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In the Morning of Time



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Charles G. D. Roberts

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CHAPTER I

THE WORLD WITHOUT MAN

It lay apparently afloat on the sluggish, faintly discolored 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.

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 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 lightning 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 beak-like 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-colored 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 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 green-stuff 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 discolored 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.

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 neighborhood 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-colored 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, might fall a prey to some significant 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 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 blunderingly 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 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 neighbor 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 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 body. At the base of the head began a system of defensive armor 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 center 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 colored 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 armor-plate. One of the pair threatened him from the front, as if to engross his attention, while 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 forearms 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 armored 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 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 defense 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 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 armored 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 armory of its jaws was more appalling. With a stealthy but clumsy-looking waddle, which was 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 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 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 center 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 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 near 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 reëmerged 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 quarreled till, some fifteen minutes later, their last foothold sank beneath them. Then, with 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 vigor 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 front from the lilyed 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 armored 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 neighborhood 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 pig-like 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 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 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 offense or for defense, 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

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-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 coloring 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 creatures, 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 neighborhood 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 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 hoyo-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 armor and leveled 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 marvelous 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 defense, 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 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 meager 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, colored 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, hand-like 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, ape-like 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 massive, 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-nostriled 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 favor 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 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 armored 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.

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 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—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 the 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 signaling him to come to her. As soon as she saw 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 neighbors, and commanded a clear view of the meadows 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 fruits. Along the banks of the lagoon were innumerable little groves of plantain, the rich sustaining fruit of which was of all foods his favorite. 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 saber-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 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 defense 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 waterside, 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 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. 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-armored 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 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 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 neighbor's flank in an inexplicable apprehension.

The next moment the stupendous opposing 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 manœuvre. 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 armored 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 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 the fullness 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 harbored 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 saber-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 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, saber-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 dearly 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 his diminished followers together, along with most of their stored supplies, and mass them in the amphitheater 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 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 amphitheater 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 defense of the bottle-neck pass which led into the amphitheater. 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 collecting 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-colored 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 color, 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-gray. Outnumbered nearly ten to one, and shrewd enough to see at a glance what ferocious power lurked in those misshapen frames at the 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 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 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 ape-like, 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 dishonored 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 center 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 center, the defense was led by a warrior 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 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 defense, as it were, and avoiding all the tribal gossip. Slightly younger than the Chief, and with few gray 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 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 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 bottleneck 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, upturned nostrils.

Above that dust a band of graybeards 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 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 amphitheater, 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 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.

"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."

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 wolf-skin 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 traveled 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. 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 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 crashings of the undergrowth.

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 vapor; and one of these, darker and 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 gray bear, of a bulk beyond that of the hugest grizzly—was almost upon him, 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 bear 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 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 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 favor. 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 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 gray 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 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 center 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 with an insuperable fear. 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 far 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, upcurling 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, shriveled 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, 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 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, slavering 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 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 dancing flames she did not understand, but she understood the ponderous crashing, and growls, and savage cries which came from those black thickets and slopes of tumbled rocks. The man being absorbed in watching the wonders 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 watching 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 voices of the cave-bear, the cave-hyena, or the saber-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 saber-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 these two humans in remaining so near the dreaded flames. Intent upon them, they paid no heed to their great enemy, the saber-toothed, 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 saber-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 saber-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 saber-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 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 center 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, 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 vines 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 splendor 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 saber-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 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 brand kept the great beasts at a distance, 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.

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