ook-ootsk hurl his spear at the tall figure of Mawg, leaping down upon him from the broken slope on the left. A half score of the Bow-legs were following hard upon Mawg's heels. With a scream of warning to Grôm she rushed back to the cave. But Grôm did not hear her. He had been pulled down, struck senseless and buried under a writhing heap of foes.

Her long hair streaming behind her, her eyes like those of a tigress protecting her cubs, A-ya darted to the cave-door. But she did not reach it. Just outside the threshold a club descended upon her head, and she dropped. Instantly she was pounced upon, and bound. A moment later three Bow-legs, followed by Mawg, streaming with

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blood, came running out of the cave. Mawg swung the limp form across his shoulder with a grin of satisfaction, and the party beat a hurried retreat up the slopes.

In a few minutes that last death-grapple along the front of the plateau came to an end, and Bawr, leaving nearly a third of his followers slain with the slain Bow-legs, led the exultant survivors back to the cave. It had been a costly victory for the Children of the Shining One ; but for the invaders it was little less than annihilation. The flames were raging for a mile up the valley, wherever they were not choked by the piles and windrows of the dead or dying Bow-legs. The lurid night was shaken with the incessant rising and falling chorus of shrieks, and far off under the glare rolled that awful receding wave of fugitives, with the flames leaping upon them and slaying them as they fled. Leaning upon his long club and gazing thoughtfully across the scene of incredible destruction, Bawr told himself that never again, so long as the memory of this night survived, would the Bow-legs dare to come against his people.

Then wild lamentations from the women drew the Chief into the cave. Here he found that half the little ones had been killed in that swift incursion of Mawg, and that nearly all the old men and women had been slaughtered in defending their charges. Across Grôm's doorway, crouching on his face and with his great teeth buried in the throat of a dead Bow-leg, lay the lame captive, Ookootsk. Seeing that he still breathed, and marking

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the fury with which he had fought in defence of their little ones, the warriors lifted him aside gently. Beneath him, and safely guarded in the crook of his shaggy arm, they found Grôm's baby, without a hurt. The women defending the head of the path on the right having seen the rape of A-ya, Bawr handed the babe to one of his own wives to cherish.

Then search was made for Grôm. At first the Chief imagined that he had followed the captors of A-ya, in a desperate hope of effecting her rescue alone. But they found him under a heap of dead, so nearly dead himself that they despaired of him. Realizing that it was he who had saved the tribe, they began over him that great keening lamentation hitherto reserved strictly for the funeral of the supreme Chief himself. But Bawr, his massive features furrowed with solicitude, stopped them, vowing that Grôm should not die. And lifting the hero in his arms he bore him into the cave.

Grôm's wounds proved to be deep, but not fatal to one of these clean-blooded sons of the open and the wind. It was some days before it was clearly borne in upon him that A-ya had been carried off alive by the Bow-legs. Then, with a great cry, he sprang to his feet. The blood spouted afresh from his wounds, and he fell back in a swoon. When he came to himself again, for days he would speak to no one, and it looked as if he would die, not of his wounds so much as of the insufficient will to live. But a chance word of the captive Ookootsk, who was being nursed back to life beside

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him, reminded him that there was vengeance to be lived for, and he aroused himself a little. Then Bawr, ever subtle in the reading of his people's hearts, suggested to him that even such a feat as the rescue of the girl A-ya might not be impossible to the subjugator of the fire and the slayer of a whole people.

And from that moment Grôm began climbing steadily back to life.

CHAPTER VII

THE RESCUE OF A-YA

THE clay-coloured, ape-like, bow-legged men squatted in council.

It was not long, as time went in the long, slow morning of the world—perhaps a half-score thousand years or so—since their ancestors, in the pride of their dawning intelligence, had swung down from their tree-tops, to walk upright on the solid earth and challenge the supremacy of the hunting beasts. Their arms were still of an un-human and ungainly length, their short and powerful legs were still so heavily bowed that they had no great speed in running; and they still had their homes high among the branches, where they could sleep secure from surprise. They were still tree dwellers; but they were men, intent upon asserting their lordship over all the other dwellers upon earth's surface.

They were not beautiful to look upon. Their squat, powerful forms, varying in colour from a dingy yellow-brown to blackish mud-colour, were covered unevenly with a thin growth of dark hairs.

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On thigh and shoulder, down the backbone, and on the outer side of the long fore-arm, this growth was heavier and longer, forming a sort of irregular thatch; while the hair of their heads was jet black, and matted into a filthy tangle with grease and clay. Their faces were broad and flat, with powerful protruding jaws, low and very receding foreheads, and wide noses which seemed to have been punched in at the bridge so that the flaring red nostrils turned upwards hideously.

It was but a battered and crestfallen remnant of the tribe which now took counsel over their diminished fortunes. In an irregular half-circle they squatted, pawing gingerly at their wounds or scratching themselves uncouthly, while their apish women loitered in chattering groups outside the circle, or crouched in the branches of the neighbouring trees. Those who were perched in the trees mostly held babies at their breasts, and were therefore instinctively distrustful of the dangerous ground-levels. Here and there on the outskirts of the crowd, either squatting on hillocks or clinging in a tree-top, wary-eyed old women kept watch against surprise; though there were few among either beasts or men who would be likely to venture an attack upon the ferocious tribe of the Bow-legs.

On a low, flat-topped boulder, which served the purpose of a throne, sat the Chief of the Bow-legs, playing with his unwieldy club (which was merely the root end of a sapling hacked into shape with sharp stones), as if it had been a bulrush. In

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height and bulk he was far above his fellows, though similar to them in general type except for the matter of colour, which was dark almost to blackness. His jaws were those of a beast, and his whole appearance was bestial beyond that of any other in the whole hideous throng—except for his eyes. These, though small and deep-set, blazed with fierce intelligence, and swept his audience with an air of assured mastery which made plain why he was chief. He was talking rapidly, with broad gestures, and in a barking, clicking speech which sounded little more than half articulate. He was working himself up into a rage; and the squatting listeners wriggled apprehensively, while they applauded from time to time with grunts and growls.

Near the end of the foremost rank of the semi-circle, very close to the haranguing Chief, sat one who was plainly of superior race to his companions. Something in the harangue seemed to concern him particularly, for he sprang to his feet and stood leaning on his club—which was longer and more symmetrically fashioned than that of the chief. In colour he was manifestly white, for all that dirt and the weather could do to disguise it. He was taller even than the great Black Chief himself—but shorter in the body, and achieving his height through length and straightness of leg. He had chest and shoulders of enormous power; but, unlike the barrel-shaped Bow-legs, he was comparatively slim of waist and hips. He had less hair on the body—except on the chest and fore-

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arm—than his companions ; but far more on the head, where it stood out all around like an immense black-tawny mane. His face, though heavy and lowering, *was* a face—with square, resolute jaws, a modelled mouth, a big, fully-bridged nose, and a spacious forehead. His eyes were blue, and now, deep under their shaggy brows, glared upon the Chief with desperate defiance. Close behind his heels crouched a girl, obviously of his own race—a tall, strong, shapely figure of a woman, as could well be seen, though her attitude was one of utter dejection, her face sunk upon her knees, and half her body hidden in the tangled torrent of her dull chestnut hair.

The tall alien, so dauntlessly eyeing the Chief, was Mawg the renegade. Arrogant in his folly, he had not realized that the Tree Men would hold him to account for the calamity which he had brought upon them. He had not realized that the girl A-ya, with her straight limbs and her strong comeliness, might stir the craving of others besides himself. Now, as he listened to the fierce harangue of the Chief, as his alert ears caught the mutterings behind and about him, he saw the pit yawn suddenly at his feet. But though a brute and a traitor, he was no coward. His veins began to run hot, his sinews to stretch for the death struggle which would presently be upon him.

As for the girl, unseeing, unhearing, her head bowed between her naked knees, she cared nothing. She loathed life, and all about her, equally. Her baby and her lord, if they yet lived, were far away

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beyond the mountains and the swamps, in the caverned hillside behind the smoke of the fires. Her captor, Mawg, she loathed above all ; but she was here behind him because he held her always within reach lest the filthy women of the Bow-legs should tear her to pieces.

Suddenly, without looking around, Mawg spoke to her, in their own tongue, which the Bow-legs could not understand. " Be ready, girl. They are going to kill me now. The Black Chief wants you. But I kill him, and we run. They are all dirt. *Come!* "

On the word, he sprang straight at the great Black Chief, where he towered upon his rock. But the girl, though she heard every syllable, never stirred.

The spring of Mawg was like a leopard's ; but the Black Chief, though slow of foot, was not slow of hand or wits. Though taken by surprise, he swung up his club in time to partly parry Mawg's lightning stroke, which would otherwise have broken his bull neck. As it was, the club was almost beaten from his grasp. He dropped it with a snarl and leaped at his assailant's throat with clutching hands.

Had it been possible to fight it out man to man, Mawg would have liked nothing better, though the issue would have been a doubtful one. But he had no mind to face the whole tribe, which was now surging forward like a pack of wolves. He had no time to repeat his blow fairly ; but as he eluded the gigantic, clutching fingers he got in

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a light glancing stroke with the butt which laid open his adversary's cheek and closed one furious little eye. At the same instant he whirled away lithely, sprang from the rock on the further side, and ran off like a deer through the trees, cursing the girl because she had not followed him. About half the tribe went trailing after him, yelling hoarsely, while the rest drew back and waited uneasily to see what their Chief would do.

The Chief, clapping one hairy hand over his wounded eye, glared after the fugitive with the other. But he knew the folly of trying to catch his fleet-foot adversary, and after a moment he dismissed him from his mind. With a grunt he stepped down from his rock, and, heedless of his wound, strode over to the girl. Through all the tumult she had never lifted her head from between her knees, or shown the least sign of concern. The Chief seized her by the shoulder and shook her roughly, ordering her to come with him. She did not understand his language, but his meaning was obvious. She looked up and stared straight into his one open eye. In her own eyes shifted the dangerous, lambent flame of a beast at bay, and for a moment she was on the point of darting at his throat.

But not without reason was the Black Chief dictator of the Bow-l₃. Brutal and filthy though he was, and hideous beyond description, and horrible with his gashed face and the blood pouring down over his huge and shaggy chest, he was all a man, and the mastery in him checked her. She

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felt the hopelessness of fighting her fate. The flame flickered out, leaving her eyes dull and leaden. She rose listlessly, and followed her new lord to the tree in which he had his dwelling of woven branches.

At the foot of the tree the Black Chief stopped, stood back, and signed the girl to ascend. A climber as expert as himself, she clutched the rough trunk with accustomed hands. Then she hesitated, and shut her eyes. Should she obey, yielding to her fate? Mawg, her late captor, she had hated with a murderous hate; yet she had submitted to him, in a dim way biding her time for vengeance. He was of her own race; and it was in her mind, her spirit—though she herself could not so analyse the emotion—that she hated him. But this new master was an alien, and of a lower, beastlier type. Toward him she felt a sick bodily repulsion. Behind her tight-shut lids the dark went red. She stood rigid and quivering, stormed through by a raging impulse to tear out either his throat or her own. She was herself a more advanced product of her own advanced race, and urged by impulses still new and imperfectly applied to life. But the countless centuries of submission were in her blood also; and they whispered to her insidiously that she was lawful prey. A huge hand fell significantly upon the back of her neck. She jumped, gave a sobbing cry, and sprang up into the tree. Who was she to challenge doom for an idea, a hundred thousand years before her time? *

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THE RESCUE OF A-YA

Some days' journey to the westward of the swampy refuge of the Bow-legs, a tall hunter was making his way warily through the forest. His colour, his build, and his swift grace of movement proclaimed him of the same race as Mawg and the girl A-ya, acquitting him easily of any kinship with the People of the Trees. In height and weight he was much like Mawg, but lighter in complexion, somewhat less hairy, and of a frank, sagacious countenance. His eyes were of a blue-grey, calm and piercing, yet with a look in them as of one who broods on mysteries. He was obviously much older than Mawg, his long, thick hair and short, close-curling beard being liberally touched with grey. He carried in one hand a peculiar long-handled club, which he had fashioned by lashing, with strips of green hide, a split and jagged flint-stone into the cleft head of a stick. In the other hand he bore two long, slender spears, their tips hardened and pointed in fire.

On the day, now many weeks back, when Grôm set out from the Caves behind the Fire to seek for A-ya in the far-off country of the Bow-legs, he had carried also two hollow tubes of green bark, with the seeds of fire, kept smouldering in a bed of punk, hidden in the hearts of them. But the need of stopping frequently to build a fire and renew the vitality of the secret spark had soon exasperated his impatient spirit. Intolerant of the hindrance, and confident in his own strength and craft, he had thrown the fire-tubes away and fallen back upon the weapons which had sufficed him before

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his discovery and conquest of the Shining One.

Engrossed in his purpose, thinking only of regaining possession of the girl, the mother of his man-child, he shunned all contest with the great beasts which crossed his path, and fled without shame from those which undertook to hunt him.

He would risk no doubtful battle. He satisfied his hunger on wild honey, and the ripe fruits and tubers with which the forest abounded at this season. At night he made his nest, of hurriedly woven branches, in the highest swaying of the tree-tops, where not even the leopard, cunning climber though she was, could come at him without giving timely warning. And so, doggedly and swiftly making his way due east, he came at length to the fringes of that vast region of swampy meres and fruitful, rankly wooded islets which was occupied by the Bow-legs.

Here he had need of all that wood-craft which had so often enabled him to stalk even the wary antelope. The light colour of his skin being a betrayal, he rubbed himself with clayey ooze till he was of the same hue as the Bow-legs. Crawling through the undergrowth at dusk as soundlessly as a snake, or swinging along smoothly through the branches like a grey ape in the first confusing glimmer of the dawn, he made short incursions among the outlying colonies, but could find no sign of the girl, or of Mawg, in whose hands he imagined her still to be. But working warily around the outskirts of the tribe, to northward, he

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came at last upon the stale but unmistakable trail of a flight and a pursuit. This he followed up till the pursuit came stragglingly to an end, and the trail of the fugitive stood out alone and distinct. One clear footprint in the wet earth revealed itself clearly as Mawg's—for there was no such thing as confounding that arched and moulded imprint with those left by the apish men. Feverishly the hunter cast about for another trail, smaller and slimmer. Forward he searched for it, and then back among the trampings of the pursuers. But in vain. Clearly Mawg had been the sole fugitive.

Grôm sat down in sudden despair. If Mawg, who at least was no coward, had fled alone, then surely the girl was dead. Grôm's club and his spears dropped from his nerveless hands. His interest in life sank into a sick indifference, a dull anguish which he did not even try to understand. It was well for him that no prowling beast came by in that moment of his unseeing weakness. Then a new thought came to him, and his despair flamed into rage. He leapt to his feet, clutching at his shaggy beard. The girl had been seized, without doubt, by the great Black Chief. The thought of this defilement to his woman, the mother of his man-child, drove him quite mad for the moment. Snatching up his weapons, he roared with anguish, and ran blindly forward along the trampled trail, ready to hurl himself upon the whole loathsome tribe. A gigantic leopard, crouching in a thicket of scarlet poinsettia beside the trail, made as if to pounce upon him as he went by—but shrank

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back, instead, with flattened ears, daunted by his fury.

But presently the madness burned itself out. As sanity returned he checked his rush, glanced once more watchfully about him, and at length stepped furtively into the thick of the jungle. Now more than ever was his coolest craft demanded, that A-ya might be plucked from the monster's arms.

Following up the plain clue of that tremendous pursuit, Grôm worked his way deep into the Bow-legs' country. With all his craft and his lynx-like stealth, it was at times hair-raising work. Not only the ground thickets, but the tree-tops as well, were swarming with his keen-eyed foes. He had to worm his way between swamp-sodden roots, and sometimes lie moveless as a stone for hours, enduring the stings of a million insects. Sometimes, not daring to lift his head to look about him, he had to trust to his ears and his hound-like sense of smell for information as to what was going on. And sometimes it was only his tireless immobility that saved him from the stroke of a startled adder or a questioning and indignant crotalus. After long swaying, poised for the death-stroke, the serpent would decide that the menacing thing before it was not alive. It would slowly dissolve its tense coils, and glide away; and Grôm would resume his shadowy progress.

Then, about sunrise (for the Bow-legs, like the birds, were early risers) of the second day after the discovery of Mawg's foot-prints, the patient hunter's eyes fell upon A-ya. He had crept in

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to within a hundred yards or so of the Council Rock, which was surrounded by a horde of the Bow-legs. Crouching low as he was, in a dense thicket, Grôm's view was limited; but he could see, over the heads of the listening mob, the Black Chief seated on the rock, his ragged club in his hand. He was haranguing his warriors in rapid clicks and gutturals, which conveyed no meaning to Grôm's ear. The harangue came soon to an end. The Chief stood up. The bestial crowd parted—and through the opening Grôm saw A-ya, crouched, with her hair over her knees, at the Chief's feet. Stepping down from the rock, the Chief seized her by the wrist and dragged her upright. She took her place at his heels, dejectedly, like a whipped dog. Grôm, from in his thicket, ground his teeth, and with difficulty held himself in leash. Surrounded as A-ya was, at that moment, by the hordes of her captors, any attempt at her rescue would have been hopeless folly.

There was something going on among the bow-legged mob which Grôm, from his hiding-place, could not at first make out. Then he saw that the Chief was trying to instruct his powerful but clumsy followers in the handling of the club and spear. Having been taught by the white renegade, Mawg, the Chief used his massive club with skill, but he was still clumsy and absurdly inaccurate in throwing the spear. After he had split the face of one of his followers by a misdirected cast, he gave up the spear-throwing, turned to the

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girl, and ordered her to teach this art of her people. It was obvious that the mob had vast confidence in her powers, as one of superior race, although a mere woman, for they opened out at once on two sides to leave room for the expected display. The heart of the watcher in the thicket began to thump as he saw a way clearing itself between his hiding-place and the wild-haired woman he loved.

A-ya affected to misunderstand the Chief's orders. She took the spear, but stood holding it in stupid dejection. The Chief threatened her angrily, but she paid no attention. At this moment the whistling cry of a plover sounded from the thicket. The girl straightened herself and every muscle grew tense. The melancholy cry came again. It was a strange place for a plover to lurk in, that rank thicket of jungle; but the Bow-legs took no notice of the incongruity. Upon the girl, however, the effect of the cry was magical. She gave no glance toward the thicket, but suddenly, smilingly, she seemed to understand the orders of the Chief. Poising the rude spear at the height of her shoulder, she pointed to a huge, whitish fungus which grew upon a tree-root some sixty or seventy feet away. With a flexing of her whole lithe body—as Grôm had taught her—she made her throw. The white fungus was split in halves.

With a hoarse clamour of admiration, the mob surged forward to examine the fragments. Even the Chief, though disdainful to show the interest of his followers, took a stride or two in the same direction. For a second his back was turned. In

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that second, the girl fled, light and swift as a deer, speeding toward the thicket whence the cry of the plover had sounded. Her long, bushy hair streamed out behind her as she ran.

With a bellow of wrath, the Black Chief, the whole mob at his heels, came pounding after her. The next instant, out from the thicket leapt Grôm, a towering figure, and stood with spear uplifted. Like a lion at bay, he glanced swiftly this way and that, balancing the chances of battle and escape, while he menaced the foes immediately confronting him.

At this amazing apparition, the mob paused irresolute ; but the Black Chief came on like a mad buffalo. Grôm hurled one of his two spears. He hurled it with a loathing fury ; but he was compelled to throw high, to clear A-ya's head. The Chief saw it coming, and cunningly flung himself forward on his face. The weapon hurtled on viciously, and pierced the squat body of one of the waverers a dozen paces behind. At his yell of agony the mob woke up, and came on again with guttural, barking cries. But already Grôm and the girl, side by side, were fleeing down an open glade to the left, toward a breadth of still water which they saw gleaming through the trunks. Grôm knew that the way behind him was swarming with the enemy. He had seen that there was no chance of getting through the hordes in front and to the right. But in this direction there were only a few knots of shaggy women, who shrank in terror at his approach ; and he gambled on the

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chance of the bow-legged men having no great skill in the water.

All the Folk of the Caves could swim like otters, and both Grôm and the girl were expert beyond their fellows. The water before them was some three or four hundred yards in width. They did not know whether it was a sluggish fenland river, or the arm of a lake; but, heedless of the peril of crocodiles and water-snakes, they plunged in, and with long, powerful side-strokes went surging across toward the opposite shore. They had a clear start of thirty or forty yards, and their pace in the water was tremendous. Some heavy splashes in the water behind them showed how the clumsy missiles of their foes—ragged clubs and fragments of broken branches—were falling short; and they looked back derisively.

The bow-legged, shaggy men with their wide, red, skyward nostrils were ranged along the shore, and the Chief was fiercely urging them into the water. They shrank back in horror at the prospect—which, indeed, seemed little to the taste of the Chief himself. Presently he seized the two nearest by their matted manes, and flung them headlong in. With yells of terror they scabbled out again, and scurried off to the rear like half-drowned hens.

The Chief screeched an order. Straightway the mob divided. One part went racing clumsily up the shore to the left, the other followed the Chief along through the rank sedge-growth to the right—the Chief, by reason of his superior stature and length of leg, rapidly opening up his lead.

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"It's nothing but a pond," said Grôm, in disgust, "and they're coming round the shore to head us off."

But the girl, her hair trailing darkly on the water behind her, only laughed. She was free at last. And she was with her man.

Suddenly Grôm felt a sharp, stabbing pain in the calf of his leg. With a cry, he looked back, expecting to see a water-snake gliding off. He saw nothing. But in the next instant another stab came in the other leg. Then A-ya screamed: "They're biting me all over." A dozen stinging punctures distributed themselves all at once over Grôm's body. Then he understood that their assailants were no water-snakes.

"Quick! To shore!" he ordered. Throwing all their strength into a breath-sapping, over-hand roll, they shot forward, gained the weedy shallows, and scrambled ashore. Their bodies were hung thickly with gigantic leeches.

Headless of the wounds and the drench of blood, they tore off their loathsome assailants. Then, after a few seconds' halt to regain breath and decide on their direction, they started north-westward at a rapid, swinging lope, through a region of open, grassy glades set with thickets of giant fern and mimosa.

They had run on at this free pace for a matter of half-an-hour or more, and were beginning to flatter themselves that they had shaken off their pursuers, when almost directly ahead of them, to the right, appeared the Black Chief, lumbering

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down upon them. Nearly half-a-mile behind, between the mimosa clumps, could be seen the mob of his followers straggling up to his support. He yelled a furious challenge, swung up his great club, and charged upon Grôm. Waving A-ya behind him, Grôm strode forward, accepting the challenge.

As man to man, the rivals looked not unfairly matched. The fair-skinned Man of the Caves was the taller by half a head, but obviously the lighter in weight by a full stone, if not more. His long, straight, powerfully muscled legs had not the massive strength of his bow-legged adversary's. He was even slim, by comparison, in hip and waist. But in chest, arms and shoulders his development was the finer. Physically, it seemed a matter of the lion against the bear.

To Grôm there was one thing almost as vital, in that moment, as the rescue of his woman. This was the slaking of his lust of hate against the filthy beast-man who had held that woman captive. Fading ancestral instincts flamed into new life within him. His impulse was to fling down spear and club, to fall upon his rival with bare, throttling hands and rending teeth. But his will, and his realization of all that hung upon the outcome, held this madness in check.

Silent and motionless, poised lightly and gathered as if for a spring, Grôm waited till his adversary was within some thirty paces of him. Then, with deadly force and sure aim, he hurled his one remaining spear. But he had not counted on the

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lightning accuracy, swifter than thought itself, with which the men of the trees used their huge hands. The Black Chief caught the spear-head within a few inches of his body. With a roar of rage he snapped the tough shaft like a parsnip stalk, and threw the pieces aside. Even as he did so, Grôm, still voiceless and noiseless, was upon him.

Had the vicious swing of Grôm's flint-headed club found its mark, the battle would have been over. But the Black Chief, for all his bulk, was quick as an eel. He bowed himself to the earth, so that the stroke whistled idly over him, and in the next second he swung a vicious, short blow upwards. It was well-aimed, at the small of Grôm's back. But the latter, feeling himself over-balanced by his own ineffective violence, leapt far out of reach before turning to see what had happened. The Chief recovered himself, and the two lashed out at each other so exactly together that the great clubs met in mid-air. So shattering was the force of the impact, so numbing the shock to the hairy wrists behind it, that both weapons dropped to the ground.

Neither antagonist dared stoop to snatch them up. For several seconds they stood glaring at each other, their breath hissing through clenched teeth, their knotted fingers opening and shutting. Then they sprang at each other's throats—Grôm in silence, the Black Chief snarling hoarsely. Neither, however, gained the fatal grip at which he aimed. They found themselves in a fair clinch,

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and stood swaying, straining, sweating, and grunting, so equally matched in sheer strength that to A-ya, standing breathless with suspense, the dreadful seconds seemed to drag themselves out to hours. Then Grôm, amazed to find that in brute force he had met his match, feigned to give way. Loosing the clutch of one arm, he dropped upon his knee. With a grunt of triumph the Black Chief crashed down upon him, only to find himself clutched by the legs and hurled clean over his wily adversary's head. Before he could recover himself, Grôm was upon him, pinning him to the earth and reaching for his throat. In desperation he set his huge ape teeth, with the grip of a bulldog, deep into the muscular base of Grôm's neck, and began working his way in toward the artery.

At this moment A-ya glanced about her. She saw two bodies of the Bow-legs closing in upon them from either side—the nearest not much more than a couple of hundred yards distant. Her lord had plainly ordered her to stand aside from this combat, but this was no time for obedience. She snatched up the sharpened fragment of the broken spear. Gripping it with both hands she drove it with all her force into the side of the Black Chief's throat, and left it there. With a hideous cough his grip relaxed. His limbs straightened out stiffly, and he lay quivering.

Covered with blood, Grôm sprang to his feet, and turned angrily upon A-ya. "I would have killed him," he said, coldly.

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"There was no time," answered the girl, and pointed to the advancing hordes.

Without a word Grôm snatched up his club, wrenched the broken spear from his dead rival's neck, thrust it into the girl's hands, and darted for the narrowing space of open between the two converging mobs.

With their greatly superior speed it was obvious that the two fugitives might reasonably expect to win through. They were surprised, therefore, at the note of triumph in the furious cries of the Bow-legs. A few hundred yards ahead the comparatively open country came to an end, and its place was taken by a belt of splendid crimson bloom, extending to right and left as far as the eye could see. It was a jungle of shrubs some twenty feet high, with scanty, pale-green leaves almost hidden by their exuberance of blossom. But jungle though it was, Grôm's sagacious eyes decided that it was by no means dense enough to seriously hinder their flight. When they reached it, the jabbering hordes were almost upon them. But, with mocking laughter, they slipped through, and plunged in among the grey stems, beneath the over-shadowing rosy glow. Their pursuers yelled wildly—it seemed to Grôm a yell of exultation—but they halted abruptly at the edge of the rosy barrier and made no attempt to follow.

"They know they can't catch us," said Grôm, slackening his pace. But the girl, puzzled by this sudden stopping of the pursuit, felt uneasy and made no reply.

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Loping onward at moderate pace through the enchanting pink light, which filtered down about them through the massed bloom overhead, they presently became conscious of an oppressive silence. The cries of their pursuers having died away behind them, there was now nothing but the soft thud of their own foot-falls to relieve the anxious intentness of their ears. Not a bird-note, not the flutter of a wing, not the hum or the darting of a single insect, disturbed the strangely heavy air. No snake or lizard or squeaking mouse scurried among the fallen leaves. They wondered greatly at such stillness. Then they wondered at the absence of small undergrowth, the lack of other shrubs and trees such as were wont to grow together in the warm jungle. Nothing anywhere about them but the endless grey stems and pallid slim leaves of the oleander, with their rose-red roof of blossom.

Presently they felt a lethargy creeping over their limbs, which began to grow heavy; and a dull pain came throbbing behind their eyes. Then understanding of those cries of triumph flashed into Grôm's mind. He stopped, and clutched the girl by the wrist. "It is poison here. It is death," he muttered. "That's why they shouted."

"Yes, everything is dead but the red flowers," whispered A-ya, and clung to him, shuddering with awe.

"Courage!" cried Grôm, lifting his head and dashing his great hand across his eyes. "We *must* get through. We *must* find air."

Shaking off the deadly sloth, they ran on again

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at full speed, peering through the stems in every direction. The effort made their brains throb fiercely. And still there was nothing before them and about them but the endless succession of slender grey stems and the downpour of that sinister rosy light. At last A-ya's steps again began to lag, as if she were growing sleepy.

"Wake up!" shouted Grôm, and dragged so fiercely at her arm that she cried out. But the pain aroused her to a new effort. She sprang forward, sobbing. The next moment, she was jerked violently to the left. "This way!" panted Grôm, the sweat pouring down his livid face; and there, through the stems to the left, her dazed eyes perceived that the hated rosy glow was paling into the whiteness of the natural day.

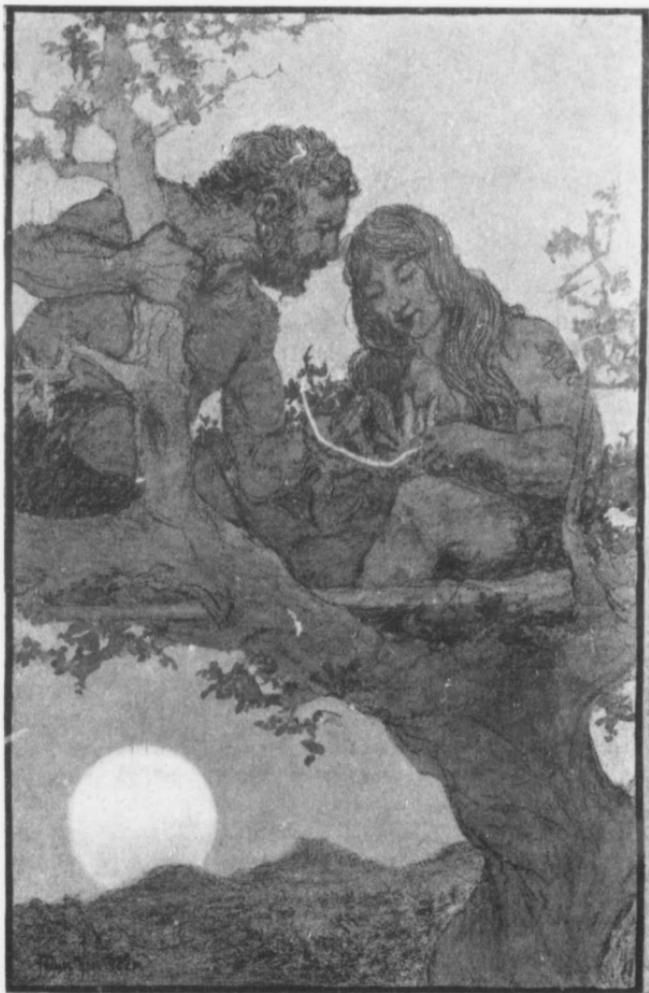
It was a big white rock, an island thrust up through the sea of treacherous bloom. With fumbling, nerveless fingers they scaled its bare sides, flung themselves down among the scant but wholesome herbage, which clothed its top, and filled their lungs with the clean, reviving air. Dimly they heard a blessed buzzing of insects, and several great flies, with barred wings, lit upon them and bit them sharply. They lay with closed eyes, while slowly the throbbing in their brains died away and strength flowed back into their unstrung limbs.

Then, after perhaps an hour, Grôm sat up and looked about him. On every side outspread the fatal flood of the rose-red oleanders, unbroken except toward the north-west. In that quarter,

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however, a spur of the giant forest, of growths too mighty to feel the spell of the envenomed blooms, was thrust deep into the crimson tide. Its tip came to within a couple of hundred yards of the rock. Having fully recovered, Grôm and A-ya swung down, with loathing, into the pink gloom, fled through it almost without drawing breath, and found themselves once more in the rank green shadows of the jungle. They went on till they came to a thicket of plantains. Then, loading themselves with the ripe fruit, they climbed high into a tree, and wove themselves a safe resting-place among the branches.

For the next few days their journey was without adventure, save for the frequent eluding of the monsters of that teeming world. Grôm had his club, A-ya her broken spear; but they were avoiding all combats in their haste to get back to their own country of the homely caves and the guardian watch-fires. At the approach of the great black lion or the sabre-tooth, or the wantonly malignant rhinoceros, they betook themselves to the tree-tops, and continued their way by that aerial path as long as it served them. The most subtle of the beasts they knew they could outwit, and their only anxiety now was Mawg, whose craft and courage Grôm could no longer hold in scorn. He was doubtless at large, and quite possibly on their trail, biding his time to catch them unawares. They never allowed themselves, therefore, to sleep both at the same time. One always kept on guard; and hence their progress, for all their



"A safe resting-place among the branches."



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eagerness, was slower than it would otherwise have been.

On a certain day, after a long unbroken stretch of travel, A-ya rested and kept watch in a tree-top, while Grôm went to fetch a bunch of plantains. It was fairly open country, a region of low herbage dotted with small groves and single trees; and the girl, herself securely hidden, could see in every direction. She could see Grôm wandering from plantain clump to plantain clump, seeking fruit ripe enough to be palatable. And then, with a shiver of hate and dread, she saw the dark form of Mawg, creeping noiselessly on Grôm's trail, and not more than a couple of hundred paces behind him. At the very moment when her eyes fell upon him, he dropped flat upon his face, and began worming his way soundlessly through the herbage.

Her mouth opened wide to give the alarm. But the cry stopped in her throat, and a smile of bitter triumph spread over her face.

If Mawg was hunting Grôm, he was at the same time himself being hunted. And by a dreadful hunter.

Out from behind a thicket of glowing mimosa appeared a monstrous bird, some ten or twelve feet in height, lifting its feet very high in a swift but noiseless and curiously delicate stride. Its dark plumage was more like long, stringy hair than feathers. Its build was something like that of a gigantic cassowary, but its thighs and long blue shanks were proportionately more massive. Its neck was long, but immensely muscular to support

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the enormous head, which was larger than that of a horse, and armed with a huge, hooked, rending, vulture's beak. The apparent length of this terrible head was increased by a pointed crest of blood-red feathers, projecting straight back in a line with the fore-part of the skull and the beak.

The crawling figure of Mawg was still a good hundred paces from the unsuspecting Grôm, when the great bird overtook it. A-ya, watching from her tree-top, clutched a branch and held her breath. Mawg's ears caught a sound behind him, and he glanced around sharply. With a scream, he bounded to his feet. But it was too late. Before he could either strike or flee, he was beaten down again, with a smash of that pile-driving beak. The bird planted one huge foot on its victim's loins, gripped his head in its beak, and neatly snapped his neck. Then it fell greedily to its hideous meal.

At Mawg's scream of terror, Grôm had turned and rushed to the rescue, swinging his club. But before he had covered half the distance, he saw that the monster had done its work; and he hesitated. He was too late to help the victim. And he knew the mettle of this ferocious bird, almost as much to be dreaded, in single combat, as the sabre-tooth itself. At his approach, the bird had lifted its dripping beak, half turned, and stood gripping the prey with one foot, swaying its grim head slowly and eyeing him with malevolent defiance. Still he hesitated, fingering his club; for the insolence of that challenging stare made

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his blood seethe. Then came A-ya's voice from the tree-top, calling him. "Come away!" she cried. "It was Mawg."

Whereupon he turned, with the content of one who sees all old scores cleanly wiped out together, and went back to gather his ripe plantains.

The peril of Mawg being thus removed from their path, they journeyed more swiftly; and when the next new moon was a thin white sickle in the sky, just above the line of saw-toothed hills, they came safely back to the comfortable caves and the clear-burning watch-fires of their tribe.

CHAPTER VIII

THE BENDING OF THE BOW

BEFORE the Caves of the Pointed Hills the fires of the tribe burned brightly. Within the caves reigned plenty and an unheard-of security; for since the conquest of fire those monstrous beasts and gigantic, carnivorous, running birds, which had been Man's ceaseless menace ever since he swung down out of the tree-tops to walk the earth erect, had been held at a distance through awe of the licking flames. Though the great battle which had hurled back the invading hosts of the Bow-legs had cost the tribe more than half its warriors, the Caves were swarming with vigorous children. To Bawr, the Chief, and to Grôm, his Right Hand and Councillor, the future of the tribe looked secure.

So sharp had been the lessons lately administered to the prowling beasts—the terrible sabre-tooth, the giant red bear of the caves, the proud black lion, and the bone-crushing cave hyena—that even the stretch of bumpy plain outside the circle of the fires, to a distance of several hundred paces,

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was considered a safe play-ground for the children of the tribe. On the outermost skirts of this play-ground, to be sure, just where the reedy pools and the dense bamboo thickets began, there was a fire kept burning. But this was more as a reminder than as an actual defence. When a bear or a sabre-tooth had once had a blazing brand thrust in his face, he acquired a measure of discretion. Moreover, the activities of the tribe had driven all the game animals to some distance up the valley; and it was seldom that anything more formidable than a jackal or a civet-cat cared to come within a half-mile of the fires.

It was now two years since the rescue of A-ya from her captivity among the Bow-legs. Her child by Grôm was a straight-limbed, fair-skinned lad of somewhere between four and five years. She sat cross-legged near the sentinel fire, some fifty yards or so from the edge of the thickets, and played with the lad, whose eyes were alight with eager intelligence. Behind her sprawled, playing contentedly with its toes and sucking a banana, a fat brown flat-nosed baby of some fourteen or fifteen months.

Both A-ya and the boy were interested in a new toy. It was, perhaps, the first whip. The boy had succeeded in tying a thin strip of green hide, something over three feet in length, to one end of a stick which was several inches longer. The uses of a whip came to him by unerring insight, and he began applying it to his mother's shoulders. The novelty of it delighted them both. A-ya,

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moreover, chuckled slyly at the thought that the procedure might, on some future occasion, be reversed, not without advantage to the cause of discipline.

At last the lithe lash, so enthusiastically wielded, stung too hard for even A-ya, with all her stoicism, to find it amusing. She snatched the toy away and began playing with it herself. The lash, at its free end, chanced to be slit almost to the tip, forming a loop. The butt of the handle was formed by a jagged knot, where it had been broken from the parent stem. Idly but firmly, with her strong hands she bent the stick, and slipped the loop over the jagged knot, where it held.

Interested, but with no hint of comprehension in her bright eyes, she looked upon the first bow—the stupendous product of a child and a woman playing.

The child, displeased at this new, useless thing, and wanting his whip back, tried to snatch the bow from his mother's hands. But she pushed him off. She liked this new toy. It looked, somehow, as if it invited her to do something with it. Presently she pulled the cord, and let it go again. Tightly strung, it made a pleasant little humming sound. This she repeated many times, holding it up to her ear and laughing with pleasure. The boy grew interested thereupon, and wanted to try the new game for himself. But A-ya was too absorbed. She would not let him touch it. "Go get another stick," she commanded impatiently; but quite forgot to see her command obeyed.



"With no hint of comprehension in her bright eyes, she looked upon the first bow."



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As she was twanging the strange implement which had so happily fashioned itself under her hands, Grôm came up behind her. He stepped carefully over the sprawling brown baby. He was about to pull her heavy hair affectionately ; but his eyes fell upon the thing in her hands, and he checked himself.

For minute after minute he stood there motionless, watching and studying the new toy. His eyes narrowed, his brows drew themselves down broodingly. The thing seemed to him to suggest dim, cloudy, vast possibilities ; and he groped in his brain for some hint of the nature of these possibilities. Yet as far as he could see it was good for nothing but to make a faintly pleasant twang for the amusement of women and children. At last he could keep his hands off it no longer. " Give it to me," said he suddenly, laying hold of A-ya's wrist.

But A-ya was not yet done with it. She held it away from him, and twanged it with redoubled vigour. Without further argument, and without violence, Grôm reached out a long arm, and found the bow in his grasp. A-ya was surprised that such a trifle should seem of such importance in her lord's eyes ; but her faith was great. She shook the wild mane of hair back from her face, silenced the boy's importunings with an imperative gesture, and gathered herself with her arms about both knees to watch what Grôm would do with the plaything.

First he examined it minutely, and then he

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fastened the thong more securely at either end. He twanged it as A-ya had done. He bent it to its limit and eased it slowly back again, studying the new force imprisoned in the changing curve. At last he asked who had made it.

"I did," answered A-ya, very proud of her achievement now that she found it taken so seriously by the one being to whom her adventurous spirit really deferred.

"No, *I* did!" piped the boy, with an injured air.

The mother laughed indulgently. "Yes, he tied one end, and beat me with it," said she. "Then I took it from him, and bent the stick and tied the other end."

"It is very good!" said Grôm, nodding his approval musingly. He squatted down a few feet away, and began experimenting.

Picking up a small stone, he held it upon the cord, bent the bow a little way, and let go. The stone flew up, and hit him with amazing energy in the mouth.

"*Oh!*" murmured A-ya, sympathetically, as the bright blood ran down his beard. But the child, thinking that his father had done it on purpose, laughed with hearty appreciation. Somewhat annoyed, Grôm got up, moved a few paces farther away, and sat down again with his back to the family circle.

As to the force that lurked in this slender little implement he was now fully satisfied. But he was not satisfied with the direction in which it exerted

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itself. He continued his experiments, but was careful to draw the bow lightly.

For a long time he found it impossible to guess beforehand the direction which the pebbles, or the bits of stick or bark, would take in their surprising leaps from the loosed bow-string. But at length a dim idea of aim occurred to him. He lifted the bow—his left fist grasping its middle—to the level of his eyes, at arm's length. He got the cord accurately in the centre of the pebble, and drew toward his nose. This effort was so successful that the stone went perfectly straight—and caught him fair on the thumb-knuckle.

The blow was so sharp that he dropped the bow with an angry exclamation. Glancing quickly over his shoulder to see if A-ya had noticed the incident, he observed that her face was buried between her knees and quite hidden by her hair. But her shoulders were heaving spasmodically. He suspected that she was laughing at him; and for a moment, as his knuckle was aching fiercely, he considered the advisability of giving her a beating. He had never done such a thing to her, however, though all the other Cave Men, including Bawr himself, were wont to beat their women on occasion. In his heart he hated the idea of hurting her; and it would hardly be worth while to beat her without hurting her. The idea, therefore, was promptly dismissed. He eyed the shaking shoulders gloomily for some seconds; and then, as the throbbing in the outraged knuckle subsided, a grin of sympathetic comprehension spread over his own

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face. He picked up the bow, sprang to his feet, and strolled over to the edge of a thicket of young cane.

The girl, lifting her head, peered at him cautiously through her hair. Her laughter was forgotten on the instant, because she guessed that his fertile brain was on the trail of some new experiment.

Arriving at the cane-thicket, Grôm broke himself half a dozen well-hardened, tapering stems, from two to three feet in length, and about as thick at their smaller ends as A-ya's little finger.

These seemed to suggest to him the possibility of better results than anything he could get from those erratic pebbles.

By this time quite a number of curious spectators—women and children mostly, the majority of the men being away hunting, and the rest too proud to show their curiosity—had gathered to watch Grôm's experiments. They were puzzled to make out what it was he was busying himself with. But as he was a great chief, and held in deeper awe than even Bawr himself, they did not presume to come very near; and they had therefore not perceived, or at least they had not apprehended, those two trifling mishaps of his. As for Grôm, he paid his audience no attention whatever. Now that he had possessed himself of those slender, straight shafts of cane, all else was forgotten. He felt, as he looked at them and poised them, that in some vital way they belonged to this fascinating implement which A-ya had invented for him.

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Selecting one of the shafts, he slowly applied the bigger end of it to the bow-string, and stood for a long time pondering it, drawing it a little way and easing it back without releasing it. Then he called to mind that his spears always threw better when they were hurled heavy end first. So he turned the little shaft and applied the small end to the bow-string. Then he pulled the string tentatively, and let it go. The arrow, all unguided, shot straight up into the air, turned over, fell sharply, and buried its head in a bit of soft ground. Grôm felt that this was progress. The spectators opened their mouths in wonder, but durst not venture any comment when Grôm was at his mysteries.

Plucking the shaft from the earth, Grôm once more laid it to the bow-string. As he pulled the string, the shaft wobbled crazily. With a growl of impatience, he clapped the fore-finger of his left hand over it, holding it in place, and pulled it through the guide thus formed. A light flashed upon his brooding intelligence. Slightly crooking his finger, so that the shaft could move freely, he drew the string backward and forward, with deep deliberation, over and over again. To his delight, he found that the shaft was no longer eccentrically rebellious, but as docile as he could wish. At last, lifting the bow above his head, he drew it strongly, and shot the shaft into the air. He shouted as it slipped smoothly through the guiding crook of his finger and went soaring skyward as if it would never stop. The eyes of the spectators followed its flight

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with awe, and A-ya, suddenly comprehending, caught her breath and snatched the boy to her heart in a transport. Her alert mind had grasped, though dimly, the wonder of her man's achievement.

Now, though Grôm had pointed his shaft skyward, he had taken no thought whatever as to its direction, or the distance it might travel. As a matter of fact, he had shot towards the Caves. He had shot strongly; and that first bow was a stiff one. Most of the folk who squatted before the Caves were watching; but there were some who were too indifferent or too stupid to take an interest in anything less arresting than a thump on the head. Among these was a fat old woman, who, with her back to all the excitement, was bending herself double to grub in the litter of sticks and bones for some tit-bit which she had dropped. Grôm's shaft, turning gracefully against the blue, came darting downward on a long slope, and buried its point in that upturned fat and grimy thigh. With a yell the old woman whipped round, tore out the shaft, dashed it upon the ground, stared at it in horror as if she thought it some kind of snake, and waddled, wildly jabbering, into the nearest cave.

An outburst of startled cries arose from all the spectators, but it hushed itself almost in the same breath. It was Grôm who had done this singular thing, smiting unawares from very far off. The old woman must have done something to make Grôm angry. They were all afraid; and several,

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whose consciences were not quite at ease, followed the old woman's example and slipped into the Caves.

As for Grôm, his feelings were a mixture of embarrassment and elation. He was sorry to have hurt the old woman. He had a ridiculous dislike of hurting anyone unnecessarily; and when he looked back and saw A-ya rocking herself to and fro in heartless mirth, he felt like asking her how she would have liked it herself, if she had been in the place of the fat old woman. On the other hand, he knew that he had made a great discovery, second only to the conquest of the fire. He had found a new weapon, of unheard-of, unimagined powers, able to kill swiftly and silently and at a great distance. All he had to do was to perfect the weapon and learn to control it.

He strode haughtily up to the cave mouth to recover his shaft. The people, even the mightiest of the warriors, looked anxious and deprecating at his approach; but he gave them never a glance. It would not have done to let them think he had wounded the old woman by accident. He picked up the shaft and examined its blood-stained point, frowning fiercely. Then he glared into the cave where the unlucky victim of his experiments had taken refuge. He refitted the shaft to the bow-string, and made as if to follow up his stroke with further chastisement. Instantly there came from the dark interior a chorus of shrill feminine entreaties. He hesitated, seemed to relent, put the shaft into the bundle under his arm, and strode

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back to rejoin A-ya. He had done enough for the moment. His next step required deep thought and preparation.

An hour or two later, Grôm set out from the Caves, alone in spite of A-ya's pleadings. He wanted complete solitude with his new weapon. Besides a generous bundle of canes, of varying lengths and sizes, he carried some strips of raw meat, a bunch of plantains, his spear and club, and a sort of rude basket, without handle, formed by tying together the ends of a roll of green bark.

This basket was a device of A-ya's, which had added greatly to her prestige in the tribe, and caused the women to regard her with redoubled jealousy. By lining it thickly with wet clay, she was able to carry fire in it so securely and simply that Grôm had adopted it at once, throwing away his uncertain and always troublesome fire-tubes of hollow bamboo.

Mounting the steep hill-side behind the Caves, Grôm turned into a high, winding ravine, and was soon lost to the sight of the tribe. The ravine, the bed of a long-dry torrent, climbed rapidly, bearing around to the eastward, and brought him at length to a high plateau on a shoulder of the mountain. At the back of the plateau the mountain rose again, abruptly, to one of those saw-tooth pinnacles which characterized this range. At the base of the steep was a narrow fissure in the rock-face, leading into a small grotto which Grôm had discovered on one of his hunting expeditions. He had used it several times already as a

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retreat when tired of the hubbub of the tribe and anxious to ponder in quiet some of the problems which for ever tormented his fruitful brain.

Absorbed in meditations upon his new weapon, Grôm set himself to build a small fire before the entrance of the grotto. The red coals from his fire-basket he surrounded and covered with dry grass, dead twigs, and small sticks. Then, getting down upon all fours, he blew long and steadily into the mass till the smoke which curled up from it was streaked with thin flames. As the flames curled higher, his ears caught the sound of something stirring within the cave. He looked up, peering between the little coils of smoke, and saw a pair of eyes, very close to the ground, glaring forth at him from the darkness.

With one hand, he coolly but swiftly fed the fire to fuller volume, while with the other he reached for and clutched his club. The eyes drew back slowly to the depths of the cave. Appearing not to have observed them, Grôm plied the fire with heavier and heavier fuel, till it was blazing strongly and full of well-lighted brands. Then he stood up, seized a brand, and hurled it into the cave. There was a harsh snarl, and the eyes disappeared, the owner of them having apparently shrunk off to one side.

A moment or two later the interior was suddenly lighted up with a smoky glare. The brand had fallen on a heap of withered grass which had formerly been Grôm's couch. Grôm set his teeth and swung up his club; and in the same instant there

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shot forth two immense cave-hyenas, mad with rage and terror.

The great beasts were more afraid of the sudden flare within than of the substantial and dangerous fire without. The first swerved just in time to escape the fire, and went by so swiftly that the stroke of Grôm's club caught him only a light, glancing blow on the rump. But the second of the pair, the female, was too close behind to swerve in time. She dashed straight through the fire, struck Grôm with all her frantic weight, knocked him flat, and tore off howling down the valley, leaving a pungent trail of singed fur on the air.

Uninjured save for an ugly scratch, which bled profusely, down one side of his face, Grôm picked himself up in a rage and started after the fleeing beasts. But his common sense speedily reasserted itself. He grunted in disgust, turned back to the fire, and was soon absorbed in new experiments with the bow. As for the blaze within the cave, he troubled himself no more about it. He knew it would soon burn out. And it would leave the cave well cleansed of pestilential insects.

All that afternoon he experimented with his bundle of shafts, to find what length and what weight would give the best results. One of the arrows he shattered completely, by driving it, at short range, straight against the rock-face of the mountain. Two others he lost, by shooting them, far beyond his expectations, over the edge of the plateau and down into the dense thickets below him, where he did not care to search too closely

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by reason of the peril of snakes. The bow, as his good luck would have it, though short and clumsy was very strong, being made of a stick of dry upland hickory. And the cord of raw hide was well-seasoned, stout and tough; though it had a troublesome trick of stretching, which forced Grôm to restring it many times before all the stretch was out of it.

Having satisfied himself as to the power of his bow and the range of his arrows, Grôm set himself next to the problem of marksmanship. Selecting a plant of prickly pear, of about the dimensions of a man, he shot at it, at different ranges, till most of its great fleshy leaves were shredded and shattered. With his straight eye and his natural aptitude, he soon grasped the idea of elevation for range, and made some respectable shooting. He also found that he could guide the arrow without crooking his finger around it. His elation was so extreme that he quite forgot to eat, till the closing in of darkness put an end to his practice. Then, piling high his fire as a warning to prowlers, he squatted in the mouth of the cave and made his meal. For water he had to go some little way below the lip of the plateau; but carrying a blazing balsam-knot he had nothing to fear from the beasts that lay in ambush about the spring. They slunk away sullenly at the approach of the waving flame.

That night Grôm slept securely, with three fires before his door. Every hour or two, vigilant woodsman that he was, he would wake up to replenish

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he fires, and be asleep again even in the act of ying down. And when the dawn came red and amber around the shoulder of the saw-toothed peak, he was up again and out into the chill, sweet air with his arrows.

The difficulty which now confronted him was that of giving his shafts a penetrating point. Being of a very hard-fibred cane, akin to bamboo, they would take a kind of splinter-point of almost needle sharpness. But it was fragile; and the cane being hollow, the point was necessarily on one side, which affected the accuracy of the flight. There were no flints in the neighbourhood, or slaty rocks, which he could split into edged and pointed fragments. He tried hardening his points in the fire; but the results were not altogether satisfactory. He thought of tipping some of the shafts with thorns, or with the steely points of the old aloe leaves; but he could not, at the moment, devise such a method of fixing these formidable weapons in place as would not quite destroy their efficiency. Finally he made up his mind that the thing to use would be bone, ground into a suitable shape between two stones. But this was a matter that would have to await his return to the Caves, and would then call for much careful devising. For the present he would perforce content himself with such points as he had fined down and hardened in the fire.

This matter settled in his mind, Grôm burned to put his wonderful new weapon to practical test. He descended cautiously the steep slope

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from the eastern edge of his plateau—a broken region of ledges, sub-tropical thickets, and narrow, grassy glades, with here and there some tree of larger growth rising solitary like a watch-tower. Knowing this was a favourite feeding-hour for many of the grass-eaters, he hid himself in the well-screened crotch of a deodar, overlooking a green glade, and waited.

He had not long to wait, for the region swarmed with game. Out from a runway some thirty or forty yards up the glade stepped a huge, dun-coloured bull, with horns like scimitars each as long as Grôm's arm. His flanks were scarred with long wounds but lately healed, and Grôm realized that he was a solitary, beaten and driven out from his herd by some mightier rival. The bull glanced warily about him, and then fell to cropping the grass.

The beast offered an admirable target. Grôm's arrow sped noiselessly between the curtaining branches, and found its mark high up on the bull's fore-shoulder. It penetrated—but not to a depth of more than two or three inches. And Grôm, though elated by his good shot, realized that such a wound would be nothing more than an irritant.

Startled and infuriated, the bull roared and pawed the sod, and glared about him to locate his unseen assailant. He had not the remotest idea of the direction from which the strange attack had come. The galling smart in his shoulder grew momentarily more severe. He lashed back at it savagely with the side of his horn, but the arrow was just out of

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his reach. Then, bewildered and alarmed, he tried to escape from this new kind of fly with the intolerable sting by galloping furiously up and down the glade. As he passed the deodar, Grôm let drive another arrow, at close range. This, too, struck, and stuck. But it did not go deep enough to produce any serious effect. The animal roared again, stared about him as if he thought the place was bewitched, and plunged headlong into the nearest thicket, tearing out both arrows as he went through the close-set stems. Grôm heard him crashing onward down the slope, and smiled to think of the surprise in store for any antagonist that might cross the mad brute's path.

This experiment upon the wild bull had shown Grôm one thing clearly. He must arm his arrows with a more penetrating point. Until he could carry out his idea of giving them tips of bone, he must find some shoots of solid, pithless growth to take the place of his light hollow canes. For the next hour or two he searched the jungle carefully and warily, looking for a young growth that might immediately serve his purpose.

But there in the jungle everything that was hard enough was crooked or gnarled, everything that was straight enough was soft and sappy. It was not till the sun was almost over his head, and the heat was urging him back to the coolness of his grotto, that he came across something worth making a trial of. On a bleak wind-swept knoll, far out on the mountain-side, lay the trunk of an old hickory-tree, which had evidently been shattered

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by lightning. From the roots, tenacious of life, had sprung up a throng of saplings, ranging from a foot or two in height to the level of Grôm's head. They were as straight and slim as the canes. And their hardness was proved to Grôm's satisfaction when he tried to break them off. They were tough, too, so that he almost lost his patience over them, before he learned that the best way to deal with them was to strip them down, in the direction of the fibre, where they sprang from the parent trunk or root. Having at length gathered an armful, he returned to his grotto and proceeded to shape the refractory butts in the fire. As he squatted between the cave door and the fire he made his meal of raw flesh and plantains, and gazed out contemplatively over the vast, rankly-green landscape below him, musing upon the savage and monstrous strife which went on beneath that mask of wide-flung calm. And as he pondered, the fire which he had subjugated was quietly doing his work for him.

The result was beyond his utmost expectations. After judicious charring, the ends being turned continually in the glowing coals, he rubbed away the charred portions between two stones, and found that he could thus work up an evenly-rounded point. The point thus obtained was keen and hard; and as he balanced this new shaft in his hand he realized that its weight would add vastly to its power of penetration. When he tried a shot with it, he found that it flew farther and straighter. It drove through the tough, fleshy

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leaf of the prickly pear as if it hardly noticed the obstruction. He fashioned himself a half-dozen more of these highly-efficient shafts, and then set out again—this time down the ravine—to seek a living target for his practice.

The ravine was winding and of irregular width, terraced here and there with broken ledges, here and there cut into by steep little narrow gullies. Its bottom was in part bare rock ; but wherever there was an accumulation of soil, and some tiny spring oozing up through the fissures, there the vegetation grew rank, starred with vivid blooms of canna and hibiscus. In many places the ledges were draped with a dense curtain of the flat-flowered, pink-and-gold mesembryanthemum. It was a region well adapted to the ambuscading beasts ; and Grôm moved stealthily as a panther, keeping for the most part along the upper ledges, crouching low to cross the open spots, and slipping into cover every few minutes to listen and peer and sniff.

Presently he came to a spot which seemed to offer him every advantage as a place of ambush. It was a ledge some twenty feet above the valley level, with a sort of natural parapet behind which he could crouch, and, unseen, keep an eye on all the glades and runways below. Behind him the rock-face was so nearly perpendicular that no enemy could steal upon him from the rear. He laid his club and his spear down beside him, selected one of his best arrows, and hoped that a fat buck would come by, or one of those little,

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spotted, two-toed horses whose flesh was so prized by the people of the Caves. Such a prize would be a proof to all the tribe of the potency of his new weapon.

For nearly an hour he waited, moveless, save for his ranging eyes, as the rock on which he leaned. To a hunter like Grôm, schooled to infinite patience, this was nothing. He knew that, in the woods, if one waits long enough and keeps still enough, he is bound to see something interesting. At last it came. It was neither the fat buck nor the little two-toed horse with dappled hide, but a young cow-buffalo. Grôm noticed at once that she was nervous and puzzled. She seemed to suspect that she was being followed and was undecided what to do. Once she faced about angrily, staring into the coverts behind her, and made as if to charge. Had she been an old cow, or a bull, she would have charged; but her inexperience made her irresolute. She snorted, faced about again, and moved on, ears, eyes and wide nostrils one note of wrathful interrogation. She was well within range, and Grôm would have tried a shot at her except for his seasoned wariness. He would rather see, before revealing himself, what foe it was that dared to trail so dangerous a quarry. The buffalo moved on slowly out of range, and vanished down a runaway; and immediately afterwards the stealthy pursuer came in view.

To Grôm's amazement, it was neither a lion nor a bear. It was a man, of his own tribe. And then he saw it was none other than the great chief,

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Bawr himself, hunting alone after his haughty and daring fashion. Between Grôm and Bawr there was the fullest understanding, and Grôm would have whistled that plover-cry, his private signal, but for the risk of interfering with Bawr's chase. Once more, therefore, he held himself in check ; while Bawr, his eyes easily reading the trail, crept on with the soundless step of a wild cat.

But Grôm was not the only hunter lying in ambush in the sun-drenched ravine. Out from a bed of giant, red-blooming canna arose the diabolical, grinning head and monstrous shoulders of a sabre-tooth, and stared after Bawr. Then the whole body emerged with a noiseless bound. For a second the gigantic beast stood there, with one paw uplifted, its golden-tawny bulk seeming to quiver in the downpour of intense sunlight. It was a third as tall again at the shoulders as the biggest Himalayan tiger, its head was flat-skulled like a tiger's, and its upper jaw was armed with two long, yellow, sabre-like tusks, projecting downwards below the lower jaw. This appalling monster started after Bawr with a swift, crouching rush, as silent, for all its weight, as if its feet were shod with thistle-down.

Grôm leapt to his feet with a wild yell of warning, at the same time letting fly an arrow. In his haste the shaft went wide. Bawr, looking over his shoulder, saw the giant beast almost upon him. With a tremendous bound he gained the foot of a tree. Dropping his club and



“ Its head was flat-skulled like a tiger's, and its upper jaw was armed with two long, yellow sabre-like tusks.”



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spear, he sprang desperately, caught a branch, and swung himself upward.

But the sabre-tooth was already at his heels, before he had time to swing quite out of reach. The gigantic brute gathered itself for a spring which would have enabled it to pluck Bawr from his refuge like a ripe fig. But that spring was never delivered. With a roar of rage the monster turned instead, and bit furiously at the shaft of an arrow sticking in its flank. Grôm's second shaft had flown true; and Bawr, greatly marvelling, drew up his legs to a place of safety.

With the fire of that deep wound in its entrails, the sabre-tooth forgot all about its quarry in the tree. It had caught sight of Grôm when he uttered his yell of warning, and it knew instantly whence the strange attack had come. It bit off the protruding shaft; and then, fixing its dreadful eyes on Grôm, it ceased its snarling and came charging for the ledge with a rush which seemed likely to carry it clear up the twenty-foot perpendicular of smooth rock.

Grôm, enamoured of the new weapon, forgot the spear which was likely to be far more efficient at these close quarters. Leaning far out over the parapet, he drew his arrow to the head and let drive just as the monster reared itself, open-jawed, at the wall. The pointed hickory went down into the gaping gullet, and stood out some inches at the side of the neck. With a horrible coughing screech the monster recoiled, put its head between its paws, and tried to claw the anguish

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from its throat. But after a moment, seeming to realize that this was impossible, it backed away, gathered itself together, and sprang for the ledge. It received another of Grôm's shafts deep in the chest, without seeming to notice the wound; and its impetus was so tremendous that it succeeded in getting its fore-paws fixed upon the ledge. Clinging there, its enormous pale-green eyes staring straight into Grôm's, it struggled to draw itself up all the way—an effort in which it would doubtless have succeeded at once but for that first arrow in its entrails. The iron claws of its hinder feet rasped noisily on the rock-face.

Grôm dropped his bow beside him and reached for the spear. His hand grasped the club instead; but there was no time to change. Swinging the stone-head weapon high in air, he brought it down, with a grunt of huge effort, full upon one of those giant paws which clutched the edge of the parapet. Crushed and numbed, the grip of that paw fell away; but at the same moment one of the hinder paws got over the edge, and clung. And there the monster hung, its body bent in a contorted bow.

Bawr, meanwhile, seeing Grôm's peril, had dropped from his tree, snatched up his spear and club, and rushed in to the rescue. It was courage, this, of the finest, counting no odds; for down there on the level he would have stood no ghost of a chance had the beast turned back upon him. Grôm yelled to him to keep away, and swung up his club for another shattering blow. But in that

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same moment the great glaring eyes filmed and rolled upwards; blood spouted from between the gaping jaws; and with a spluttering cough the monster lost its hold. It fell, with a soft but jarring thud, upon its back, and slowly rolled over upon its side, pawing the air aimlessly. The arrow in the throat had done its work.

With fine self-restraint Bawr refrained from striking, that he might seem to usurp no share in Grôm's amazing achievement. He stood leaning upon his spear, calmly watching the last feeble paroxysms, till Grôm came scrambling down from the ledge and stood beside him. He took the bow and the arrows, and examined them in silence. Then he turned upon Grôm with burning eyes.

"You found the Fire for our people. You saved our people from the hordes of the Bow-legs. You have saved my life now, slaying the monster from very far off with these little sticks which you have made. It is you who should be Chief, not I."

Grôm laughed and shook his head. "Bawr is the better man of us two," said he positively, "and he is a better chief. He governs the people, while I go away and think new things. And he is my friend. Look, I will teach him now this new thing. And we will make another just like it, that when we return to the Caves Bawr also shall know how to strike from very far off."

With their rough-edged spear-heads of flint they set themselves to the skinning of the sabre-tooth. Then they went back to the high plateau, where Bawr was taught to shoot a straight shaft. And

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on the following day they returned to the fires of the tribe, carrying between them, shoulder high, slung upon their two spears, this first trophy of the bow, the monstrous head and hide of the sabre-tooth.



"She fell at Grôm's feet, plainly imploring his protection."

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CHAPTER IX

THE DESTROYING SPLENDOUR

I

TO Grôm, hunting farther to the south of the Tribal Fires than he had ever ranged before, came suddenly a woman running, mad with fright, a baby clutched to her bosom. She fell at Grôm's feet, gibbering breathlessly, and plainly imploring his protection. Both she and the child were streaming with blood, and covered with strange cup-like wounds, as if the flesh had been gouged out of them with some irresistible circular instrument.

Grôm swiftly fitted an arrow to his bow, and peered through the trees to see what manner of adversary the fugitive was like to bring upon him. At the same time, he gave a piercing cry, which was answered at once from some distance behind him.

Having satisfied himself (the country being fairly open) that the woman's pursuer, whatever it might be, was not close upon her heels, and that no immediate danger was in view, he turned his attention upon the woman herself. She was

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not of his race, and he looked down upon her with cold aversion. At first glance he thought she was one of the Bow-legs. But the colour of her skin, where it could be seen for the blood, was different, being rather of a copper-red; and she was neither so hairy on the body nor of so ape-like proportions. She was sufficiently hideous, however, and of some race plainly inferior to the People of the Caves. The natural instinct of a Cave Man would have been to knock her and her offspring on the head without ceremony—an effective method of guarding his more highly developed breed from the mixture of an inferior blood. But Grôm, the Chief and the wise man, had many vague impulses moving him at times which were novel to the human play-fellows of Earth's childhood. He disliked hurting a woman or a child. He might, quite conceivably, have refused to concern himself with the suppliant before him, and merely left her and her baby to the chances of the jungle. But the peculiar character of her wounds interested him. She aroused his curiosity. Here was a new mystery for him to investigate. The woman was saved.

Knowing a few words of the Bow-legs' tongue, which he had learned from his lame slave Ook-ootsk, he addressed the crouching woman, telling her not to fear. The tongue was unintelligible to her, but the tones of his voice seemed to reassure her. She sat up, revealing again the form of the little one, which she had been shielding with her hair and her bosom as if she feared the tall white hunter might dash its brains out; and Grôm noted with

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keen interest that the child also had one of those terrible, cup-shaped wounds, almost obliterating its fat, copper-coloured shoulder. He saw, also, that the woman's face, though uncomely, was more intelligent and human than the bestial faces of the Bow-legs women. It was a broad face, with very small, deep-set eyes, high cheek-bones, a tiny nose, and a very wide mouth, and it looked as if someone had sat on it hard and pushed it in. The idea made him smile, and the smile completed the woman's reassurance. She poured out a stream of chatter quite unlike the clicks and barkings of the Bow-legs. Then she crept closer to Grôm's feet, and proceeded to give her little one the breast. It was twisting uneasily with the pain of its dreadful wound, but it nursed hungrily, and with the prudent stoicism of a wild creature it made no outcry.

As Grôm stood studying the pair, the mother kept throwing glances of horror over her shoulder, as if expecting her assailants to arrive at any moment. Grôm followed her eyes, but there was no sign of any pursuit. Then he observed the fugitives' wounds more closely, and noted that the blood upon them was already, in most cases, pretty well coagulated. He noted also certain other wounds, deep, narrow punctures, like stabs. He guessed that they could not be much less than an hour old. The Thing, whatever it was, which had inflicted them—the Thing with so strange a mouth, and so strange a way of using it—had apparently given up the pursuit. Grôm's curiosity burned within him, and he was angry at the woman

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because she could not speak to him in his own language, or at least in that of the Bow-legs. It seemed to him wilful obstinacy on her part to refuse to understand the Bow-legs' tongue. He stooped over her, and roughly examined one of the wounds with his huge fingers. She winced, but made no complaint, only covering her baby with her hair and her arms in terror lest it should suffer a like harsh handling.

With a qualm of compunction, which rather puzzled him, Grôm gave over his investigating, and turned to a tall, slim youth with a great mop of chestnut hair who at this moment came running up to him. It was A-ya's young brother, Mò, Grôm's favourite follower and hunting mate; and he had come at speed, being very swift of foot, in answer to Grôm's signal. Breathing quickly, he stood at Grôm's side, and looked down with wonder and dislike upon the crouching woman.

Briefly Grôm explained, and then pointed to the inexplicable wounds. The youth, unable to believe that any human creature should be unable to comprehend plain human speech, such as that of the Cave People, tried his own hand at questioning the woman. He got a flow of chatter in reply, but, being able to make nothing out of it, he imagined it was not speech at all, and turned away angrily, thinking that she mocked him. Grôm, smiling at the mistake, explained that the woman was talking her own language, which he intended presently to learn as he had learned that of the Bow-legs.

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"But now," said he, "we will go and see what it is that has bitten the woman. It is surely something with a strange mouth."

Mô, who was not only brave to recklessness, but would have followed Grôm through the mouth of hell, sprang forward eagerly. Grôm, who realized that the mystery before him was a perilous one, and who loved to do dangerous things in a prudent manner, looked to his bow-string and saw that his arrows were handy in his girdle, before he started on the venture. Besides his bow he carried the usual two spears and his inseparable stone-headed club. Though danger was his delight, it was not the danger itself but the thrill of overcoming it that he loved.

The moment he stepped forward, however, the woman divined his purpose and leapt wildly to her feet. She sprang straight in front of him, screaming and gesticulating. She was plainly horror-stricken at the thought that the two men should venture into the perils from which she had so hardly escaped. To Grôm's keen intelligence her gestures were eloquent. She managed to convey to him the idea of great numbers, and the impossibility of his dealing with them. When he attempted to pass her, she threw herself down and clung to his feet, shaking with her terror. When she saw that Grôm was at last impressed, she stretched herself out as if dead, and then, after a few moments of ghastly rigidity, with fixed, staring eyes, she came to and held up one hand with the fingers outspread.

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This frantic pantomime Grôm could read in no other way than as an attempt to tell him that the unknown Something had killed five of the woman's companions. The information gave him pause. Adventurous as he was, he had small respect for mere pig-headed recklessness. He was resolved to solve the problem—but after all it could abide his more thorough preparation.

"Come back," he ordered, turning to the impetuous M6. "She says they are too many for us two. They have killed five of her people. We will go back to the Caves, and after three sleeps for good counsel, we will return with fire and find the destroying Thing."

II

On their return to the Caves, Grôm gave the stranger woman and her baby to his faithful slave Ook-ootsk, who accepted the gift with enthusiasm because, being a Bow-leg, he had not been allowed to take any of the Cave Women to wife. He lavished his attentions upon the unhappy stranger, but he could make no more of her speech than Grôm had done. The girl A-ya, however, in a moment of peculiar insight had gathered, or thought she gathered, from the stranger's signs, that the dreadful and destroying Thing was something that flew—therefore, a great flesh-eating bird. But she gathered, also, that it was something which in some way bore a resemblance to fire—for the

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woman, after getting over her first terror of the dancing flames, kept pointing to them and then to her wounds in a most suggestive way. This, however, as Grôm rather scornfully pointed out, was too absurd. There was nothing that could be in the least like fire except fire itself; and the wounds of the fugitives had no likeness whatever to the corrosive bites of the flame. A-ya took the correction submissively, but held her own thoughts; and when a day or two later, events proved her to have been right, she discreetly refrained from calling her lord's attention to the fact—a point upon which Grôm was equally reserved.

With so provocative a mystery waiting to be solved, Grôm could not long rest idle. Had she not known well it would be a waste of breath, A-ya would have tried to dissuade him from the perilous, and to her mind profitless, adventure. It was one she shrank from in spite of her tried courage and her unwavering trust in Grôm's prowess. The mystery of it daunted her. She feared it in the same way that she feared the dark. But she kept her fears to herself, and claimed her long-established right to go with Grôm on the expedition. Grôm was willing enough, for there was no one whose readiness and nerve, in a supreme crisis, he could so depend upon, and he wanted her close at hand with her fire-basket. There was nothing to keep her at home, as the children were looked after by Ook-ootsk.

It was a very little party which started south-

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ward from the Caves—simply Grôm, A-ya, young Mô, and a dwarfish kinsman of Grôm's, named Loob, who was the swiftest runner in the tribe and noted for his cunning as a scout. He could go through underbrush like a shadow, and hide where there was apparently no hiding-place, making himself indistinguishable from his surroundings like a squatting partridge. Each one carried a bow, two light spears, and a club—except A-ya, who had no club, and only one spear. The weapon she chiefly relied upon was the bow, which she loved with passion. She considered herself the inventor of it ; and in the accuracy of her shooting she outdid even Grôm. In addition to these weapons, each member of the party except the leader himself carried a fire-basket, in which a mass of red coals mixed with punk smouldered in a bed of moist clay.

The little expedition travelled Indian file, Grôm leading the way, with A-ya at his heels, then Loob the Scout, and young Mô bringing up the rear. They had started about dawn, when the first of the morning rose was just beginning to pale the cave-mouth fires. They travelled swiftly, but every two hours or so they would make a brief halt beside a spring to drink and breathe themselves and to look to the precious fires in the fire-baskets. When it wanted perhaps an hour of noon, they came to a little patch of meadow surrounding a solitary Judas-tree covered with bloom. Here they built a fire, for the replenishing of the coals in the fire-baskets, and as a menace to prowling beasts.

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Then they dined on their sun-dried meat and on ripe plantains gathered during the journey. Having dined, the three younger members of the party stretched themselves out in the shade for their noon sleep, while Grôm, whose restless brain never suffered him to sleep by day, kept watch, and pondered the adventure which lay before them.

As Grôm sat there, ten or a dozen paces from the fire, absorbed in thought, his eyes gradually focussed themselves upon a big purple-and-lemon orchid bloom, which glowed forth conspicuously from the rank green jungle-growth fringing the meadow. The gorgeous bloom seemed to rise out of a black, curiously gnarled elbow of branch or trunk which thrust itself out through the leafage. Grôm's eyes dwelt for a time, unheeding, upon this piece of misshapen tree trunk. Suddenly he saw the blackness wink. His startled vision cleared itself instantly, and revealed to him the hideous, two-horned mask of a black rhinoceros, peering forth just under the orchid blossom.

Grôm's first impulse was to wake the sleepers with a yell and shepherd them to refuge in the tree—for the gigantic woolly rhinoceros, with his armour of impenetrable hide, was a foe whom Man had not yet learned to handle with any certainty. But a deeper instinct held Grôm motionless. He knew that the monster, whose eyesight was always dim and feeble, could not see him distinctly, and was in all probability staring in stupid wonder at the dancing flames of the camp-fire. As long as no smell of man should reach the brute's sensitive

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nostrils to rouse its rage, it was not likely to charge. There was no wind, and the air about him was full of the spicy bitterness of the wood-smoke. Grôm decided that the safest thing was to keep perfectly still and wait for the next move in the game to come from the monster. He devoutly trusted that the sleepers behind him were sleeping soundly, and that no one would wake and sit up to attract the monster's attention.

Grôm could now see plainly that it was the fire, and not himself, which the rhinoceros was staring at. The shifting flames, and the smell of the smoke, apparently puzzled it. After a moment or two, it took a step forward, so that half of its huge, black, shaggy bulk projected from the banked greenery as from a frame. Then it stood motionless, blinking its little malignant eyes, till the silent suspense grew to be a strain even upon Grôm's well-seasoned nerves.

At last a large stick, laid across the fire, burned through and fell apart. The flames leapt upwards with redoubled vigour, preceded by a volley of crackling sparks. Knowing the temper of the rhinoceros, Grôm expected it to fly into a fury and charge upon the fire at once. His mouth opened, indeed, for the yell of warning which should wake the sleepers and send them leaping into the tree. But he checked himself in time. The monster, for once in its life, seemed to be abashed. The curling red flames were too elusive a foe for it. With a grunt of uneasiness, it drew back into the leafage ; and in a moment or two Grôm

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heard the giant bulk crashing off through the jungle at a gallop. The unwonted sensation of alarm, once yielded to, had swollen to a panic, and the dull-witted brute fled on for a mile or more before it could forget the cause of its terror.

That afternoon toward sundown the expedition reached the point where the fugitive had made her appeal to Grôm. For fear of giving information to the unknown enemy, no fires were lighted. The night was passed in a dense and lofty tree-top. For Grôm, strung up with excitement, suspense and curiosity, there was little sleep. For the most part he perched on his woven platform with his arms about his knees, listening to the sounds of the night—the occasional sudden rush of a hunting beast, the agonized scream and scuffle, the gurglings and noisy slaverings that told of the unseen tragedies enacted far down in the murderous dark. But there was no sound novel to his own experience. Once there came a scratching of claws and a sniffing at the base of the tree.

But Grôm dropped a live coal from his fire-basket, and chanced to make a lucky shot. With a snarl some heavy body bounced away from the tree. The coal then fell into a tuft of dry grass, which flared up suddenly. Grôm had a glimpse of huge shapes and startled, savage eyes backing away from the circle of light. The blaze died down as quickly as it had arisen; and thereafter the night prowlers kept at a distance from the tree. But the sleepers had all been thoroughly aroused, and till dawn they sat

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discussing, for the hundredth time, the chances of the morrow's venture.

Before the sun was clear of the horizon, the little party was again upon the march, but now going with the wariness of a sable. They no longer went Indian file, but flitting singly from tree to tree, from covert to covert, Grôm picking up the old trail of the fugitive, the rest of the party keeping him in view and peering ahead for some sign of the unknown Terror. The red woman in her flight had left a sharp trail enough ; but in the lapse of three days it had been so obliterated that all Grôm's woodcraft was needed to decipher it, and his progress was slow. He began to be puzzled at the absence of any other trail, of any footsteps of a mysterious, unknown monster. Such tracks as crossed those of the fugitive, however terrible, were all familiar to his eye.

Suddenly he almost stumbled over a hideous sight. A low whistle brought his followers closing in upon him. The skeleton of a full-grown man lay outstretched in the grass. The bones were fresh—blood-stained and bright—and a swarm of blood-sucking insects arose from them. They were picked minutely clean, except for a portion of the skull, where the long, strong, densely matted hair seemed to have served as an effective armour. The bones were not pulled about, or crushed for their marrow, as they would have been if the victim had been the prey of any of the great carnivorous beasts. And there were no tracks about it save those of a few small rat-like creatures. It

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was clear that the Mystery, whatever it might be, had wings.

"A bird!" whispered A-ya, with a gleam of triumph in her eyes, at the same time glancing up into the tree-tops apprehensively. But Grôm did not think so. There were no marks of mighty claws on the turf around the skeleton.

Grôm cast about him an eager but anxious eye. The country was not densely wooded at this point, but studded with low thickets, and set here and there with scattered trees. From a little way ahead came a gleam of calm water through the greenery. It was a scene of peace, and security, and summer loveliness. Its very beauty seemed to Grôm an added menace, as if some peculiar treachery must lurk behind it.

In the centre of an open glade, not far from the skeleton, Grôm set his party to building a circle of fires, as likely to afford the surest kind of a refuge. A supply of fuel having been gathered, he directed A-ya and Mô to remain and tend the fires and not to leave the circle unless he should summon them. Loob, the cunning scout, he sent off to the left through the underbrush. He himself followed the trail of the fugitive—now doubled by that of the other fugitive whose skeleton lay there in the sun—down toward that gleam of water through the trees. A-ya gazed after him anxiously as he vanished, half minded to dare his displeasure and follow him.

Grôm was presently able to make out that the water was a wide, reedy lake or the arm of a

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shallow river. There was no wind, and the surface shone like clear glass. But once and again his eyes were dazzled by a dart of intense radiance, a great flash of rose or violet or blue-green flame, shooting over the surface of the water. A memory of what A-ya had professed to gather from the stranger woman rushed into his mind. Perhaps the Destroying Thing *was* like a bird, and nevertheless, at the same time, something like fire. He felt himself confronted by a mystery which made even his tried nerves creep; and he hid himself in the densest undergrowth as he stole forward toward the water. He had forgotten, and forsaken, the trail he was following, in his haste to solve the problem of those darting splendours.

A few moments more and he gained the edge of an open glade which led straight to the water. He paused behind the screening leaves. Out over the water a bar of ruby light, surrounded by a globe of rose-pink mist, shot by and vanished from his narrow field of vision. He was just about to thrust out his head and crane his neck to follow the gorgeous apparition, when a peculiar dry rustling in the air above checked him. He glanced up cautiously, and saw hovering, not more than twenty or thirty yards away, a beautiful and dreadful being.

In shape it was exactly like a dragon-fly; but the length of its flaming violet body was greater than that of Grôm's longest arrow. The spread of its two pairs of transparent, crystal-shining, colourless wings was even greater than the length of its

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body. Its enormous eyes, wells of purple fire which took up the whole of the top and sides of its monstrous head, seemed to see everywhere at once ; and Grôm shivered with the feeling that they had spied him out and were peering into his very soul.

The awful eyes may have seen him, indeed ; but at that moment they spied out something else which apparently concerned them more. With a pounce like a flash of violet lightning—and, indeed, almost as swift—the bright shape swooped to the grass. The four shining wings waved there for a moment, and there seemed to be a mild struggle. Then the giant fly rose again, lightly, into the air, holding in the clutch of its six slender, jointed legs the body of one of those black, rat-like animals which Grôm knew so well as infesting the grass of all meadows near the water. The captor flew to a naked branch near the waterside, alighted upon it, and proceeded to make its meal, holding up the body between the end joints of its front pair of legs and turning it over and over deftly while its appalling jaws both crushed and mangled it. The process was amazingly swift. In the space of a couple of minutes all the blood, flesh, and soft material of the rat were squeezed out and sucked down. The remnants were rolled into a hard little ball, perfectly spherical, and scornfully tossed aside. And the monster, leaping into the air with a rustle of its glittering wings, flashed off over the water.

Almost in the same moment an amazingly loud rustle, like the sweep of a fierce gust of rain upon

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a rank of palmetto leaves, filled the air above the glade, and Grôm, looking up with a start, saw a great shoal of the radiant shapes storm by, as if with the rainbow entangled in their wings. He wondered upon what foray they were bent; and now for the first time he realized, with a creeping of the flesh, what it was that had overtaken the man whose skeleton he had found in the grass. The shoal swept out over the lake a little way, and then on down the shore toward the left; and Grôm drew a long breath as he assured himself that their course was taking them far from the fires of A-ya and Mô.

When Grôm lowered his eyes to earth again he started. On the side of the stump of a fallen tree, out in the glade not more than eight or ten yards distant, clung one of the monsters, scintillating blue-green and amethyst in the full blaze of the sun. Its wings, exquisitely netted and of crystal transparency, were tinged with an ineffable purple iridescence. Its jointed body, slightly longer than Grôm's arm, was nearly as thick as his wrist, and ended at the tail with a formidable double claw. Its six legs, arranged in three pairs under the thorax, were armed on the inner sides with powerful spines, needle-pointed and steel hard, with which to grip and hold its victims. The thorax, from the back of which sprouted the four great wings, was of the thickness of Grôm's fore-arm, while its head was as big as Grôm's two great fists put together. It was this head which held Grôm's fascinated gaze, giving him more of the sensation

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of cold fear than he had ever known before. More than two-thirds of the head consisted of a pair of huge, globose eyes, without pupil, ethereally transparent, yet unfathomable. From the depths of them flamed a ceaselessly changing radiance of blue-green, purple and violet. Grôm found the stare of those blank, pupilless eyes almost intolerable.

It was plainly straight at him, through the ineffectual screen of the leafage, that the dreadful insect was staring. At first it stared with the back of its head. Then, very deliberately, it turned its head completely around, without moving its body a hair's-breadth, till its mouth was in the same plane with its back. This gave Grôm a sense of disgust, and his shrinking dread began to give way to a sort of rage.

Then he took note of the monster's mouth—and understood those great cup-shaped wounds on the woman and the child. The mouth took up the remaining third of the head, and seemed to consist of globular discs working one over the other, so as either to cut cleanly or to grind. They were working, slowly, now—and Grôm felt suddenly that he must put a stop to it, that he must put out the awful light in those monstrous devil eyes. Stealthily, almost imperceptibly, he fitted an arrow to his bow, raised it, drew it, and took a long, steady aim. He must not miss. The shaft flew—and the great fly was pinned, through the thorax, to the soft, rotten wood of its perch.

To Grôm's horror that stroke, which to any

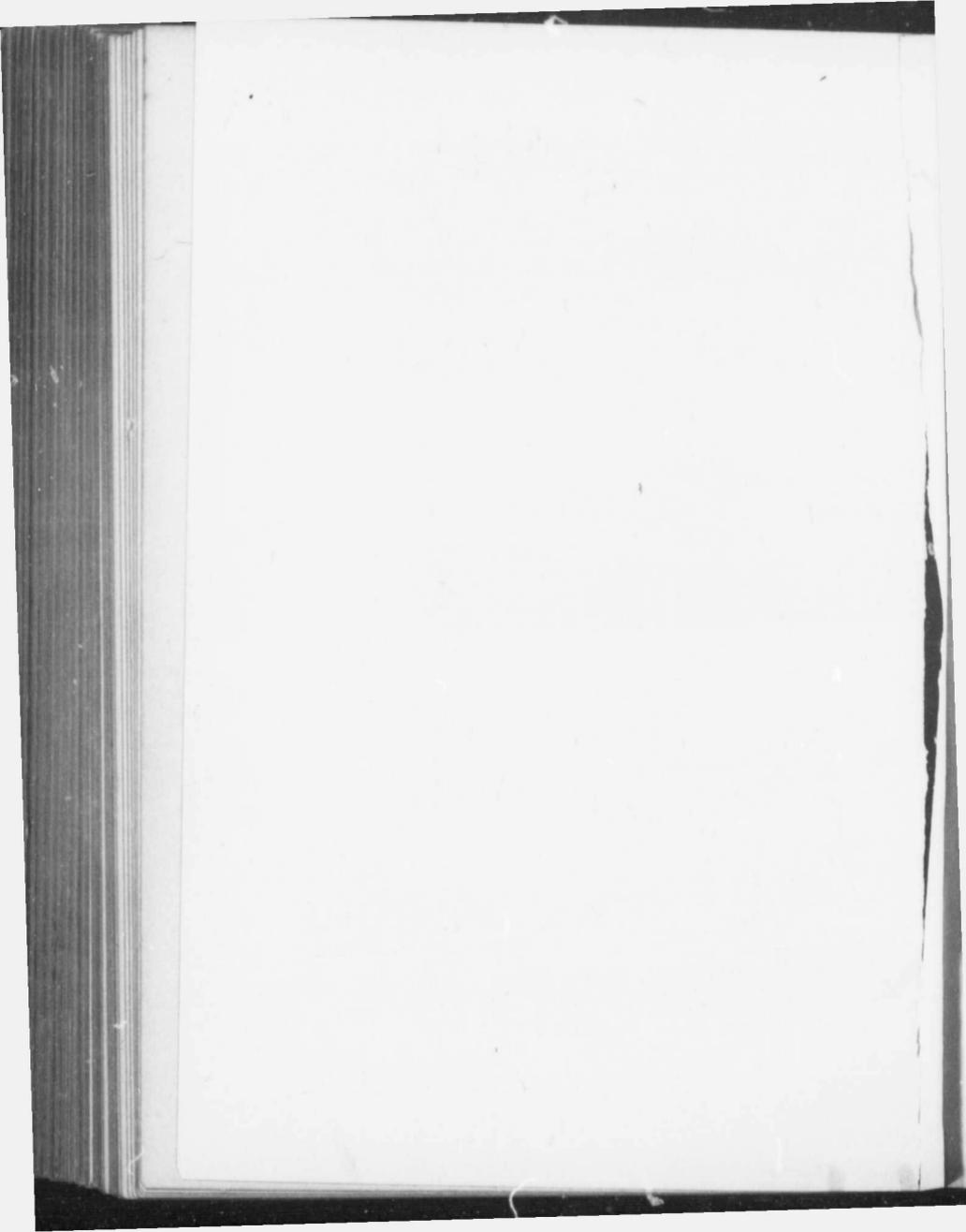
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beast he knew would have at once been fatal, did not kill the monstrous fly. Its struggles, and the beating of its four great wings, were so violent that the arrow-head was presently wrenched loose from its hold in the wood, and the raging splendour, with the shaft half-way through its thorax, bounded into the air. It darted straight at Grôm, who had prudently edged in among a tangle of stems. Its fury carried it through the screen of leafage—but then, its wings impeded by the branches, and the arrow hampering it, it dashed itself to the earth. Instantly Grôm was upon it, stamping its slim body, as it lay there blazing and quivering, into the soil. The violet light in the huge, pupilless eyes still stared up at him implacable, from a head turned around squarely over the back. But in a cold fury Grôm shattered the gleaming head with his club. Then he trod the silver wings to dust.

Having slaked his wrath effectually, Grôm turned to stare forth again at those destroying splendours darting and glittering above the surface of the lake. To his surprise there were no more of them to be seen. Then far off down the shore he heard the voice of Loob, shouting for help. The shouting changed at once to a scream of terror, and Grôm started to the rescue on the full run—taking care, however, to keep within cover of the thickets. But before he had gone a quarter of a mile he heard A-ya's voice calling him, wildly, insistently, mingled with excited yells from Mō. He shouted in reply and dashed madly for the fires. The



" He strove to throttle his dreadful assailant."



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peril of A-ya put all other considerations out of his mind.

As he burst forth into the glade of refuge, he saw A-ya and young Mō leaping about frantically among their fires, now trying to stir the fires to a fiercer blaze, now beating upwards with their spears, while above them darted and gleamed and swooped and scintillated, with a horrid dry rustling of their silver wings, shoal upon shoal of the devouring monsters. As he burst into the open, with a great shout of encouragement, something dropped upon him. He felt his head instantly caged by six steel-like legs which gripped like jaws, their spines sinking deep into the flesh of neck and cheek. He reached up his left hand, caught his dreadful assailant just where the head and thorax join, and strove to throttle it. This was impossible, by reason of the insect's armour, but he succeeded in holding off those horrid jaws from his face as he dashed for the circle. Another monster swooped and struck its spines into his back, and bit a great mouthful out of his shoulder. But he gained the fires, and, holding his breath, sprang right through the fiercest flame. The wings of his assailants shrivelled instantly, and the flame, drawn into the mouths of their breathing tubes, sealed them up. Grôm tore them off, and slammed the writhing, wingless bodies into the fire.

Inside the circle, now that the fires were burning high, it was possible to defend oneself effectually, as the bulk of the assailants seemed to realize that the flames were fatal to their frail wings. But

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there were enough so headlong in their ferocity that both Grôm and Mô were kept busy beating them off with spears, while A-ya fed the fires; and the ground inside the circle was littered with the radiant bodies of the dying insects, which, even in dying, bit like bull-dogs if foot or leg came within reach. Grôm noticed that their supply of fuel was all but gone, and his heart sank. He measured with his eyes the distance to the nearest thickets that looked dense enough for a shelter.

"We'll have to run for those bushes," he said presently. "They can't fly in where the branches are thick. It breaks their wings."

"Good," said young Mô. But A-ya, whose shapely shoulders and thighs were already covered with hideous wounds, trembled at the prospect.

At that moment, however, an amazing change came over the scene. A black thunder-cloud passed across the face of the sun. The moment the sunshine vanished the destroyers seemed to forget their fury. All the life and energy went out of them. They simply flocked to the nearest trees and hung themselves up, gigantic, jewelled blooms, upon the branches. In less than a minute every dreadful wing was stilled.

"Now is our time. Come!" commanded Grôm, leading the way out of the circle.

"Let's stop and kill them all!" pleaded young Mô, his eyes red with rage.

But Grôm pointed to the cloud. "It will pass quickly," said he. "We must be far from here before the sun shows his face again."

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He paused, however, to transfix upon his spear-head one of their wounded but still fluttering foes, that he might be able to show the tribe what manner of monster they had had to deal with. Both A-ya and M6 followed his example; and they all ran off down the glade bearing their strange trophies on their spear-heads. The monsters, clinging sullenly to their perches, rolled baleful eyes of emerald and rose and amethyst upon them as they went, but lifted never a wing to follow them. Ten minutes later the sun came out again. Then the monsters all sprang hurtling into the air, and darted hither and thither above the glade in shoals of iridescent radiance, seeking their prey. But Gr6m and A-ya and M6, triumphant in spite of their wounds, were by this time far away among the inland thickets, where those intolerable eyes could not search them out, nor the clashing wings pursue.

CHAPTER X

THE TERRORS OF THE DARK

I

FROM the topmost summit of that range of pointed hills which held the caves and the cave-mouth fires of his people, Grôm stared northward with keen curiosity. To east and south and west he had explored, ever seeking to enlarge the knowledge and strengthen the security of his tribe. But to northward of the Pointed Hills lay league on league of profound jungle—grotesque and enormous growths knitted together impenetrably by a tangle of gigantic, flame-flowered lianas. And in those rank, green glooms, as Grôm had reason to believe, there lurked such monsters as even he, with all his resources of fire and novel weapons, had so far shrunk from challenging.

But beyond the expanse of jungle stretched another line of hills, their summits not saw-toothed like his own, but low and gently rounded, and of a smoky purple against the pure turquoise sky. These hills Grôm was thirsting to explore. They might contain caves more roomy than those of

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his own hills—spacious and suitable to give shelter to his tribe, which was now finding itself somewhat cramped. Moreover, it had always seemed to Grôm that there might be a mystery behind those hills, and to his restless imagination a mystery was always like a stinging goad.

In all this neighbourhood the crust of earth was thin, as plainly appeared from the fringe of wavering volcanic flames which, during all the five years since the coming of the tribe, had been dancing from the lip of the narrow fissure across the mouth of their valley. Night and day, now high and vehement, now low and faint, they had danced there, guarding the valley entrance—until just one moon ago. Then had come an earthquake, shaking the hearts of all the tribe to water. The dancing flames had died. The fissure had closed up, and its place had been taken by a pool of boiling pitch. And one of the caves had fallen in, burying several members of the tribe, who had been too stupefied with panic to flee into the open at the first alarm. For some days after this catastrophe the tribe had camped in the open, huddled about their great fires. Then, but with deep misgivings, they had all crowded back into the remaining caves.

But now there was not room enough, and Bawr, the wise Chief, had taken frequent counsel upon the matter with Grôm, whom, loving him greatly, he called sometimes his Right Hand and sometimes the Eye of the People. At last, it had been settled that Grôm should lead a party through the

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jungle land to those other hills, to spy out the prospect. And Grôm, like the foresighted leader that he was, had spent many hours on the mountain-top, planning his route and studying the luxuriant surface of the jungle outstretched below him, before plunging into its mysterious depths.

As was his custom when on a perilous venture, Grôm would have few followers to share the peril with him. He took A-ya, not only because of her oft-proved courage and resourcefulness, not only because he wanted her always at his side, but, above all, because he knew he could not leave her behind. Had he tried to leave her, she would have disobeyed and followed him by stealth—and perhaps fallen a prey to prowling beasts. He took also A-ya's young brother, the hot-head M6; and Loob, the shaggy, little sharp-faced scout, who could run like a hare, hide like a fox, and fight like a cornered weasel. This he would have accounted, ordinarily, a sufficient party. But the present enterprise being one of peculiar difficulty, he decided at the last moment to strengthen his following by the addition of a dark-faced, perpetually-grinning giant named Hobbo, who was slow of wit, but thewed like a bull, and a mighty fighter with the stone-headed club.

This little but greatly daring band, which Grôm, one flaming sunrise, led down into the unknown jungle, was well armed. Besides the spear and the club, each member of the party but Hobbo (who had displayed no aptitude for its use) carried Grôm's wonderful invention—the bow. Hobbo,

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however, because of his immense strength, bore the heavy fire-basket, wherein the smouldering coals were cherished in a bed of clay. As a food reserve, everyone carried a few strips of half-dried meat ; but their main dependence, of course, was to be upon the spoils of their hunting and the fruits that they might gather on their march.

The forest into whose depths Grôm now led the way was in reality a survival from a previous age, into which the forms, both vegetable and animal, of contemporary life had been gradually infiltrating. The soil, of incredible fertility, still poured forth those gigantic tree grasses, and colossal, sappy ferns and pseudo-palms, which had flourished chiefly in the carboniferous period. But here they were mingled with the more enduring hard-wood growths of the later tropical forests ; and only these were strong enough to support the massive, strangling coils of the cable-like lianas, which wound their way up the huge trunks and reached out in aerial, swaying bridges from tree-top to tree-top. On every side, high or low, the deep-green gloom was splashed with colour from the gorgeous orchids and other epiphytes, which flowered out into grotesque or monstrous wing-petalled shapes of vermilion and purple and orange and rose and white, eyed with velvet black or streaked with iridescent bronze.

To men of to-day this jungle would have been impenetrable, except by the incessant use of axe or machete. But Grôm and his party were Cave-Men, and had not yet forgotten all the instincts

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and capacities of their tree-dwelling ancestors. Sometimes, where it seemed easiest, they forced their way along the ground, or followed the trodden trail of some great jungle beast, so long as it led in the right direction. But here they had to be ceaselessly on the watch against surprise by creatures whose monstrous tracks were unlike any that they had ever seen before. Whenever possible, therefore, they preferred to journey, after the fashion of their apish ancestors, by way of the high branches and the liana bridges. Hampered as they were by their weapons, their progress by this aerial way was slow. But it was comparatively secure. And it was also comparatively cool; while down at the ground-level the steaming heat and the stinging insects were almost beyond endurance.

Yet before the end of that first day's journey they learned that even in the tree-tops it was necessary to be always on the watch. Once the little hairy scout, Loob, who travelled always on the outskirts of the party, was struck at suddenly by a huge black leopard, which lay ambushed in the crotch of a tree. Loob, however, who was so quick-sighted that he seemed to see things before they actually happened, leapt to a higher branch in time to escape the deadly paw. In the next instant he struck down furiously with his spear, catching his assailant between the shoulder-blades and driving the stroke home with all his strength. With a screech, the beast stiffened out, and then, somewhat slowly, collapsed. As Loob wrenched

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his weapon free, the great animal slumped limply from its branch. For a moment or two it hung by the fore-paws, coughing and frothing at the mouth. Then this last hold relaxed and it fell, bumping with a curious deliberation from branch to branch. It vanished through a floor of thick leafage, and struck the ground with a dull crash. It must have fallen under the very jaws of an unseen waiting monster; for there arose at once a strange, hooting roar, followed by the sound of rending flesh and cracking bone. Loob grinned over his feat, and Grôm, glancing at A-ya, muttered quietly: "It is better to be up here than down there." As he spoke, and they all peered downwards, a dreadful head, with the limp body of the leopard gripped like a rat between its long jaws and dripping yellow fangs, thrust itself up through the floor of leafage and stared at them with round eyes as cold and blank as ice.

Grôm itched to shoot an arrow into one of those unwinking, devilish eyes. But arrows were too precious to be wasted.

That night they slept profoundly on a platform which they wove of branches in one of the tallest and most unscaleable trees. They kept watch, of course, turn and turn about; but nothing attempted to approach them, and they cared little for the sounds of strife, the crashings of pursuit and desperate flight, which came up to them at intervals from the blackness far below.

On the morrow, however, as they were pursuing their aerial path along the borders of a narrow,

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sluggish bayou, they were suddenly made to realize that the tree-tops held perils more deadly than that of the lurking leopards. They were all staring down into the water, which swarmed with gigantic crocodiles and boiled immediately beneath them with the turmoil of a life-and-death struggle between two of the brutes, when a harsh jabbering in the branches just across the water made them look up.

The tree-tops opposite were full of great apes, mowing and gibbering at them with every sign of hate. The beasts were as big and massive as Hobbo himself, and covered thickly with long, blackish fur. Their faces, half human, half dog-like, were hairless and of a bright but bilious blue, with great livid red circles about the small, furious eyes. With derisive gestures they swung themselves out upon the overhanging branches, till it almost seemed as if they would hurl themselves into the water in their rage against the little knot of human beings.

The girl A-ya, overcome with loathing horror because the beasts were so hideous a caricature of man, covered her eyes with one hand. Young Mò, his fiery temper stung by their challenge, clapped an arrow to his string and raised his bow to shoot. But Grôm checked him sternly, dreading to fix any thirst of vengeance in the minds of the terrible troop.

"They can't come at us here. Let them forget about us," said he. "Don't take any more notice of them at all."

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As he led the way once more through the branches along the edge of the bayou, the apes kept pace with them on the other side. But presently the bayou widened, and then swept sharply off to the west. Grôm kept on straight to the north, by the route which he had planned. And the mad gibbering died away into the hot, green silence of the tree-tops.

The adventurers now pushed on with redoubled speed, unwilling to pass another night in the tree-tops when such dangerous antagonists were in the neighbourhood. The hills, however, were still far off when evening came again. Not knowing that the great apes always slept at night, Grôm decided to continue the journey in order to lessen the risk of a surprise. When the moon rose, round and huge and honey-coloured, over the sea of foliage, travelling through the tree-tops was almost as easy as by day, while the earth below them, with its prowling and battling monsters, was buried in inky gloom. When day broke, there were the rounded hills startlingly close ahead, as if they had crept forward to meet them in the night.

And now the hills looked different. Between the nearest—a long, rolling, treeless ridge of downland—and the edge of the jungle lay an expanse of open, grassy savannah, dotted with ponds, and here and there a curious, solitary, naked tree-trunk, with what looked like a bunch of grass on its top. They were like gigantic green paint-brushes, with yellow-grey handles, stuck up at

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random. Far off they saw a herd of curious beasts at pasture, and away to the left a giant bird, as tall as the tree by which it stood, seemed to keep watch. A little to the right, where the treeless ridge came abruptly to an end, gleamed a considerable stretch of water. It was toward this point, where the water washed the steep-shouldered promontory, that Grôm decided to shape his course across the plain.

By the time the sun was some three hours high they had arrived within a couple of hundred yards of the open. Sick of the oppressive jungle, and eager for the change to a type of country with which they were more familiar, they were swinging on through the tree-tops at a great pace, when that savage, snarling jabber which they so dreaded was heard in the branches behind them. Grôm instantly put A-ya in the lead, while he himself dropped to the rear to meet this deadliest of perils. There was no need to urge his party to haste; but it seemed to them all as if they were standing still, so swiftly did the clamour of the apes come up upon them.

"Down to earth," ordered Grôm sharply, seeing that they must be overtaken before they could reach the open, and realizing that in the tree-tops they could not hope to match these four-handed dwellers of the trees.

As they dropped nimbly from branch to branch, the foremost of the apes arrived in sight, set up a screech of triumph, and came swooping down after them in vast, swinging leaps. In the hurry Hobbo

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dropped his fire-basket, which broke as it fell and scattered the precious coals. Grôm, guarding the rear of the flight, made the mistake of keeping his eye too much on the enemy, too little on where he was going. In a moment or two, he found himself cut off, upon a branch from which there was no escape without a drop of twenty feet to a most uncertain foothold. Rather than risk it, he ran in upon his nearest assailant at the base of the branch, thrusting at the blue-faced beast with his spear. But his position being so insecure, his thrust lacked force and precision. The great ape caught it deftly; and Grôm, to preserve his balance, had to let the spear be wrenched from his hand. At the same moment another ape dropped on the branch behind him.

For just one second Grôm thought his hour had come. He crouched to steady himself, then darted forward and hurled his club straight at his foe's protruding and shaggy paunch. Again the beast caught the missile in its lightning clutch; but in the next instant it threw up its long arms, without a sound, and fell backwards out of the tree. A-ya, who had been the first to reach the ground, had drawn her bow and shot upwards with sure aim. The shaft had caught the great ape under the centre of the jaw, far back at the throat, and pierced straight up to the brain.

Surprised at seeing their leader fall with so little apparent reason, the other apes halted for a moment in their onset, chattering noisily. In that moment Grôm swung himself to the ground.

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As he reached it both Mô and Loob discharged their arrows. Another ape fell from his perch, but caught himself on a lower branch and hung there writhing; while a third, with a shaft half buried in his paunch, fled back yelling into the tree-top. Then the adventurers snatched up their fallen weapons from the ground and made for the open as fast as they could run. And the apes, with hellish uproar of barks and screams, came swarming after them through the lower branches.

At this point, fortunately for the travellers, the jungle was already thinning, and they had a chance to show their speed. The raging blue-faces were speedily distanced, and the fugitives ran out breathless upon the sunny savannah. Here, feeling themselves safe, they halted to look back. The lower branches all along the edge of the grass were thronged with leaping brown forms, and gnashing blue masks, and red-rimmed, devilish eyes. But not one of the great beasts, for all their rage, seemed willing to venture forth into the open.

"There must be something out here that they fear greatly," commented Grôm, peering warily about him. But there was nothing in sight to suggest any danger, and he led the way onward through the rank grass at a long, leisurely trot.

II

For the most part the grass grew hardly waist high; but here and there were patches, perhaps

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an acre or so in extent, where it was more cane than grass and rose to a height of twelve or fifteen feet. To such patches, which might serve as lurking-places to unknown monsters, Grôm gave a wide berth. He had a vivid remembrance of that colossal head, with the awful dead eyes, which had reared itself through the leafage to stare up at him.

In spite of the strange and enormous trails which crossed their path at times ; in spite of occasional massive swayings and crashings in the deep beds of cane, the adventurous party accomplished the journey across the savannah without encountering a single foe. The mid-noon blaze of the sun upon the windless grass, which was almost more than they could endure, was probably keeping the monsters to their lairs ; and the only living things to be seen, besides the insects and a high-wheeling vulture or two, were a few shy troops of a kind of small antelope, incredibly swift of foot.

Grôm drew a breath of relief as they reached the foot of the hills. But just here it was impossible to climb them. A range of high limestone downs, they were fringed at this point by an unbroken line of cliff, perpendicular and at times overhanging, from forty or fifty to perhaps a couple of hundred feet in height, and so smooth that even these goat-footed cave-folk could not scale them. The rich plain-land at their feet had once been a shallow, inland sea, and now its grasses washed along their base in a gold-green, scented foam.

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Turning to the right, Grôm led the way close along the cliff-foot toward the water, which glowed like brass about a mile ahead. Along the right of their path the ground sloped off gently to a belt of that high cane-like growth which Grôm regarded with such suspicion. Before they had gone many hundred yards his suspicion was more than justified.

From a little way behind them there arose all at once a chorus of explosive gruntings, mixed with a huge crashing of the canes. Glancing over their shoulders, they saw a great rust-red animal, about the size of a rhinoceros, which burst forth from the canes and stood staring after them. Its hideous head was larger than that of any rhinoceros they had ever seen, and armed with a pair of enormous conical horns, each more than a foot in diameter at the base and tapering to a keen point. Set side by side, at a moderate angle, upon the bridge of the snout, they were far more terrible than the horns of any rhinoceros. Their bearer lowered them menacingly, and charged down upon Grôm's party with a sound that was something between the grunting of a hog and the braying of an ass. Immediately upon his massive heels a whole herd of the red monsters surged forth from the canes, and came charging after their leader at a ponderous gallop which seemed literally to shake the earth.

For a moment or two Grôm's party had paused, confident in their own fleetness of foot, and wondering at that pair of amazing horns on the monster's

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snout. But when the rest of the terrific herd came thundering down upon them, they fled in all haste. To their amazement, they found that their speed was none too great for their need. The red monsters, in spite of their bulk, were disconcertingly swift.

As he neared the steep promontory which terminated the range of downs, Grôm began to fear that he and his followers would have to take refuge in the water. This water, as it chanced, was the brackish estuary of a river which, sweeping down from the east, here made its way to the sea through a long, slanting break in the limestone hills. It was now near low tide, and there opened before the hard-pressed fugitives, as they approached the shore, a strip of damp beach running around the base of the bluff. As they left the grass and ran out upon the beach they were astonished to find that the thundering pursuit had stopped short. Just at the turn of the cliff they halted and stared back wondering. Their pursuers, though swinging their great horns and braying with rage, were evidently unwilling to venture so near the water-side. They drew back, indeed, as if they feared it, and at last went crashing away into the canes. The fugitives, glad of an opportunity to rest their labouring lungs, squatted down with their backs against the cliff and congratulated themselves on having got rid of such perilous attentions. But Grôm's sagacious eyes searched the cliff face anxiously, without neglecting to watch the unruffled water. If that water was so dreaded that

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even the mighty herd of their pursuers durst not approach it, surely its smiling surface must hide some peril of surpassing horror.

For the next few hundred yards, till it vanished around the curve, the strip of naked beach was not more than twenty or thirty feet in width. Not without some apprehensions, Grôm decided to push forward. There seemed nothing else to do, indeed, seeing that the cane-beds behind them were occupied by that irresistible red herd. Somewhere ahead, he argued, there must be a break in the cliff which would give access to the rolling downs above, where they might travel in safety. Disguising his uneasiness that he might not discourage his followers—who were now full of elation at having reached the foot of the hills—he led on again in haste, though there seemed to be no need of haste. Both Hobbo and young Mô, indeed, were for staying a while and sleeping in the shade of an overhanging rock. But A-ya, who sensed through sympathy her lord's disquietude, and the little scout Loob, who was always, on principle, ill at ease in any spot where there was no tree to climb, were as eager as their chief to push ahead; and the others would never have dared, in any case, to question Grôm's decision.

As they rounded the next bend of the cliff, however, a clamour of excited satisfaction arose from all the party. Straight ahead, and not fifty paces distant, there opened before them a spacious cave-mouth, with a somewhat wider strip of beach before it. Immediately beyond the cave the strip

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of beach came sharply to an end, and the tide lapped softly against the foot of the cliff.

But just then, in the moment of their elation, a terrifying thing happened. As if aroused by their voices, the still surface a few yards from shore boiled up, and was lashed to foam by the strokes of a gigantic tail.

"Run!" yelled Grôm; and they all dashed forward, there being no chance to go back. In the same instant, an appalling head—like that of a thrice magnified and distorted crocodile, with vast, round, painted eyes—was upthrust from the water and came rushing after them at a pace which sent up a curving wave before it.

Quick as thought, Grôm drew his bow and shot at the appalling head. The arrow drove straight into the gaping throat, eliciting a thunderous bellow of rage, but producing no other effect. Then Grôm sprang after his fleeing companions, and raced for his life toward the cave mouth. The cave might be nothing more than a death-trap for them all; but it seemed to offer the one possibility of escape.

As they dashed into the cave the awful, gaping head was close behind them. They had a flashed glimpse, through the gloom, of high-arched distance melting into blackness, of a strip of black water along the right, and to left a gentle ascent of smooth white sand, whose end was out of sight.

Up this slope they raced, with the clashing of monstrous fangs close behind them. But they had not gone a dozen strides when the slope quivered,

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and heaved upwards shudderingly beneath them ; and they all fell forward flat upon their faces. From all but Grôm there went up a shriek so piercing that in their own ears it disguised the stupendous rending roar which at that moment seemed to stun the air. The mighty arch of the cave mouth had slipped and crashed down, completely jamming the entrance, and opening up a gash of blue heaven above their heads.

To Grôm's unshaken wits, it was clear on the instant what had happened. He staggered to his feet and looked back through a rain of falling rock-splinters. He had a vision of their colossal pursuer, its jaws stretched to their utmost width, the vast globes of its eyes protruding from their armoured sockets, its ponderous, bowed fore-legs pawing the air aimlessly in the final convulsion. The falling rock-mass had caught it on the middle of the back, crushing its mighty frame like an egg-shell.

For a second or two, Grôm stood there rigid, staring, his gnarled fingers clenched upon his weapons. Then a second earthquake tremor beneath his feet warned him. With an unerring instinct, he sprang on up the slope after his companions, who had fled as soon as they could pick themselves up. And in the next moment the rock above his head, fissured deep by the rains, slipped again. With a growling screech, as if torn from the bowels of the mountain, it settled slowly down, and sealed the mouth of the cave to utter blackness.

Grôm stopped short, having no mind to dash

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out his brains against the rock. There was stillness at last, and silence save for the faint, humming moan of the earthquake which seemed to come from vast depths beneath his feet. Profoundly awed, but master of his spirit, he stood leaning upon his spear in the thick dark till the last of that strange humming note had died away. Then, through a silence so thick it seemed to choke him, he called aloud :

"A-ya! where are you?"

"Grôm!" came the girl's answer, a sobbing cry of relief and joy, from almost, as it seemed, beneath his outstretched hand.

"We are all here," came the voices of the three men.

They had fallen headlong at the second shock, as at the first; and in the darkness they had not dared to rise again, but lay waiting for their leader to tell them what to do. In half a dozen cautious, groping steps he was among them, and sank down by A-ya's side, clutching her to him to stop her trembling.

"What are we to do now?" asked the girl, after a long silence. Without Grôm, they would probably have died where they were, not daring to stir in the darkness. But their faith in their chief kept them cheerful ever in this desperate plight.

"We must find a way out," answered Grôm, with resolute confidence.

"If Hobbo had not dropped the fire!" said young Mò bitterly.

The giant groaned in self-abasement, and beat

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his chest with his great fists. But Grôm, who would allow no dissensions in his following, answered sternly :

"Be silent. You might have done no better yourself."

Then for a time there was no more said, while Grôm, sitting there in the dark with the girl's face buried in his great shaggy chest, thought out his plans. It was plain to him, from what he had seen in that last instant of daylight, that the entrance was blocked impregnably. Moreover, he judged that any attempt to work an opening in that direction would be likely, for the present, to bring more rocks down upon them. It would be better, first, to feel their way on into the cave in the hope of finding another exit. He was not afraid of getting lost, no matter how absolute the dark, because he possessed that sixth sense, so long ago vanished from modern man's equipment—the sense of direction. He knew that, as a matter of course, he could find his way back to this starting-point whenever he would.

"Come on!" he ordered at last, lifting A-ya and holding her hand in his grasp. Reaching out with his spear, he kept tapping the ground before him as he went, and occasionally the wall upon his left. Sometimes, too, he would reach upwards to assure himself that there was no lowering of the rocky ceiling. A spear's length to the right, more or less, he got always a splash of water.

With their fine senses intensely alert, they were able to make fair progress, even though unaided by

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their eyes. But suddenly Grôm checked his advance abruptly. He had a perception of some obstacle before him. He reached out his spear as far as he could. It touched a soft object. The object, whatever it was, surged violently beneath the touch. His flesh crept, and the shaggy hair uplifted on his neck. "Back!" he hissed, thrusting A-ya off to arm's length and bracing his spear point before him to receive the expected attack. A pair of faintly phosphorescent eyes, small, but so wide apart as to show that their owner's head must have been enormous, flashed round upon them. There was a hoarse squeal of alarm, and a heavy body went floundering off into the water. They could hear it swimming away in hot haste.

Every one drew a long breath. Then, after a few moments, A-ya laughed softly:

"It's good to find something at last that runs away from us instead of after us!" said she.

A little further on the cave wall turned to the left. A few steps, and their path came to an end. There was water ahead of them, and on both sides. Grôm's exploring spear assured them that it was deep water.

"We must swim," said he. "Leave your clubs behind." And leading the way down into the unknown tide, he struck out straight ahead.

It was nerve-testing work swimming thus through that unseen water to an unguessed goal; but Grôm was unhesitating, and his companions rested upon his steady will. The water was of a summer warmth, and slightly salt, which convinced him

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that it had free communication with the sunlit tides outside. Several times he came within touch of the rocky walls of the cavern, and found that they went straight down to a depth he could not guess. But he kept on with hope and confidence at a leisurely pace, which, in that bland and windless flood, he knew that every member of his party could have maintained for half a day.

Suddenly there appeared ahead of them a faint, bluish gleam upon the water's surface. It was something elusive and unreal, and vaguely menacing.

"Daylight!" exclaimed young Mō eagerly. But Grôm said nothing. He did not think it was daylight, and he was apprehensive of some new peril.

The strange light grew and spread. It was evident now that it arose from the water, and also that it was advancing rapidly to meet the astonished swimmers. After a few moments it was bright enough in its blue pallor to show the swimmers that they were traversing a vast hall of waters, whose roof was lost in darkness. Some fifty yards ahead of them, and a little to the right, a low spit of rock, half awash for the greater part of its length, ran out slantingly from the wall of the stupendous chamber.

Toward this ledge Grôm now led the way, hurling himself through the water on his side at top speed. He could not fathom this mysterious phosphorescence, and he wished to get his people out upon dry land before it reached them. But fast as the

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adventurers swam, the ghostly radiance spread faster. Before they got to the ledge, the light was all about them ; but it seemed to be coming from a great depth.

Nervously they all glanced down, and a low cry of horror broke from their lips. The depths were swarming with monstrous, luminous forms, a moon-bright, crawling, sliding field of claws and feelers, and broad, flat backs, and dreadful, protruding eyes.

The eyes all stared straight up at them with a fixed malignancy that froze even Grôm's blood. They seemed innumerable, and all together they came suddenly floating upwards.

Already the fugitives were dragging themselves out upon the ledge, in frantic haste, when the diabolical swarm reached the surface. But Hobbo, who was the slowest swimmer, was merely clutching at the rock when the water boiled all about him into a froth of light. A pair of huge, pincer-like claws seized him by the neck, and another pair by one arm, plucking him back. His convulsed face stared upward for an instant, and then, with a choked scream, he was dragged under. He disappeared in a swirl of pale blue, frantically waving claws, and eyes, and feelers, and black-fringed, chopping mouths.

Beside himself with rage and horror, Grôm stabbed down wildly into the whirling struggle, and his example was followed at once by Loob and young M6. Some of their random blows went home, and as one or another of the gigantic crabs

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turned over in its death-throes, its nearest fellows seized it, tore it to pieces, and devoured it.

But A-ya, who had taken no part in this vengeance, now snatched Grôm by the arm, shrieking wildly :

“ Look ! They are coming out ! ”

Recovering their senses, the three half-maddened men stared about them. On every side the gigantic crabs—some with claws eight or ten feet long, and eyes upon the ends of long waving stalks—were crawling up upon the ledge.

The ledge, fortunately, was of some width. At its landward end it rose into a mass of tumbled rocks perhaps twenty or thirty feet above the water. Toward this post of vantage the adventurers fought their way, striking and thrusting desperately with their spears as the monsters, crowding up from the water on either side, snatched at them with their terrible mailed claws. Over and over again one or another of the party was seized by the foot or the leg ; but his companions would beat the long, jointed limb to fragments, or drive their spear-points deep into the awful, drooling mouth, and set him free.

At last, bleeding from many wounds, they reached the end of the ledge and clambered to the top. Here but three or four of the giant crustaceans tried to follow them. These were easily speared from above, and hurled back disabled among their ravening kin. And the whole swarm, apparently forgetting their intended victims as soon as they were out of reach, fell to fighting hideously among

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themselves over the convulsed bodies of these wounded. The lower portion of the ledge, and the water all about it, was a crawling mass of horror that seemed to froth with blue light. And a confused noise of crackling, snapping and hissing arose from it.

Every eye but Grôm's was glued in fascination to the baleful scene. But Grôm now thought only of using that pervasive light to best advantage while it should last. The wall of the cavern at this point was so broken and fissured that it was not unscalable; and a little way off to the right he marked, at some height above the water, what looked like the entrance to a lateral gallery.

"Come! While the light lasts," he ordered, setting off over the rocks. The others followed close. Now sidling along knife-like ledges, now clinging by fingers and toes to almost imperceptible projections, they made their way across the face of the steep, and gained the mouth of the gallery. It was spacious, and easy to traverse, its floor sloping upwards somewhat steeply. They plunged into it with confidence. And the blue light of the Hall of Terrors faded out behind them.

Not many minutes later, another light, as it were a white star, gleamed ahead of them. It grew as they went, and turned to gold. Then a patch of turquoise sky, flecked sweetly with small fleeces of cloud, opened before them, and in a moment more they came out upon a high, blossoming down, blown over by a breeze that smelt of honey and salt. Below them was a lovely, land-locked bay, with a

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herd of deer pasturing among scattered trees by the shore. Away behind them undulated the gracious line of the downs, inviting their feet.

"It is a pleasant land," said Grôm, "and we will surely come back to it. But I think we must find another way than that by which we came."

CHAPTER XI

THE FEASTING OF THE CAVE FOLK

I

AT last, and reluctantly, the Folk of the Caves had withdrawn from their earthquake-harassed valley and betaken themselves to the new dwelling-place which Grôm had found for them, on the green hill-slope beside the Bitter Waters. They had lost no time, however, in accepting the new conditions ; for these caves in the limestone were ample and secure—it was hard for any invader to come at them save by way of the long, bare ridge of the downs running westward behind the caves ; a sweet-water brook ran almost past their threshold to fall with a pleasant clamour into the bay,—and the surrounding country was rich in game. The vast basin of marshy plain and colossal jungle, to be sure, which stretched and steamed below the downs to southward, was the habitation of strange monsters ; but these, apparently, had no taste for exploring the high, clean, windy downs.

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On a certain golden morning it chanced that the caves were well-nigh deserted. The men of the tribe, including the chiefs themselves, Bawr and Grôm, together with most of the women and the half-grown children, had gone off down the shore to a shallow inlet five or six miles distant to gather shell-fish—great luscious mussels and peculiarly plump and savoury whelks. The girl A-ya, absorbed in her special occupation of fashioning bows and arrows for the tribe, had remained, with a half-score of old men and women and Grôm's giant slave, the lame Bow-leg, Ook-ootsk, to guard the little children and the tribal fires. As Grôm's mate, and his confidential associate in all his greatest ventures, A-ya's prestige in the tribe had come to be only less than that of Bawr and Grôm themselves.

On the open, grassy level before the cave mouth, the two great fires burned steadily in the sun. The giant Ook-ootsk, hideous with his ape-like forehead, his upturned, flaring nostrils, his protruding jaw, his shaggy, clay-coloured torso, and his short, massive, grotesquely bowed legs—of which one was twisted so that the toes pointed almost backwards—lay sprawling and chuckling benevolently near the entrance, while a swarm of little ones, A-ya's two among them, clambered over him. The old men and the old women most of them dozed in the shade, save two or three of the most diligent, who occupied their gnarled fingers in twisting thin strips of hide into bow-strings, or lashing slivers of stone into the heads

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of spears. A-ya sat cross-legged a little apart, beside a tiny fire, laboriously fashioning her bows and arrows by charring the wood in the embers and then rubbing it between two rough stones. With her head bent low over her work, the heavy, tangled masses of her hair fell upon it and got in her way, and from time to time she shook them aside impatiently. It was a picture of primeval peace.

But peace, in the days when earth was young, was something more precarious than a bubble.

From around the green shoulder of the hill came a sound, trampling hooves and laboured breathing. A-ya sprang to her feet, snatching up her own well-tried bow and fitting an arrow to the string. At the same time she gave a sharp alarm-cry, at which the lame slave, Ook-ootsk, arose, shaking off the swarm of children, and came hobbling towards her with his weapons in both hands. An old woman pounced upon the startled, wide-eyed children, and in a twinkling had them shepherded into the cave-mouth, out of sight. The old men, springing from their sleep, and blinking, hurried forth into the sunlight, with such spears or clubs as they could lay instant hand upon.

A breathless moment, while all stood waiting for they knew not what. Then around the corner appeared a tall, wide-antlered elk, its eyes showing the whites with terror, its dilated nostrils spattering bloody froth. A long, raking wound ran scarlet down one flank. Staggering from weariness or loss of blood, it came on straight toward

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the cave-mouth, so blinded by its terror that it seemed not to see the human creatures awaiting it, nor even the fires before them.

A-ya fetched a deep breath of relief when she saw that this was no ravening monster. Her immediate thought was the hunter's thought. She drew her bow to the full length of her shaft, and as the panting beast went by she let drive. The arrow pierced to half its span, just behind the straining fore-shoulder. Blood burst from the animal's nostrils. It fell on its knees, struggled up again, blundered on for half a dozen strides, and dropped half-way across the second fire.

There was a chorus of triumphant shouts from the old men and women ; and A-ya started forward with the intention of dragging her prize from the fire. But a look of apprehension and warning in the keen little eyes of Ook-ootsk, who had by this time hobbled to her side, checked her. In a flash the meaning of it came to her.

"What do you suppose was chasing it, Ook-ootsk?" she queried ; and whipped about, without waiting for his answer, to stare anxiously at the green shoulder of the hillside.

"Black lion, maybe," said Ook-ootsk, in his harsh, clucking voice, dropping his spear and club beside him and setting a long arrow to the string of his massive bow.

But the words were hardly out of his throat, when his guess was proved wrong. Around the turn came lumbering, with huge heads hung low and slavering, half-open jaws, a pair of those

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colossal red bears of the caves which had always been A-ya's peculiar terror.

"Hide the children!" she yelled, and then let fly an arrow, almost without aim, at the foremost of the monsters. She was the best shot in the tribe, and the shaft sped even too true. It struck the bear full in the snout, and pierced through the palate and into the throat—a wound which, though likely to prove mortal after a time, only made the beast more dangerous for the moment. It paused, coughing, and tried to paw the torment from its jaws, and then rushed forward, screaming hideously.

In that pause, however, though it was but for a second or two, the second bear had forged ahead of its companion. It was greeted instantly by an arrow from the massive bow of Ook-ootsk, aimed with cool deliberation. The long shaft of hickory, delivered thus at close range, caught the enemy in the front of the right shoulder and drove clean in to the joint, so that the leg gave way and the gigantic brute almost fell upon its side. With a roar, it bit off the protruding half of the tough hickory, and then came on again, on three legs. From A-ya's nimble bow it got another arrow, which went half-way through its neck; but to this deadly wound, which sent the blood gushing from its mouth, it seemed to pay no heed whatever. Aya's next shot missed; and then, screaming for the old men to come into the fray, she snatched up her stone-headed spear and ran around behind the nearest fire, expecting the bears to follow her

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and be led away from the hiding-place of the children.

But she had forgotten that the slave, Ook-ootsk, with his twisted and shrunken leg, could not run. That valiant savage, blinking his little eyes rapidly and blowing defiantly through his upturned nostrils as he saw his doom rushing upon him, let drive one more of his long shafts into the red, towering bulk, then dropped his bow, sank upon one knee, and held up his spear slantingly before him, with its butt firmly braced upon the ground. As the monster reared itself and fell upon him, the jagged point of the spear was forced deep into its belly, straight up till it reached the backbone. Then the shaft snapped, Ook-ootsk sprawled forward upon his face, and the monster, in the paroxysm of its amazement and agony, leapt onward and plunged right over him, involuntarily hurling him aside and clawing most of the flesh off his back with a kick of one gigantic hind paw.

He clenched his teeth stoically, shut his eyes, folded his long, hairy arms about his head, and rolled himself into a ball, confidently expecting in the next moment to feel the life crunched out of him.

But just as the monster, recovering itself, was turning madly to finish off its insignificant but torturing opponent, A-ya came leaping back to the rescue, with a blazing and sparking faggot in each hand, and the old men, some with fire-brands, some with spears, clamouring resolutely behind her. With fearless dexterity, she thrust the fire

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straight into the monster's eyeballs, totally blinding him. As he wheeled to strike her down, she slipped aside with a mocking laugh, and threw one of the brands between his jaws, where he crunched upon it savagely before he felt the torment of it and spat it out.

Depending now upon his ears, the monster blundered straight forward in the direction of the shouting voices. He had quite forgotten Ookootsk. He raged to come at this last intolerable foe, who had scorched the light from his eyes. He made for her voice straight enough; but it chanced that exactly in his path lay the second fire—that into which the body of the elk had fallen. Already too maddened with the anguish of his wounds to notice the fire at once, he stumbled upon the body. Here, surely, was one of his foes. He fell to rending the carcase with his claws, and biting it, crawling forward upon it to reach its throat with the fire licking up derisively about his head; till at length the flames were drawn deep into his labouring lungs, searing them and sealing them so that they could no more perform their office. With a shallow, screeching gasp he threw himself backwards out of the fire, rolled upon the turf, and lay there fighting the air with his paws as he strangled swiftly and convulsively.

The second bear, meanwhile, wallowing with astonishing nimbleness on three legs, had charged roaring into the group of old men. In a twinkling he had three or four spears sticking into him; but

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the arms that hurled the spears were weak, and the monster ramped on unheeding. Several fire-brands fell upon him, scorching his long, red fur, but he shook them off, too maddened to remember his natural dread of the flames.

The group scattered in all directions. But one brave old grey-beard, who had marked A-ya's success, lingered in the path, and tried to thrust his blazing faggot into the monster's eyes, as she had done. He was not quick enough. The monster threw up its muzzle, dodging the stroke, and the next moment it had struck down its feeble adversary and crushed his head between its tremendous jaws.

In its folly, it now forgot its other enemies, and fell to wreaking its madness on the lifeless victim. But in another second or two it was fairly overwhelmed with the red brands descending upon its head. A-ya, with all the force of her strong young arms, drove her short spear half-way through its loins. Then, with one eye blinded and its long fur smouldering, its rage gave way suddenly into panic. Lifting its giant head high into the air, as if thus to escape its fiery assailants, it turned and scuttled back the way it had come, while the old men swarmed after it, belabouring and jabbing its elephantine rump with their live brands.

A-ya, racing like a deer and screaming with exultation, ran round the pack of old men and stabbed the frantic brute in the neck, with her spear held short in both hands. Shrinking abjectly

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from this attack, he swerved off toward the left. It was his left eye that was blinded, and the other was full of smoke and ashes. He missed the path, therefore, and plunged squalling over the edge of the bluff, which at this point dropped about a hundred feet, almost perpendicularly, to the beach. Rolling over and over, and bouncing out into space every time he struck the cliff face, he fell to the bottom amid a shower of stones and dust, and lay there as shapeless as a fur rug dropped from an upper window.

The old men, jabbering in triumph, craned their shaggy grey heads out over the brink to grin down upon him, while A-ya, with a wild light in her eyes and her strong white teeth gleaming savagely, turned back to tend the wounds of her slave, Ook-ootsk.

II

Having assured herself that the hurts of Ook-ootsk, dreadful though they were, were yet not mortal (our sires of Cave and Tree took a lot of killing!), A-ya stepped over to the further fire to see about rescuing the carcase of the slain elk before it should be quite burned up. As a matter of fact, there was little of it actually consumed by the fire, but it was amazingly shredded by the clawing of the blinded bear; and an odour of roasted venison steamed up from it, which seemed rather pleasant to A-ya's nostrils. Under her

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direction, the old men hauled the body from the fire by the hind-legs, and dragged it over to the edge of the bluff before cutting it up, for convenience in getting rid of the offal. Everyone followed, to secure their due share of the tit-bits, except Ook-ootsk and one old woman. This old woman sat rocking and keening beside the body of her mate whom the bear had slain; while Ook-ootsk crawled off into a neighbouring hollow to look for certain healing herbs which should cleanse and astringe his wounds.

The hide of the elk was too much burnt, too ripped and torn by the claws of the bear, to be of any use except for thongs; but the old men skinned it off expertly before dividing the flesh. Though their gnarled fingers were feeble, they were amazingly clever in the use of the sharp-edged flakes of stone which served them as knives. A-ya stood by them, watching closely, to see that none of the specially dainty cuts were appropriated. These delicacies were reserved for herself and her two children, and for Grôm when he should return. She had the right to them, not only because she was the mate of Grôm, but because the kill was hers.

As she stood over the carcass—the fore-part of which had been superficially barbecued in the fire—the smell of the roasted flesh began to appeal to her even more strongly than at first. As she sniffed it, curiously, it began to entice her appetite as nothing had ever tempted it before. She touched a well-browned, fatty morsel, and then put her

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fingers into her mouth. The flavour seemed to her as delightful as the smell. She cast about for a suitable morsel on which to experiment.

Now it chanced that the elk's tongue, having lain in the heart of the fire, but enclosed within the half-open jaws, had been cooked to a turn. A-ya possessed herself of this ever-coveted delicacy. It looked so queer, in its cooked state, charred black along the lower edge, that she hesitated to taste it. At last, persuaded by its fragrance, she brought herself to nibble at it.

A moment more and she was devouring it with a gusto which, had manners been greatly considered in the days when earth was young, might have seemed unbecoming in the wife of a great chief. Never before had she eaten anything that seemed to her half so delicious. It was the food she had all her life been craving. Her two little boys, pulling at her, aroused her from her ecstasy. She gave them each a fragment, which they swallowed greedily, demanding more; and between the three of them the great lump of roast tongue quickly vanished.

The rest of the crowd meanwhile had been looking on with instinctive disapproval. The portions of the meat which the fire had cooked, or partly cooked, seemed to them spoiled. A-ya might, indeed, like the strange food; but she was different from the rest of them in so many ways! When, however, they saw her two boys follow her example, and noted their enthusiasm, several of the old men ventured to try for themselves. They

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were instant converts. Last of all, the old women and the children—always the most conservative in such matters, took the notion that they were losing something, and dared to essay the novel diet. One taste, as a rule, proved enough to vanquish their prejudices. In a very few minutes every shred of the carcass that could claim acquaintance with the fire had been eaten, and all were clamouring for more. Fully three-parts of the carcass remained, indeed, but it was all raw flesh. A-ya looked down upon it with disdain.

“ Take it back and throw it on the fire again ! ” she ordered angrily. The generous lump of steak, which she had hacked off for herself from the loin, had proved to be merely scorched on the outside, and she was disappointed. She stood fingering the raw mass with resentful aversion, while the old men and women, chattering gleefully and followed by the horde of children, dragged the mangled carcass back to the fire, lifted it laboriously by all four legs, and managed to deposit it in the very midst of the flames. A shrill shout of triumph went up from the withered old throats at this achievement, and they all drew back to wait for the fire to do its wonderful work.

But A-ya was impatient, and vaguely dissatisfied as she watched that crude roasting in the process. She stood brooding, eyeing the fire and turning her lump of raw flesh over and over in her hands. The attitude of body was one she had caught from Grôm, when he was groping for a solution to some

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problem. And now it seemed as if she had caught his attitude of mind as well. Into her brain, for the moment passive and receptive, flashed an idea, she knew not whence. It was as if it had been whispered to her. She picked up a spear, jabbed its stone head firmly into the lump of meat, and thrust the meat into the edge of the fire, as far as it could go without burning the wood of the spear shaft.

It took her a very few minutes to realize that her idea was nothing less than an inspiration. Moving the morsel backwards and forwards to keep it from charring, she found that it seemed to do best over a mass of hot coals rather than in a flame; and being a thin cut, it cooked quickly. When it was done she burnt her fingers with it, and her big red mouth as well; and her two boys, for whom she had torn off shreds too hot for herself to hold, danced up and down and wept loudly with the smart of it, to be instantly consoled by the savour.

Noting the supreme success of A-ya's experiment, the spectators rushed in, dragged the carcass once more from the fire, and fell to hacking off suitable morsels, each for himself. In a few minutes every one who could get hold of a long arrow, or a spear, or a pointed stick, was busy learning to cook. Even the wailing old mourner, finding the excitement irresistible, forsook the body of her slain mate and came forward to take her share. Only the dead man, lying outstretched in the sun by the cave-door, and the crippled giant Ook-ootsk,

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away in the green hollow nursing his honourable wounds, had no part in the rejoicing, in this revel of the First Cooked Food. The hot meat juices, modified by the action of the fire, were almost as stimulating as alcohol in the veins of these simple livers, and the revel grew to something like an orgie as the shrivelled nerves of the elders began to thrill with new life. A-ya, seeing the carcase of the elk melt away like new snow under a spring sun, gave orders to skin and cut up the body of the first bear.

But the old men were too absorbed in their feasting to pay any attention to her orders; and she herself was too exhilarated and content to make any serious effort to enforce them. Everyone, old and young alike, was sucking burnt fingers and radiating greasy, happy smiles, and she felt dimly that anything like discipline would be unpopular at such a moment.

During all this excitement the main body of the tribe came straggling back along the beach from their hunting of whelks and mussels. At the foot of the bluff below the cave they found the body of the second bear, and gathered anxiously about it, clamouring over its spear-wounds and the arrows sticking in it, till Bawr and Grôm, who were in the rear, came up. It was plain there had been a terrific battle at the Cave. With most of the warriors the two Chiefs dashed on and up the path, to find out how things had gone, while a handful remained behind to skin the bear and cut up the meat.

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When the anxious warriors arrived before the cave, they were amazed at the hilarity which they found there—and inclined, at first, to resent it, being something to which they had no clue. What were all the old fools doing, dancing and cackling about the fire, and wasting good meat by poking it into the fire on the ends of sticks and spears and arrows?

The younger women, coming up behind the warriors, were derisive. They were always critical in their attitude towards A-ya—so far as they dared to be—and now they ran forward to scold and slap their respective children for putting this disgusting burnt meat into their mouths.

To Grôm and Bawr, however, A-ya explained the whole situation in a few pertinent phrases, and followed up her explanation by proffering them each a well-cooked morsel. They both smelled it doubtfully, tasted it, broke into smiles, and devoured it, smacking their bearded lips.

“Did *you* do this, girl?” demanded Grôm, beaming upon her proudly and holding out his great hairy hand for another sample. But Bawr strode forward, thrust the old men aside, hacked himself off a generous collop, stuck it on his spear-head, and thrust it into the fire.

In his impatience, Bawr kept pulling the roast out every minute or two, to taste it and see if it was done enough. His enthusiasm—and that of Grôm, who was now following his example—cured the rest of the warriors of their hesitation, so effectually that in five minutes there was

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nothing more left of the great elk's carcass but antlers, bone and offal. Those who had got nothing fell upon the body of the bear, skinning it and hacking it in greedy haste. The young women, having satisfied convention by slapping their bewildered and protesting brats, soon yielded to curiosity and began surreptitiously to nibble at the greasy cooked morsels which they had confiscated. Then they, too, grabbed up spears and sticks for toasting-forks, and came clamouring shrilly for their portions. And A-ya, standing a little apart with Grôm, smiled with comprehending sarcasm at their conversion.

For the next few hours the fires were surrounded each by a seething and squabbling mob, the innermost rings engaged in toasting their collops with one hand, while with the other they tried to shield their faces from the heat. As fast as those in the front rank wriggled out with their browned and juicy tit-bits, others battled in to take their places; and the Tribe of the Cave Men, mindful of nothing but the gratification of this new taste, feasted away the afternoon with such unanimous and improvident rejoicing as they had never known before. At last, radiant with gravy and repletion, they flung themselves down where they would and went to sleep. Bawr and Grôm, and two or three others of the older warriors, who had been wise enough to banquet without gorging themselves, thought with some misgiving of what might happen if an enemy should steal upon them at such an hour of torpor.

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But no enemy approached. With the fall of the dew the moon arose over the bay, honey-coloured in a violet sky, and played fantastic tricks with the shifting light of the fires. And from within the cave came softly the voice of A-ya, soothing a restless child.

CHAPTER XII

ON THE FACE OF THE WATERS

I

THE People of the Cave were running short of arrows. The supply of young hickory sprouts, on which they had depended for their shafts, was almost exhausted. And within a two days' journey of the Caves there was nothing to be found that would quite take the place of those hickory sprouts. Neither Grôm himself nor any other member of his tribe had as yet succeeded in so fixing a tip of bone or flint to a shaft of cane as not to interfere with its penetration. Some growth must be found that was tough, perfectly straight, and tapering, while at the same time so solid and hard of grain that it would take and hold a point, and heavy enough for driving power. All this was difficult to find, and Grôm was convinced that it must be sought for far afield. Life had been running uneventfully for months at the Great Caves, and Grôm's restless spirit was craving new knowledge, new adventure.

On this quest of the arrow Grôm took with him

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only two companions—his slim, swift-footed mate, A-ya and that cunning little scout, Loob, the Hairy One.

For the space of three days they journeyed due west from the Caves. Then the range of downland which they had been following swept off sharply to the south.

Being bent upon exploring to the westward—though he was not very clear as to his reasons for his preference—Grôm led the way down from the hills into the rankly wooded plain. For two days more they pushed on through incessant perils, the country swarming with black lions, sabre-tooth, and woolly rhinoceros. As they were not fighting, but exploring, the price of safety was a vigilance so unremitting that it soon began to get on their nerves, and they were glad to take a whole day's rest in the spacious security of a banyan top, where nothing could come at them but leopards or pythons. Neither leopards nor pythons gave them any great concern.

On the second day after quitting their refuge in the banyan top, they emerged from the jungle so suddenly that they nearly fell into a river whose whitish, turbid flood ran swirling heavily before their feet. It was a mighty stream, a good half-mile in width, and at this point the current was eating away the bank so hungrily that whole ranks of tree and bush had toppled over into the tide.

The great river barred their way, flowing as it did toward the north-east, and Grôm reluctantly turned the course of the expedition southward

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following up the shore. Swift as was the current, these folk of the Caves might have crossed it by swimming ; but Grôm knew that such waters were apt to swarm with giant crocodiles of varying type and unvarying ferocity, as well as with ferocious flesh-eating fish that swarmed in wolfish packs, and were able to tear an aurochs or a mastodon in pieces with their razor-edged teeth. He gazed desirously at the opposite shore, however—which looked to him much more beautiful and more interesting than that on which he stood—and wondered if he should ever be able to devise some way of reaching it other than by swimming.

Along the river shore the travellers had endless variety to keep them interested, with a less exhausting immanence of peril than in the depths of the jungle. Sometimes great branches, draped and festooned with gorgeous-flowered lianas, thrust themselves far out over the water, affording easy refuge. Sometimes the river was bordered by a strip of grassy level, behind which ran the edge of the jungle in the form of a steep bank of violent green, with here and there a broad splotch of magenta or violet or orange bloom flung over it like a curtain. At times, again, it was necessary to plunge back into the humming and steaming gloom behind this resplendent screen, in order to make a *détour* around some swampy cove, whose dense growth of sedge, fifteen to twenty feet in height, was traversed by wide trails which showed it to be the abode of unfamiliar monsters. The travellers were curious as to the makers of such

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colossal trails, but were not tempted to gratify this curiosity by invading their lairs.

In all this time, and through all difficulties and dangers, neither Grôm nor A-ya, nor the unsleeping Loob had lost sight of the object of their journey. Every straight and slender sapling and seedling of hard grain they tested, but hitherto they had found nothing that came within measurable distance of their requirements.

In the customary order of their going, Grôm went first, peering ahead, ever studying, pondering, observing, with his bow and his club swung from his shoulder, his heavy, flint-headed spear always in readiness for use at close quarters. Loob the scout, little and dark and hairy, with the eyes of a weasel and the heart of a bull buffalo, went darting and gliding soundlessly through the undergrowth a few paces to the left, guarding against the approach of any attack from the jungle-depths. While A-ya, whose quickness and precision with the bow, her darling weapon, were nothing less than a miracle to all the tribe, covered the rear, lest any prowling monster should be following on their trail.

It chanced that A-ya dropped back some paces further, without saying anything to Grôm. She had marked a slim shaft of a seedling which looked suitable for an arrow; and in case the discovery should prove a good one, she wanted the credit of it to herself. She stooped to pull the seedling up by the roots, since it seemed too tough to break. It was obstinate. In the effort her naked side

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and shoulder leaned fully against the trunk of a small tree of which she had taken no notice. In a second it seemed to her as if the tree trunk were made of red-hot coals. The stinging fire of it ran like lightning all over her arms and body. With a piercing scream she sprang away from the tree, and began tearing and beating frantically at her body with both hands. She was covered with furious ants—the great, red, stinging ants whose venom is like drops of liquid flame.

At the sound of her scream, Grôm was back at her side in two leaps, his hair and beard bristling stiffly, his eyes blazing with rage. But there was no assailant in sight on whom to hurl himself. For a second or two he glared about him wildly, with Loob crouched beside him, snarling for vengeance. Then, perceiving the woman's plight, he flung himself upon her, trying to envelop her in one sweeping embrace that should crush all the virulent pests at once. In this he failed signally; and in an instant the liquid fire was running over his own body. The torture of it, however, was a small thing to him compared with the torture of seeing them sting the woman, and feeling himself impotent to effect her instant succour. He slapped and beat at her with his great hands, while she covered her face with her own hands to protect it from disfigurement.

Loob came to help, but Grôm, his brain keen in every emergency, stopped him.

"Keep off!" he ordered. "Keep off! and keep watch!"

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Then he seized A-ya by one arm, rushed her to the edge of the bank, and dragged her with him into the water.

At this point the water was not much more than three feet deep. They crouched down in it, heads under, for nearly a minute; while Loob, spear in hand, stood over them, his wild little eyes scanning the water depths in front and the jungle depths behind for the approach of any foe.

When they could hold their breath no longer, they stood up. Their red assailants were floating off on the current; but the fiery poison remained, and they bathed each other's scarlet and scorching shoulders assiduously, forgetful for the moment of everything besides. At this moment a gigantic water python reared its head from the leafage close by, fixed its flat, lidless, glittering eyes upon them, and drew back to strike. But in the next second Loob's ready spear was thrust clean through its throat, and his yell of warning tore the air. Grôm and A-ya whipped up on to the bank like a pair of otters: and the python, mortally stricken, shot out into the water over their heads, carrying Loob's spear with it, gripped tight in the constriction of its throat muscles.

As the lashing body struck the surface the water boiled about it, suddenly alive with crocodiles. Baulked of their human prey, they fell upon the python. One of the monsters shot straight up, half-way out of the water, with two convulsive coils of the python's tail wrapped crushingly about its jaws; but the python, with Loob's spear

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through its throat, could only struggle blindly. A moment more and it was bitten in two, and the crocodiles were fighting monstrosly among themselves for the writhing fragments.

"You got us out of that just in time," said Grôm, grinning upon the little scout with approval.

A-ya wrung the water out of her heavy hair with both hands, and threw the masses back with an upward toss of her head.

"I hate ants," she said, shuddering. "Let's get away from here."

II

Some two hours after sunrise of the following day they came to a place where a belt of woods, perhaps a hundred to two hundred yards in depth, ran bordering the river, while behind it a broad stretch of grassy plain thrust back the jungle. Along the edge of the plain, skirting the belt of woods, the grass was short and the travelling was easy; but off to the left the growth was ranker, and interspersed with thickets such as Grôm always regarded with suspicion. He had learned by experience that these dense thickets in the grassland were a favourite lurking-place of the unexpected—and that the unexpected was almost always perilous.

Suddenly from the deeper grass a couple of hundred yards or so to the left rose heavily the menacing bulk of a red Siva moose bull, and stood

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staring at them with mingled wonder and malevolence in his cruelly vindictive eyes. In stature surpassing the biggest rhinoceros that Grôm had ever seen, he gave the impression of combining the terrific power of the rhinoceros with the agile speed and devilish cunning of the buffalo. His ponderous head, with its high-arched, eagle-hooked snout, was armed with two pairs of massive, keen-tipped, broad-bladed horns, that seemed to be a deadly-efficient compromise between the horns of a buffalo and the palmated antlers of a moose. This alarming apparition snorted loudly, and at once from behind him lurched to their feet some two score more of his like, and all stood with their eyes fixed upon the little group of travellers by the edge of the wood.

Grôm had heard vague traditions of the implacable ferocity of these red monsters, but having before never come across them he answered their stare with keen interest. At the same time, edging in closer to the wood, he whispered :

"Don't run. But if they come we must go up the first tree. They are swift as the wind, these great beasts, and more terrible than the sabretooth."

"Can't go in *these* trees!" said Loob, whose piercing eyes had investigated them minutely at the first glimpse of the monster in the grass.

"Why not?" demanded Grôm, his eyes still fixed upon the monsters.

"Oh! The bees! The terrible bees!" whispered A-ya. "Where can we go?"

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Grôm turned his head and scanned the belt of woodland, his ears now suddenly comprehending a deep, humming sound which he had hitherto referred solely to the winged foragers in the grass-tops. Scattered at intervals from the branches, in the shadowy green gloom, hung a number of immense, dark, semi-pear-shaped globes. They looked harmless enough, but Grôm knew that their inhabitants, the great jungle-bees, were more to be dreaded than sabre-tooth or crocodile. To disturb, or seem to threaten to disturb, one of their nests, meant sure and instant doom.

"No, we must trust to our running—and they are very swift," said Grôm. "But let us go softly now, and perhaps they will not charge upon us."

The words were hardly out of his mouth when the giant red bull, with a grunt of wrath, lurched forward and charged down at them. And instantly the whole herd, with their ridiculous little tails stuck up stiffly in the air, charged after him. Swift as thought A-ya drew her bow. The arrow buried itself deep in the red giant's muzzle. With a bawl of fury, he paused, to try and root the burning torment out of his nose. The whole herd paused behind him. It was only for a few seconds, and then he came on again, blowing blood and foam from his nostrils; but they were precious seconds, and the fugitives, running lightly, and stooping low for fear of offending the bees, had gained a start of a hundred yards or more.

The three were among the swiftest runners of the tribe; but Grôm soon saw that the utmost

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they could hope was to maintain their distance. And there was the imminent risk that the bees, disturbed by the noise of flight and pursuit, might take umbrage. To lessen this frightful risk, he swerved out till he was some thirty or forty paces distant from the belt of woods. And he noticed, too, that the pursuing herd seemed to have no great anxiety to approach the frontiers of the Bee People. They were following on a slant that gave the woods a wide berth.

About a mile further on the woods came to an end, and Grôm, though he feared the pace might be beginning to tell on A-ya, and though there was no refuge in sight, breathed more freely. He feared the bees more than the yellow monsters, because they were something he could not fight. The grass-land now ran clear to the river's edge, and gave firm footing; and the fugitives raced on, breathing carefully, and trusting to come to trees again before they should be spent.

At last a curve of the bank showed them the woods sweeping down again to the water, but three or four miles ahead! Grôm, looking back over his shoulder, realized that their pursuers were now gaining upon them appreciably. With an effort he quickened his pace still further. Loob responded without difficulty. But A-ya's face showed signs of distress, and at this Grôm's heart sank. He began to scan the water, weighing the chances of the crocodiles. It looked as if they were trapped beyond escape.

Perhaps half a mile up the shore a spit of land

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ran out against the current, and behind its shelter an eddy had collected a mass of uprooted trees and other flood refuse, all matted with green from the growth of wind-borne seeds. It was in reality a great natural raft, built by the eddy and anchored behind the little point. For this Grôm headed with new hope. It might be strong enough—parts of it at least—to bear up the three fugitives. But their furious pursuers would surely not venture their giant bulks upon it.

Approaching the point he slackened his pace, and steadied A-ya with one hand. At the edge of the eddy he stopped, casting an appraising eye over the collection of débris, in order to pick out a stable retreat and also the most secure path to it. In this pause the monsters swept up with a thunder of trampling hooves and windy snortings. They had their victims at last where there was no escape.

The raging brutes were not more than a dozen paces behind, when Grôm led the way out upon the floating mass, picking his steps warily and leaping from trunk to trunk. Loob and A-ya followed with like care. Certain of the trunks gave and sank beneath their feet, but their feet were already away to surer footing. And at the very outermost point of that old collection of débris, where the current and the eddy wavered for mastery, on a toughly interwoven tangle of uprooted trunks and half-dead vines, they found a refuge which did not yield beneath them. Here, steadying themselves by upthrust branches, they

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turned and looked back, half apprehensive and half defiant, at their mighty pursuers.

"They'll never dare to try to follow us here," gasped A-ya.

But she was wrong. Quite blind with rage through that galling shaft in his muzzle, the giant bull came plunging on, and half a dozen of his closest followers, infected with his madness, came with him. The inner edge of the mass gave way at once beneath them—and the bank at this point was straight up and down. The monsters floundered in deep water, snorting and spluttering, while their fellows on the shore checked themselves violently and drew back bawling with bewilderment. As the drowning monsters battled to get their front legs up upon the raft, the edges gave way continually beneath them, plunging them again and again beneath the surface, while A-ya stabbed at them vengefully with her spear, and Loob shot arrows into them till Grôm stopped him, saying that the arrows were too precious to waste. Thereupon Loob tripped delicately over the surging trunks and smote at the struggling monsters' heads with his light club.

The anchorage of this natural raft having been broken, the weight of the monsters striving to gain a foothold upon it soon thrust its firm outer portion forth into the grip of the current. In a minute or two more this solid portion was torn away from the rest, and went sailing off slowly down stream with its living freight. The incoherent remnant was left in the eddy, where the snorting

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monsters struggled and threshed about amongst it, now climbing half-way out upon some great trunk, which forthwith reared on end and slid them off, now vanishing for a moment beneath the beaten stew of leaves and vines.

A couple of the horned giants, being close to the bank, now seemed to recover their wits sufficiently to turn and clamber ashore. But the others were mad with terror. And in a moment more the fascinated watchers on the raft perceived the cause of this madness. All round the scene of the turmoil the water seethed with lashing tails and snapping jaws; and then one of the monsters, which had struggled out into clear water, was dragged down in a boiling vortex of jaws and bloody foam. A few moments more and the whole eddy became a bubbling hell of slaughter, and great broad washes of crimson streamed out upon the current. The monsters, for all their giant strength, and the pile-driving blows of their huge hoofs, were as helpless as rabbits against their swarming and ravenous assailants; and the battle—which indeed was no battle at all—soon was over. The eddy had become but a writhing nest of crocodiles.

“It was hardly worth while wasting arrows, you see?” said Grôm, standing erect on the raft and watching the scene with brooding interest.

“Do you suppose those swimming beasts with the great jaws can get at us here?” demanded A-ya with a shudder.

“While this thing that carries us holds together,

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I think we can fight them off," replied Grôm. And straightway he set himself to examine how securely the trees were interknit. The trunks had been piled by flood one upon another, and the structure seemed substantial; but to further strengthen it he set all to work interweaving the free branches and such creepers as the mass contained, with the skill that came of much practice in the weaving of tree-top nests.

When all was done that could be done, the voyagers took time to look about them. They had by now been swept far out into the river, and the shores on either side seemed low and remote. A-ya felt oppressed, the face of the waters seeming to her so vast, inscrutable and menacing. She stole close up to Grôm and edged herself under his massive arm for reassurance. The little scout sat like a monkey between two branches, and scratched his hairy arms, and, with an expression of pleased interest, scanned the water for the approach of new foes. As for Grôm, he was entranced. This, at last, was what he had really come in search of, the stuff for arrows being merely his excuse to himself. This was the utterly new experience, the new achievement. He was traveling by water, not in it, but upon it—upborne, dry, and without discomfort, upon its surface.

For a little while he did not ask whither he was being borne. To his surprise the crocodiles and other formidable water-dwellers, which were quite unknown to him, paid them no attention whatever; and he concluded that they looked upon

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the raft as nothing more than a mass of floating driftwood containing nothing for them to eat. He could see them everywhere about, swimming with brute snouts half above water or basking on sandy spits of shore. Then he observed that the current was bearing them gradually towards that further shore which he so longed to visit, and he thrilled with new anticipation. But when, after perhaps an hour, the capricious tide blew them again to mid-stream, a new idea took possession of him. He must find some way of influencing the direction of their voyage. He could not long relinquish himself to the blind whim and chance of the current.

Just as he was beginning to grapple with this problem, A-ya anticipated his thought—as he had noticed that she often did. Looking up at him through her tossed hair, she enquired where they were going.

“ I am just trying to think,” he answered, “ how to make this thing take us where we want to go.”

“ If the water is not too deep, couldn't you push with your long spear ? ” suggested the girl.

Acting at once on the suggestion, Grôm leaned over the edge and thrust the spear straight downwards. But he could find no bottom.

“ It *is* too deep,” said he, “ but I'll find a way.”

As he stood near the forward end of the raft he began sweeping the spear in a wide arc through the water, as if it were a paddle, but with the idea merely of testing the resistance of the water. Poor

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substitute as the spear was for a paddle or an oar, his great strength made up for its inefficiency, and after a few sweeps he was astonished and delighted to notice that the head of the raft had swung away from him, so that it was heading for the shore from which they had come.

He pondered this in silence for a little, then stepped over to the other side and repeated the experiment. After several vigorous efforts the unwieldy craft yielded. Its head swung straight, and then, very gradually, toward the other side. Yes, there was no doubt about it. He had found a way of influencing their direction.

"I am going to take you over to the other shore," he announced proudly.

And now, labouring in a keen excitement, he set himself to carry out his boast. First he so overdid it that he made the raft turn clean about and head up-stream. He puzzled over this for a time, but at length got it once more headed in the direction which he wished it to take. Then he found that he could keep it to this direction—more or less—by taking a few strokes on one side, then hurriedly crossing to take a few strokes on the other. And in this way they began once more to approach the other bank. The process, however, was slow; and Grôm presently concluded that it was wasteful. He hit upon the idea of setting A-ya and Loob together to stroking with their spears on one side, while he, with his great strength, balanced their effort on the other. Whereupon the sluggish craft woke up a little and began to

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make perceptible progress, on a slant across the current toward shore.

"I have found it!" he exclaimed in exultation. "On this thing we can travel over the water where we will."

"But not against the current," objected A-ya, whose enthusiasm was a little damped by the fact that she did not like the look of that further shore.

"That will come in time," declared Grôm confidently.

"Here's something coming now," announced Loob, springing to his feet and grabbing his bow. At the same moment the flat, villainous head of a big crocodile shot up over the edge of the raft, and its owner, with enormous jaws half open, started to scramble aboard.

A-ya's bow was bent as swiftly as Loob's, and the two arrows sped together, both into the monster's gaping gullet. Amazed at this reception, it shut its jaws with a loud snap, halted and came on again. Then a stab of Grôm's great spear caught it full in the eye, and this wound struck fear into its dull mind. It rolled back hastily into the water and sank, leaving a foamy wake of blood behind it.

By this time they were getting nearer the other shore. But on close view, Grôm was bound to admit that it was not alluring. It was so low as to be all awash, and fringed deep with towering reeds, which were traversed by narrow lanes of water. Of dry land there was none to be seen.

"Oh, we don't want to go ashore there!" pro-

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tested A-ya fervently. As she spoke a hideous head, with immense, round, bulging eyes and long, beak-like mouth arose over the sedge tops on a long, swaying neck and stared at them fixedly.

"No, we don't," said Grôm, with decision, making haste to swing the head of the raft once more out into the channel. They were pursued by a dense crowd of mosquitoes, voracious and venomous, which followed them to mid-stream and kept tormenting them till an up-river gust blew them off.

Grôm made up his mind that the exploration of that unknown shore could await a more convenient season. He was now deeply absorbed in the complex problem of directing and managing his raft. As he pulled his spear through the water, and noted the additional effect of its flat head, the conception came to him of something that would get more propulsive grip upon the water than was possible to a round pole. Furthermore, he was quick to realize that the immense, shapeless mass of débris on which they were travelling might be replaced by something light and manageable which he would make by lashing some trimmed trunks together with lengths of bamboo to give additional buoyancy. As he brooded this in silence, with that deep, inward look in his eyes which always kept A-ya from breaking in upon his vision, he came to the idea of a formal raft, and a formal paddle. And to this he added, with a full sense of its value, A-ya's suggestion that this new structure might very well be pushed along, in shallow water, with a pole. Having thought this

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out, he drew a deep breath, looked up, and met A-ya's eyes with a smile. His eager desire now was to get back home and put his new scheme into execution.

"Where are we going now?" asked A-ya.

Grôm looked about him wildly—at the sky, at the far-off hills on their right, at the course of the stream, which had changed within the past few miles. His sense of direction was unerring.

"This river," he answered, "flows towards the rising sun, and must empty into the bitter waters not more than a day or a half day from the Caves. We are going home. We will come again to look for arrows in a new raft which I will make."

As he spoke, Loob's spear darted down beside the raft, and came up with a big, silvery fish writhing upon it. He broke its neck with a blow and laid the prize at A-ya's feet.

"I wish we had fire with us, to cook it with," said she.

"On the new raft, as I will make it," said Grôm, "that may very well be. Our journey will be safe and easy, and the good fire we will have always with us."

CHAPTER XIII

THE FEAR

THE People of the Cave were beginning to dread their good fortune. Plenty was being showered upon them with so lavish and sudden a hand that they looked at it askance, distrustful of the unsought-for largess. For a week or more their hunting-grounds had been swarming with game, in amazing and daily increasing numbers, till there was little more of chance or of excitement in the hunt than in plucking a ripe mango from its branch. It was game of the choicest kinds, too—deer of many varieties, and antelope, and the little wild horse whose flesh they accounted such a delicacy. They slew, and slew, and their cooking-fires were busy night and day, and the flesh they could not devour was dried in the sun in long strips or smoked in the reek of green-wood fires. They feasted greedily, but there was something sinister in the whole matter, something ominous; and they would stop at times to wonder anxiously what stroke of fate could be hanging over the Caves.

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During the past day or two, moreover, there had been a disquieting influx of those great and fierce beasts which the Cave Men were by no means anxious to hunt. The giant white and the woolly rhinoceros had arrived by the score in the dense thickets of the steaming savannah which unrolled its green-and-yellow breadths along the southward base of the downs. These half-blind brutes appeared to be waging a dreadful and doubtful war with the red herds of those monstrous, cone-horned survivals from an earlier age, the *Arsinotheria*, who had ruled the reeking savannah for countless cycles. The roar and trampling of the struggle came up from time to time to the dwellers in the Caves, when the hot breeze came up from the southward.

What concerned the Cave Folk far more than any near-sighted and blundering rhinoceros, however malignant, was the sudden arrival of the great red bears, the black lions, the grinning and implacable sabre-tooth tigers, and giant black-grey wolves which hunted in small, handy packs of six or seven in number. All these, the dread foes of Man for as long as tradition could remember, had been mercifully few and scattered. Now, in a night, they had become as common as conies; and not a child could be allowed to play beyond shelter of the cave-mouth fires, not a woman durst venture to the spring without a brightly blazing fire-brand in her hand. Yet—and this seemed to the Tribe the most portentous sign of all—these blood-thirsty beasts appeared to have lost much

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of their ancient hostility to Man. They were all well fed, of course, their accustomed prey being now so abundant that they had little more to do than put forth an armed paw and seize it. But they all seemed uneasy and half-cowed, as if weighed down by a menace which they did not know how to face. When a man confronted them, the fiercest of them made way with a deprecating air, as if to say that they had troubles enough already on their minds.

* * * * *

Bawr, the Chief, and Grôm, his right hand and his counsellor, stood upon the bare green ridge above the Cave-mouth, and stared down anxiously upon the sun-drenched plain. Of old it had taken keen eyes to discern the varied life which populated its bamboo-thickets and cane-choked marshes. Now it was as thronged as the home pastures of a cattle-farm. Here and there a battle raged between such small-brained brutes as the white rhinoceros and the cone-horned monster; but for the most part there was an apprehensive sort of truce, the different kinds of beasts keeping as far as possible to themselves.

Further out in the plain pastured a herd of gigantic creatures such as neither Bawr nor Grôm had ever seen before. A pair of rhinoceros looked like pigmies beside them. They were both tall and massive, of a dark mud-colour, with colossal

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heads, no necks whatever, huge ears that flapped like wings, immensely long, up-curving tusks of gleaming yellow—mighty enough to carry a bison cradled in their curve—and it seemed to the astonished watchers on the ridge that from the snout of each monster grew a great snake, which reared itself into the air, and waved terribly, and pulled down the tops of trees for the monsters' food.

It was the Cave Man's first view of the Mammoth—which had not yet developed the shaggy coat it was later to grow on the cold sub-Arctic plains.

Recovering at length from his amazement, Bawr remarked :

" They seem to have two tails, those new beasts—a little tail behind, in the usual place, and a very big tail in front, which they use as a hand. They are very many, and very terrible. Do you think it is they who are driving all these other beasts upon us to overwhelm us ? "

Grôm thought long before replying.

" No," said he, " they are not flesh-eaters. See ! They do not heed the other beasts. They eat trees. And they, too, seem restless. I think they are themselves driven. But what dreadful beings must be they who can drive them ! "

" If they are driven over us," muttered Bawr, " they will grind us and our fires into the dust."

" It must be men," mused Grôm aloud, " men far mightier than ourselves and so countless that the hordes of the Tree Men would seem a handful in comparison. Only men, or gods, and swarms

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like locusts, could so drive all these mighty beasts before them as a child drives rabbits."

"Before they come," said Bawr, dropping his great craggy chin upon his breast, "the People of the Caves will be trodden out. Whither can we escape from such foes? We will build great fires before the caves, and we will go down fighting, as befits men."

He lifted his maned and massive head, and shook his great spear defiantly at the unknown doom that was coming up from the south. But Grôm's eyes were sunken deep under his brows in brooding thought.

"There is one way, perhaps," he said at length. "We have learned to journey on the water. We must build us rafts, many rafts, to carry all the tribe. And when we can no longer hold our fires and our caves we will push out upon the water, and perhaps make our way to that blue shore yonder, where they cannot follow us."

"The waves, and the monsters of the waves, will swallow us up," suggested Bawr.

"Some of us, perhaps many of us," agreed Grôm. "But many of us will escape, to keep the tribe-fires burning, if the gods be kind upon that day and bind down the winds till we get over. If we stay here we shall all die."

"It is well," grunted Bawr, turning to hurry down the steep. "We will build rafts. Let us hasten."

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On the beach below the Caves the Men of the Tribe worked furiously, dragging the trunks of trees together at the water's edge, lashing them with ropes of vine and cords of hide, and laboriously lopping some of the more obstructive branches by the combined use of fire and split stones. The women, and the lame slave Ook-ootsk—with the old men, who, though their hearts were still high, were too frail of their hands for such a heavy task as raft-building—remained before the Caves under the command of A-ya, Grôm's mate. They had enough to do in feeding the chain of fires, keeping the children out of danger, and fighting back with spear and arrow the ever-encroaching mob of wild-eyed beasts. The beasts feared the fires, and feared the human beings who leaped and screamed and smote from among the fires. But still more they seemed to fear some unknown thing behind them. For a time, however, the crackling flames and the biting shafts proved a sufficient barrier, and the motley but terrifying invaders went sheering off irresolutely to westward over the downs.

Down by the edge of tide the raft-builders worked under Grôm's guidance. The broad water—some four or five miles across—was the tidal estuary of a great river which flowed out of the north-west. Its brimming current bore down from the interior jungles the trunks of many up-rooted trees, which the tides of the estuary hurled back and strewed along the beach. The raft-builders, therefore, had plenty of material to work

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with. And the fear that lay chill upon their hearts urged them to a diligence that was far from their habit.

It was rather like working in a nightmare. From time to time would come a rush, a stampede, of deer or tapirs, along the strip of beach between the water and the cliff. The toiling men would draw aside till the rabble went by, then fall to work again.

Once, however, it was a herd of wild cattle, snorting, and tossing their wide, keen-pointed horns; and their trampling onrush filled the whole space so that the men had to plunge out into deep water to escape. Several, afraid of the big-mouthed, flesh-eating fish which infested the estuary at high tide, stayed too close in shore, and paid for their irresolution by being gored savagely.

It was about the full of the moon and the time of the longest days, and the raft-builders toiled feverishly the whole night through. By sunrise Bawr and Grôm estimated that there were rafts enough to carry the whole tribe, provided the present calm held on. They decided, however, to construct several more, in case some should prove less buoyant than they hoped.

But for this most wise provision Fate refused to grant the time.

A naked slip of a girl, her one scant garment of leopard skin caught upon a rock and twitched from off her loins as she ran, came fleeing down the hill-path, her hair afloat upon the fresh

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morning air. Straggling far behind her came a crowd of children, and old women carrying babies or bundles of dried meat.

"They must not come yet. They'll be in the way!" cried Bawr angrily, waving them back. But they paid no attention—which showed that there was something they feared more even than the iron-fisted Chief.

"There are none of the young women or the old men, who can fight, among them," said Grôm. "A-ya must have sent them, because the time has come. Let us wait for the young girl, who seems to bring a message."

Breathless, and clutching at her bosom with one hand, the girl fell at Bawr's feet.

"A-ya says, 'Come quick!'" she gasped. "They are too many. They run over the fires and trample us."

Grôm sprang forward with a cry, then stooped and looked at his Chief.

"Go, you," said Bawr, "and bring them to us. I will stay here and look to the rafts."

Taking a half-score of the strongest warriors with him, Grôm raced up the steep, torn with anxiety for the fate of A-ya and the children.

It was now about three-quarters tide, and the flood rising strongly. By way of precaution some of the rafts had been kept afloat, let down with ropes of vine to follow the last ebb, and guided carefully back on the returning flood. But most of them were lying where they had been built, or left by the preceding tide, along high-water mark,

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as hopelessly stranded, for the next two hours, as a birch log after a freshet. As the old women with children arrived, Bawr rushed them down the wet beach to the rafts which were afloat, appointing to each clumsy raft four men, with long, roughly flattened poles, to manage it. For the moment, all these men had to do was hold their charges in place that they might not be swept away by the incoming tide.

When Grôm and his eager handful, passing a stream of trembling fugitives on the way, reached the level ground before the Caves, the sight that greeted them was tremendous and appalling. It looked as if some great country to the southward had gathered together all its beasts and then vomited them forth in one vast torrent, confused and irresistible, to the north. It was a wholesale migration, on such a scale as the modern world has never even dreamed of, but suggested in a feeble way by the torrential drift of the bison across the North American plains half a century ago, or the sudden, inexplicable marches of the lemming myriads out of the Scandinavian barrens that give them birth.

The shrill cries of the women, fighting like she-wolves in defence of the children and the home-caves, the hoarse shouts of the old men, weak but indomitable, were mingled with an indescribable medley of noises—gruntings, bellowings, howlings, roarings, bleatings and brayings—from the dreadful mob of beasts which besieged the open space behind the fires. Some of the beasts were

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maddened with their terror, some were in a fighting rage, some only wanted to escape the throng behind them. But all seemed bent upon passing the fires and getting into the Caves, as if they thought there to find refuge from the unknown fear.

On the extreme right of the line the two farthest fires were already overwhelmed, trodden out by frantic hooves, and three or four old men, with a couple of desperate young women, behind a barrier of slain elk and stags, were fighting like furies to hold back the victorious onrush. Two of the old men were down, trodden out between the fires by blind hooves, and a third, jammed limply against the rocky wall beside the furthest cave, was being worried by a bear—hideously but aimlessly, as if the great beast hardly heeded what it was doing. There was something peculiarly terrifying in the animal's preoccupation.

At the centre of the line, immediately before the main Cave-mouth—whose yawning entrance seemed to be the objective of the swarming beasts—A-ya was heading the battle, with the lame slave, Ook-ootsk, crouched fighting at her side like a colossal frog gone mad. Here the fires were almost extinguished—but the line of slain beasts formed a tolerable barricade, upon the top of which the women leapt, stabbing with their spears and screeching shrill taunts, while the old men leaned upon the gory pile to save their strength with frugal precision. Here and there among the carcasses was the body of a woman or an old man,

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impaled on the horn of a bull or ripped open by the rending antler of an elk. As Grôm and his men came shouting across the level a huge woolly rhinoceros plunged over the barrier, his bloody horn ploughing the carcasses, trod down a couple of the defenders without appearing to see them, dashed through the nearest fire, and charged blindly into the Cave-mouth with his matted coat all ablaze. The children and old women who had not already fled down to the beach shrieked in horror. The frantic monster heeded them not at all, but went thundering on into the bowels of the cavern.

"Go back, all you women!" yelled Grôm above the tumult, as he and his men raced to the barrier. "Get down to the beach with the children. We'll hold the rush back till you get down. Run! Run!"

Sobbing with the fury of the struggle, the women obeyed, darting back and pouncing upon their own little ones—all but A-ya, who remained doggedly at Grôm's side.

"Go," ordered Grôm fiercely. "The children need you. Get them all down."

Sullenly the woman obeyed, seeing he was right, but still lusting for the fight, though her wearied arm could now do little more than lift the spear.

Under the shock of these fresh fighters, with lion-like heads, masterful eyes, and smashing, irresistible weapons, the front ranks of the animals recoiled, trampling those behind them; and for a few

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minutes the pressure was relieved. Grôm turned to the old men.

"You go now," he ordered.

But they refused.

"We stay here," cried one, breathless, but with fire in his ancient eyes. "None too much room on the rafts." And they fell again grimly to the fight.

Grôm laughed proudly. With such mettle even in withered veins, the Tribe, he thought, was destined to great things. He turned to the lame slave, whom he had ever favoured for his faithfulness.

"You go! You are lame and cannot run."

The crouching giant looked up at him with a wide-mouthed grin.

"I am no woman," said he. "I stay and hold them back when you all go. I kill, and kill. And then I go very far."

He waved one great gnarled hand, dripping with blood, toward the sun and the high spaces of air.

Before Grôm could answer, from below the southward edge of the plateau there came a mad, high trumpeting, so loud that every other voice in that pandemonium was silenced by it. At that dread sound the rabble of beasts surged forward again upon the barrier, upon the clubs and spears of the defenders. Up over the brow of the slope came a forest of waving trunks, and tossing tusks, and ponderous black foreheads.

"The Two-Tails are upon us!" cried Grôm, in a voice of awe. And his followers gasped,

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as the colossal shapes shouldered up into full view.

Grôm looked behind him, and saw the last of the women and children, shepherded vehemently by A-ya with the butt of her spear, vanishing down the steep toward the beach.

"It is time for us to go too," shouted Grôm, clutching the lame slave by the arm to drag him off. But Ook-ootsk wrenched himself free.

"I'll hold them back till you get away," he growled, and drove his great spear into the heart of a bull which came over the barrier at that instant. Grôm saw it would be useless now to try and save him. With the rest of his band he ran for paths leading down to the beach. It was well, he thought, that the valiant slave should die for the Tribe.

The beasts came over the barrier and the fires like a yelling flood. But now, finding all opposition so suddenly withdrawn, the flood divided upon the massive, thrusting figure of Ook-ootsk as upon a black rock in mid-stream. It united again behind him, surging pell-mell for the Cave-mouths, where in the crush the weaker and lighter were savagely torn and trampled underfoot.

Then the Mammoths came thundering and trumpeting across the plateau, going through and over the lesser beasts like a tidal wave. Grôm, having seen the last of his warriors pass down the beach paths, turned for one more glimpse of the monstrous and incredible scene. He had a swift vision of the squatting form of Ook-ootsk thrusting

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upward with reddened spear at the breast of a black monster which hung over him like a mountain. Then the mountain rolled forward upon him, blotting him out, and Grôm slipped hurriedly over the brink and down the path.

* * * * *

At the rafts it was bedlam. A score or more of the women and children, as they were crossing to the water's edge, had been wiped out of existence by the rush of maddened bison along the beach, and the keenings of their relatives rose above the shouts and cries of embarkation. Fully half the rafts were afloat, with their loads, by now, and men grunted heavily in the effort to pry the others free, while women and children crowded into the water around them, waiting to struggle aboard as soon as the men would let them.

As Grôm and his panting band, covered with blood from head to foot, reached the waterside and flung their dripping weapons upon the rafts, a fringe of animals came over the edge of the steep, crowded aside from the caves. Some, being sure-footed, like the lions and bears, made their way with care down the paths. Others, pushed over and struggling frantically, came rolling downward, bouncing from rock and ledge, and landing on the beach a mass of broken bones. Then behind them, along the brink, black and gigantic against the blue sky-line, appeared a group of the Mam-

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moths. They waved their long trunks, and trumpeted piercingly, but hesitated to try the descent.

"Hurry! hurry!" thundered Bawr, straining at the stranded timbers till the great veins stood out on neck and forehead as if they would burst.

Under the added efforts of Grôm and his band the last of the rafts floated. The children were thrown aboard, the women clambered after them, and the men, wading and guiding, lest the rafts should ground again, began to follow cautiously.

At this moment, along the beach came a new rush of animals—chiefly buffalo, headed by three huge white rhinoceros. These all seemed quite blind with panic. They dashed on straight ahead, paying no heed whatever either to the people on the rafts or to the other beasts coming down the steep. On their heels thundered a second herd of Mammoths, their trunks held high in the air, the red caverns of their mouths wide open.

As these colossal, rolling bulks came abreast of the rafts, a child shrieked at the terrifying sight. The leader of the herd turned his malignant little eye upon the rafts, seeming to perceive them for the first time. Without pausing in his huge stride he reached down his trunk, whipped it about the waist of Bawr, and swung him aloft, crushing in his ribs with the terrific pressure, and carried him along high in the air above the trumpeting ranks.

A howl of rage went up from the rafts; and A-ya,

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whose bow was quick as thought, let fly an arrow before Grôm could stay her hand. The shaft struck deep in the monster's trunk. Dashing down its lifeless victim among the feet of the herd, the monster tried to turn back to take vengeance for the strange wound. But unable to stem the avalanche behind, it was borne up the beach, screaming with rage.

Grôm, who was now sole chief and master of the tribe, signed every raft to push out into deep water, beyond reach of further attack. With all responsibility now upon his shoulders, he had little time to grieve for the death of Bawr, who, after all, had died greatly, as a Chief should. The rafts were now travelling inland at a fair rate, on the last half-hour of the flood; and, as the estuary narrowed rapidly above their starting-place, he hoped to be able, during the slack of tide, to work the clumsy rafts well over towards the northern shore before getting caught in the full strength of the ebb. As he studied out this problem, and urged the warriors to their utmost effort on the heavy and awkward pole-paddles, he kept puzzling all the time over the great mystery. What was it that swept even the mighty mammoths before its face? How should he name the Fear?

Then all at once, when the rafts were about three or four hundred yards out from shore, he saw. A low cry of wonder broke from his lips, and was re-echoed in chorus from all the burdened rafts.

Down over the heights where the Cave Folk had

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been dwelling, up along the beach from which the rafts had just escaped, in countless ravening, snapping swarms, poured hyenas by the myriad—huge hyenas, bigger than the mightiest timber wolves, their deep-jowled heads carried close to the ground. It was clear in a moment that they were mad with hunger, driven by nothing but their own raging appetites. They fled from nothing, but some of them stopped, in struggling masses, to devour the bodies of the beasts which they found slain, while the rest poured on insatiably, to pull down by sheer weight of numbers and the might of their bone-crushing jaws the mightiest of the monsters which fled before them. Here and there a mammoth cow, maddened by the slaughter of her calf, or an old rhinoceros bull, indignant at being hunted by such vermin, would turn and run amuck through the mass, stamping them out by the hundred. But this made no impression at all, either upon their numbers or the rage of their hunger, and in a few minutes the colossus, its feet half eaten off, would come crashing down, to be swarmed over and disappear like a fat grub in an ant-heap. Here and there, too, a mammoth, more sagacious than its fellows, would wade out belly deep into the water—upon finding its escape cut off—and stand there plucking its foes one by one from the shore to trample them under its feet, screaming shrill triumph.

Grôm turned with a deep breath from the unspeakable spectacle, looked across to the green

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line of the opposite shore, and thanked his unknown gods that it was so far off. With that great river rolling its flood between, he thought the Tribe might rest secure from these fiends and once more build up its fortunes.

CHAPTER XIV

THE LAKE OF LONG SLEEP

DRIVEN from their home beside the Bitter Water by the great migration of the beasts, the Tribe of the Cave Folk, diminished in numbers and stricken in spirit, had escaped on rafts across the broad river-estuary which washed the northern border of their domain. There they had found a breathing-space, but it had proved a perilous one. The whole region north of the estuary was little better than a steaming swamp, infested with poisonous snakes and insects, and with strange monsters, survivals from a still earlier age, whose ferocity drove the Cave Folk back to their ancestral life in the tree-tops. Under these conditions it was all but impossible to keep alight the sacred fires—as precious to the tribe as life itself—which they had brought with them in their flight upon the rafts. And Grôm, the Chief, saw his harassed people in danger of sinking back into the degradation from which his discovery and conquest of fire had so wonderfully uplifted them.

From the top of a solitary jobo tree, which

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towered above the rank surrounding jungle, Grôm could make out what looked like a low bank of purple cloud along the western and north-western horizon. As it was always there, whenever he climbed to look at it, he concluded that it was not a cloud-bank, but a line of hills. Where there were hills there might be caves. In any case, the People must have some better place to inhabit than this region of swamps and monsters. The way to that blue line of promise lay across what would surely be the path of the migrating beasts, if they should take it into their heads to swim across the river. The possibility was one from which even his resolute spirit shrank. But he felt that he must face any risk in the hope of winning his way to those cloudy hills. Within an hour of his reaching this decision the Tribe of the Cave Folk was once more on the march.

The first few days of the march were like a nightmare. Grôm led the way along the shore of the river, both because that seemed the shortest way to the hills, and because, in case of emergency, the open water afforded a door of escape by raft. Had it been possible to make the journey by raft matters would have been simplified; but Grôm had already proved by experience that his heavy, unwieldy rafts could not be forced upwards against the mighty current of the river. At the last point to which the flood-tides would carry them the rafts had been abandoned—herded together into a quiet cove, and lashed to the shore by twisted vine-ropes against some possible future need.

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At the head of the dismal march went Grôm, with his mate A-ya, and her two children, and the hairy little scout Loob, whose feet were as quick as his eyes and ears and nostrils, and whose sinews were as untiring as those of the grey wolf. Immediately behind these came the main body of the warriors, on a wide line so as to guard against surprise on the flank. Then followed the women and children, bunched as closely as possible behind the centre of the line; and a knot of picked warriors, under young Mô, the brother of A-ya, guarded the rear. There were no old men and women, all these having gone down in the last great battle at the Caves, selling their lives as dearly as possible to cover the retreat. Such of the young women as had no small children to carry bore the heavy burdens of the fire-baskets, or bundles of smoke-dried meat, leaving the warriors free to use their bows and spears.

In traversing the swamp the march was sometimes at ground-level, sometimes high in the tree tops. In the tree-tops it was safer, but the progress was slow and laborious. At ground-level the swarms of stinging insects were always with them, till Grôm invented the use of smudges. When every alternate member of the tribe carried a torch of dry grass and half-green bark, the march was enveloped in a cloud of acrid smoke, which the insects found more or less disconcerting.

Of the grave perils of this weary march to the hills a single instance may suffice. The nights, as a rule, were passed by the whole tribe in the tree-

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tops, both for the greater security, and because there was seldom enough dry ground to sleep upon. But one evening, toward sunset, they came upon a sort of little island in the reeking jungle. Its surface was four or five feet above the level of the swamp. The trees which dotted it were smooth, straight, towering shafts with wide fans of foliage at their far-off tops. And the ground between these clean, symmetrical trunks was unencumbered, being clothed only with a rich, soft, spicy-scented herbage, akin to the thymes and mints. Such an opportunity for rest and refreshment was not to be let slip, and Grôm ordered an immediate halt.

A fat, pig-like water beast, of the nature of the dugong, had been speared that day in a bayou beside the line of march, and with great contentment the tribe settled themselves down to such a comfortable feasting as they had not known for many days. While the fat dugong was being hacked to pieces and divided under the astute direction of A-ya, Grôm made haste to establish the camp-fires in a chain completely encircling the encampment, as a protection against night-prowlers from the surrounding jungle. As darkness fell the flames lit up the soaring trunks, but the roof of over-arching foliage was so high that the smoky illumination was lost in it.

While the rest of the tribe gave itself up to the feasting, Grôm and Loob, and half a dozen of the other warriors, kept vigilant watch whilst they ate, distrusting the black depths of jungle and

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the deep, reed-fringed pools beyond the circle of light. Suddenly, all along one side of the island there arose a sound of heavy splashing, and out of the darkness came a row of small, malignant eyes, all fixed upon the feasters. Then into the circle of light swam the masks of giant alligators and strange, tusked caymans. Quite unawed by the fires they came ashore with a clumsy rush, open-mouthed.

While the clamouring women snatched the children away to the other side of the encampment, Grôm and the other warriors hurled themselves upon the hideous invaders as they came waddling with amazing nimbleness in between the fires. But these were no assailants to be met with bow and spear. At Grôm's sharp orders each warrior snatched a blazing brand from the fire, and drove it into the gaping throat of his nearest assailant. In their stupid ferocity the monsters invariably bit upon the brand before they realized its nature. Then, bellowing with pain, they wheeled about and scrambled back toward the water, lashing out with their gigantic tails, so that three of the warriors were knocked over and half a dozen of the fires were scattered.

The feasters had hardly more than settled down after this startling visitation, when from the darkness inland came a hoarse, hooting cry, followed by a succession of crashing thuds, as if a pair of mammoths were playing leap-frog in the jungle. All the men sprang again to their weapons, and stood waiting, in a sudden hush, straining their

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eyes into the perilous dark. Some of the women herded the children into the very centre of the island, while others fed the fires with feverish haste. The hooting call, and the heavy, leaping thuds, came nearer and nearer at a terrifying speed; and suddenly, amid the far-off, vaguely-lighted tangle of the tree-trunks appeared a giant form, seven or eight times the height of Grôm himself. Leaping upon its mighty hind-legs, and holding its mailed fore-paws before its chest, it came bounding like a colossal kangaroo through the jungle, smashing down the branches and smaller trees as it came, and balancing itself at each spring with its massive, reptilian tail. Its vast head, something like a cross between that of a monstrous horse and that of an alligator, was upborne upon a long, snaky neck, and its eyes, huge and round and lidless, were like two discs of shining and enamelled metal where they caught the flash of the camp-fires.

This appalling shape had apparently no dread whatever of the flames. When it was within some thirty or forty yards of the line of fire, Grôm yelled an order and a swarm of arrows darted from the bows to meet it. But they fell futile from its armoured hide, which gleamed like dull bronze in the fire-light. Grôm shouted again, and this time the warriors hurled their spears—and they, too, fell harmless from the monster's armour. Its next crashing bound brought the monster to the edge of the encampment, where one of its ponderous feet obliterated a fire. With a lightning swoop



"Leaping upon its mighty hind-legs . . . like a colossal kangaroo."



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of its gigantic head it seized the nearest warrior in its jaws and swung him, screaming, high into the air, as a heron might snatch up a sprawling frog. At the same instant A-ya, who was the one unerring archer in the tribe, let fly an arrow which pierced full half its length into the centre of one of those horrifying enamelled eyes; while Grôm, who alone, of all the warriors, had not recoiled in terror, succeeded in driving a spear deep into the unarmoured inner side of the monster's thigh. But both these wounds, dreadful though they were, failed to make the colossus drop its prey. With mighty, braying noises through its nostrils it brushed the spear shaft from its hold like a straw, flopped about, and with the arrow still sticking in its eye, went leaping off again into the darkness to devour its victim.

For several hours, with the fires trebled in number and stirred to fiercer heat, the tribe waited for the monster to return and claim another victim. But it did not return. At length Grôm concluded that his spear-head in its groin and A-ya's arrow in its eye had given it something else to think of. Once more he set the guards, and gradually the tribe, inured to horrors, settled itself down to sleep. It slept out the rest of the night without disturbance—but the following night, and the next two nights thereafter, were spent in the tree-tops. Then, on the fourth day, the harassed travellers emerged from the swamp into a pleasant region of grassy, mimosa-dotted, gently-rolling plain. The hills, now showing green and richly

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wooded, were not more than a day's march ahead.

And just here, as the Fates which had of late been pursuing them would have it, the worn travellers found themselves once more in the line of the hordes of migrating beasts.

Grôm's heart sank. To reach the refuge of the hills across the march of those maddened hordes was obviously impossible. Were his people to be forced back into the swamp, to resume the cramped and ape-like life among the branches? Having ordered the building of a half-circle of fire around a spur of the jungle, he climbed a tree to reconnoitre.

The river ran but a mile or two distant upon his left. Immediately before him the fleeing beasts were not numerous, consisting merely of small herds and terrified stragglers. Further out, however, toward the hills, the plain was blackened by the fugitives, who were thrust on by the myriads swimming the river behind them. Assuredly, it was not to be thought of that he should attempt to lead his people across the path of that desperate flight. But a point that Grôm noted with relief was that only certain kinds of beasts had ventured the crossing of the river. He saw no bears, lions or sabre-tooths among those streaming hordes. He saw deer of every kind—good swimmers all of them—with immense, rolling herds of buffalo and aurochs, and scattered companies of the terrible siva moose, and some bands of the giant elk, their antlers topping the mimosa thickets. Here and

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there, lumbering along sullenly as if reluctant to retreat before any peril, journeyed a huge rhinoceros, stopping from time to time for a few hurried mouthfuls of the rich plains grass. But as yet there was not a mammoth in sight—whereat Grôm wondered, as he thought they would have been among the first to dare the crossing of the river. Had they kept on up the other shore, hesitating to trust their colossal bulks to the current, or had they turned at bay, at last, in uncontrollable indignation, and gone down before the countless hordes of their ignoble assailants?

The absence of the mammoths, which he dreaded more than all the other beasts because of the fierce intelligence that gleamed in their eyes, decided Grôm. He would lead his people along to the right, skirting the swamp and marching parallel to the flight of the beasts, calculating thus to have the jungle always for a refuge, though not for a dwelling, until they should come to a region of hills and caves too difficult for the migrating beasts to traverse.

For several days this plan answered to a marvel. The fugitives nearest to the swamp-edge were mostly deer of various species, which swerved away nervously from the line of march, but at the same time afforded such good hunting that the travellers revelled in abundance and rapidly recovered their spirits. Once, when a great wave of maddened buffalo surged over upon them, the whole tribe fled back into the jungle, clambering in to the trees, and stabbing down, with angry

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shouts, at the nearest of their assailants. But the assault was a blind one. The buffalo, a black mass that seemed to foam with tossing horns and rolling eyes, soon passed on to their unknown destination. And the tribe, dropping down from the branches, quite cheerfully resumed its march.

On the fifth day of the march they saw the jungle on their right come to an end. It was succeeded by a vast expanse of shallow mere dotted with half-drowned, rushy islets, and swarming with crocodiles. After some hesitation, Grôm decided to go on, though he was uneasy about forsaking the refuge of the trees. Some leagues ahead, however, and a little toward the left, he could see a low, thick-wooded hill, which he thought might serve the tribe for a shelter. With many misgivings, he led the way directly towards it, swerving out across the path of a vast but stragglng horde of sambur deer which seemed almost exhausted.

To Grôm's surprise these stately and beautiful animals showed neither hostility nor fear toward human beings. According to all his previous experience, the attitude of every beast toward man was one of fear or fierce hate. These sambur, on the contrary, seemed rather to welcome the companionship of the tribe, as if looking to it for some protection against the strange pursuing peril. His sleepless sagacity perceiving the value of this great escort as a buffer against the contact of less kindly hordes, Grôm gave strict orders that none of these beasts should be molested. And the

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Cave Folk, not without apprehension, found themselves travelling in the vanguard of an army of tall, high-antlered beasts which stared at them with mild eyes of inquiry and appeal.

Marching at their best speed, the Tribe kept easily in the van of the distressed sambur, and more than once in the next few hours, Grôm had reason to congratulate himself upon his venture into this strange fellowship. First, for instance, he saw a herd of black buffalo overtake the sambur host and dash heavily into its rear ranks. The frightened sambur closed up, instead of scattering, and the impetus of the buffalo presently spent itself upon the unresisting mass. They edged their way through to the left, leaving swathes of gored and trodden sambur in their wake, and went thundering off on another line of retreat, caroming into a herd of aurochs, which fought them off and punished them murderously. It was obvious to Grôm, as he studied the dust-clouds of this last encounter, that the buffalo herd, here in the open, would have rolled over the tribe irresistibly, and trampled it flat.

Journeying thus at top speed toward that hill of promise before them, the travellers came at length to a wide space of absolutely level ground which presented a most curious appearance. It was as level as a windless lake, and almost without vegetation. The naked surface was of a sort of indeterminate dust-colour, but dotted here and there with tiny patches of vegetation so stunted that it was little more than moss. Grôm, with his

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inquiring mind, would have liked to stop to investigate this curious surface, unlike anything he had ever seen before. But the hordes of the sambur were behind, pressing the tribe onwards, and straight ahead was the wooded hill, dense with foliage, luring with its promise of safe and convenient shelter. He led the way, therefore, without hesitation, out across the baked and barren waste, sniffing curiously, as he went, at a strange smell, pungent but not unpleasant, which steamed up from the dry, hot surface all about him.

The first peculiarity that he noticed was a remarkable springiness in the surface upon which he trod. Then he was struck by the fact that the dust-brown surface was seamed and criss-crossed in many places by small cracks—like those in sun-scorched mud, except that the cracks were almost black in colour. These things caused him no misgiving. But presently, to his consternation, he detected a slight but amazing undulation, an immensely long, immensely slow wave rolling across the dry surface before him. He could hardly believe his eyes—for assuredly nothing could look more like good solid land than that stretch of barren plain. He stopped short, rubbing his eyes in wonder. A-ya grabbed him by the arm.

"What is it?" she whispered, staring at the unstable surface in a kind of horror.

Before he could reply, cries and shouts arose among the tribe behind him, and they all rushed forward, almost sweeping Grôm and A-ya from their feet.

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The surface of the barren, all along the edge of the grass land, had given way beneath the weight of the sambur herds, and the front ranks were being engulfed, with frantic snortings and awful groans, in what looked like a dense, blackish, glistening ooze. The ranks behind were being forced forward to this awful doom, in spite of their panic-stricken struggles to hold back; and it was the pressure of this battling mass that was creating the horrible, bulging undulation on the plain.

Grôm's quick intelligence took in the situation on the instant. The naked brown surface beneath the feet of the tribe was nothing more than a thin crust overlying a lake of some dense, dark, strange-smelling liquid.

His first impulse, naturally, was to turn back—and A-ya, with wide eyes of terror, was already dragging fiercely at his elbow. But to turn back was utterly impossible. That way lay the long strip of engulfing pitch, swallowing up insatiably the ranks of the groaning and kicking sambur. There was but one possible way of escape left open, and that was straight ahead.

But would the crust continue to uphold them? Already, under the weight of the whole tribe pressing together, it was beginning to sag hideously. With furious words and blows he tried to make the tribe scatter to right and left, so as to spread the pressure as widely as possible. Perceiving his purpose, A-ya and Loob, and several of the leading warriors, seconded his efforts with frantic vehemence; till in a few minutes the whole

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tribe, amazed and quaking with awe, was extended like a fan over a front of three or four hundred yards. Seeing that the perilous sagging of the crust was at once relieved, Grôm then ordered the tribe to advance cautiously, keeping the same wide-open formation, while he himself brought up the rear.

But in a few minutes everyone, from Grôm downwards, came to a halt irresistibly, in order to watch the monstrous drama unfolding behind them.

For nearly half a mile to either side of their immediate rear, between the still unbroken surface of the dust-brown expanse and the edge of the trampled grassy plain, stretched a sort of canal, perhaps ten paces wide, of brown-black, glistening pitch, beaten up with thrashing antlers, and tossing heads that whistled despairingly through wide nostrils, and heaving, agonizing bulks that went down slowly to their doom. After several ranks of the herd had been engulfed those next behind turned about in terror and fought madly to force their way back from the fatal brink. But the inexorable masses behind them rolled them on backwards, and slowly they too were thrust down into the pitch, till the canal was filled to the brink, and writhed horribly along its whole length. By this time, however, the alarm had spread through the rest of the sambur ranks. By a desperate effort they got themselves turned, and went surging off to the left in a direction parallel to the edge of the plain of death.

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Thrilled with the wonder and the horror of it, Grôm drew a deep breath and relaxed the tension of his watching. He was just about to turn and order the tribe forward again, when he was arrested by the sight of a vast cloud of dust rolling up swiftly upon the left flank of the retreating sambur.

A confused cry of alarm went up from the watching tribe, as they saw a forest of waving trunks appear in the front of the dust-cloud. A second or two more and a long array of mammoths emerged along the path of the cloud. Among the mammoths, here and there, raced a black or a white rhinoceros, or a towering, spotted giraffe. Behind this front rank, vague and portentous through the veiling cloud, came further colossal hordes, filling the distance as far as eye could see.

This advance looked as if nothing on earth, not even the lake of pitch, could ever stop it, and certain of the tribe started to flee. But Grôm, after a moment of misgiving and hasty calculation, checked the flight sternly. He must, at all risks, see the incredible thing that was about to happen. And he felt certain that, at this distance out upon the crust of the gulf, the tribe would be secure.

The stupendous wave of dust and waving trunks and galloping black bulks thundered up at a terrific pace, and fell with irresistible impact upon the flank of the marching sambur. These unhappy beasts went down like grass before it. They were rolled flat, trodden out like a fire in thin grass, annihilated. And the screaming, trumpeting

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monsters, hardly aware that there had been an obstacle in their path, arrived at the edge of the canal.

Here and there an old bull, leading, took alarm, trumpeted wildly, and strove to stop. But the belt of pitch was full to the brink with the packed bodies of the sambur, and did not look to be a very serious barrier to the spacious brown levels beyond it. Moreover, the panic of a long flight was upon them, and the rear ranks were thrusting them on. The trumpeting leaders were overborne in a twinkling. The ponderous feet of the front rank sank into the mass of bodies and horns and pitch, stumbled forward, belly deep, and strove to clamber out upon the solid-looking further edge. With trunks eagerly outstretched as if seeking to grip something, the huge, bat-eared heads heaved themselves up. The next moment the treacherous crust crumbled away beneath them like an egg-shell, and with screams that tore the heavens they sank into the gulfs of pitch. The next two or three ranks went on over them, trod them deeper down, heaved and surged and battled for some moments along the edge of the crumbling crust. With mad trumpeting, they were themselves swallowed up in that sluggish, implacable flood. Here and there a black trunk, twisting in agony, lingered long, awful moments above the pitch. Here and there the pallid head of a giraffe, tongue protruding and eyes bursting from their sockets, stood up rigid on its long neck and screamed hideously.

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As the thick tide closed slowly, slowly over its prey, the hosts in the rear, having taken alarm at the agonized trumpeting, succeeded by a gigantic effort in checking their career. Those nearest the edge of doom reared up and fell back upon those next behind, to be ripped with frantic tusks in the mad confusion. But presently the whole colossal array brought itself to a halt, got itself turned to the left, and went thundering off on the trail of the sambur remnants.

Grôm stood staring for a long time, with wide, brooding eyes, at the still-bubbling and heaving breadths of dark pitch. He was stunned by the sudden engulfing and utter disappearance of such a monstrous horde. He seemed to see the countless gigantic shapes heaped one upon the other, laid to their long sleep there in the deeps of the pitch. At last he shook himself, passed his shaggy hand over his eyes, and shouted to the tribe that all was well. Then he set himself once more at their head, and led them, slowly and cautiously, onward across the dreadful level, till they gained the shelter of that sweetly wooded and rivulet-watered hill.

THE END

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