

THE CRYSTAL SCEPTRE

Philip Verrill Mighels

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THE CRYSTAL SCEPTRE

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CHAPTER I. THE END OF THE VOYAGE

WE had lost all control of the wild balloon. It was driven ahead of the wind like a shred of rags, the car trailing behind at a fearful angle, for many of the ropes were broken and all the others were twisted in a hopeless tangle. Nearly all our ballast had fallen into the angry sea beneath us an hour after the storm first caught us in its whirl.

I could hear the ocean roaring and swashing, where its gigantic waves toppled over each other below. The sound must have been tremendous, for the wind blew such a howling gale that neither Ford nor I could make each other hear what we shouted two feet away.

Our hats were gone; Ford's face was haggard, whenever the lightning revealed him in the gloom. So intense was the darkness that I could

not even see the vast bag above us. When a great flash illuminated the heavens, directly ahead, I noted the monster globe full of gas, silhouetted blackly against the glare, and knew it was slightly leaking. A small three-cornered dent was in its side already. I also observed that the sea was hardly more than fifty feet below, churning milk-white foam in its fury out of liquid ebon waves of mountainous size. The sky seemed like a solid bank of black. The darkness that followed the flash absorbed even Ford. Yet I knew that while he clung to the basket with his right hand, as I had done for above an hour, he was nevertheless attempting with his left to heave out the bag of provisions and the blankets. I helped him at this and we rose perceptibly.

Where we were it was absolutely impossible even to guess. That the balloon was driving ahead at more than sixty miles an hour we had long been convinced. This had been the state of affairs throughout the night. I had lost all confidence in Ford's calculations at the end of the seventeenth hour out from Burma, for the twist which the storm had given us then threw out or broke every reliable instrument we had, leaving not so much as a compass. I was not an aeronaut like Ford, yet I knew we were doomed, unless some change should occur, and that quickly.

Ford, by the light of a flash, had seen a rope which was sawing open a seam in the silk, as it slashed and writhed in the tornado. When another blinding illumination came, I saw him climbing up in the ring to cut this rope away. The car tilted more than before; I fully expected to go hurtling out at every jerk. Suddenly two ropes, worn to a thread, on the ring, parted without the slightest warning. The car gave a lurch and all but turned bottom-side up. I heard a cry, as I swung out full length, suspended by my arms, and was even slightly struck on the foot, as Ford went plunging down. The balloon shot upward, relieved of his weight, and I was alone.

How long I clung there, swinging far out behind the wounded machine, is more than I would dare to say. My arms finally ached so intensely I could scarcely endure the pain. Dangling ropes beat me like knouts, for a time, and then wrapped and twisted about me like coils of a snake. Obviously these must have supported my weight at the last, for in a spell of dizziness and weakness I lost my grip and then was conscious only a second, when I thought, with the utmost unconcern, my end had come. Like a dummy on the tail of a kite, I dragged below the wreck of the car and was whirled thus unconsciously on, above the hungry sea.

It might have been hours, it might have been days after this last moment of despair, when my brain began again to work. I can only describe the sensations which followed as a species of dream. I thought I was dead; it seemed as if my soul, or something, was at perfect rest in a region of loveliness. Whereas I had been chilled through and

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through by the storm, I was warm now and filled with comfort. Music, which might have been the rustling of leaves or the songs of birds, made itself heard. I could not see for my eyes remained closed; but a sense of delicious odours pervaded my being; I seemed also to float, as if on the air.

At length I opened my eyes. The dream continuing on me still, I lay perfectly quiet, gazing aloft into a sky of matchless beauty. Doubtless I remained in this position for more than half an hour. Then a bright bird flitted across my range of vision, and brought me back to things of earth. I was still bound about by a piece of rope. Everything came back to me sharply, Ford, my friend, the scientist and daring balloonist, our start, the storm, his hurtling down to death, my own desperation, and then oblivion.

I was whole and sound, apparently. Removing the rope and attempting to sit erect, I found myself floundering for a second, in the top of a tree. The branch I was on let me drop. I fell toward the earth, made a grab for a limb, which somewhat broke my fall, and landed plump on the ground, in the midst of a circle of extraordinary beings.

CHAPTER II. A STRANGE ALLIANCE

NEITHER men nor apes, yet clearly creatures which were nearly the one and on the verge of being the other, these inhabitants of the place had evidently been observing my form, in a spirit of cautious curiosity, for a number now came swinging down from trees adjacent to the one I had occupied, and the ones upon the ground set up a series of singular cries.

Having landed on my feet, hatless, but otherwise stoutly clad, I threw my hand to my belt, instinctively, desiring to arm myself against possible aggression. I found only my knife remaining. This weapon I merely hauled around by sliding the belt, to bring the dagger directly beneath my hand. The creatures about me were a score or so in number, standing erect, apparently much excited, yet threatening no attack. Their movements were restless; their roundish, near-together eyes were constantly moving, like those of a monkey; they circled about me, uttering guttural monosyllables, with many inflections. Every one of them gripped in a powerful hand the haft of a rude sort of club, fashioned out of a rock, lashed firmly to the end of a stout piece of wood.

The mutual inspection between us lasted several minutes. I could detect but little difference between any two of the beings. They were nearly as tall as I, averaging about five feet six inches; they were thin, wiry, entirely naked, long-armed, flat-nosed, big-jawed and covered, on their legs and arms, with a thin and somewhat straggling growth of hair. Their skin was a reddish light-brown in colour; their feet were large, but much like hands, having the great toe set back like a thumb; their legs were slender and poorly shaped, but exceedingly muscular; their shoulders and backs were round.

One of the first to drop from a tree was a giant among them, a creature more than six feet tall, active as a panther, commanding in aspect, and possessing arms that reached fully to his knees. He carried a remarkable club which was made of a great chunk of rock-crystal, secured at the end of a polished bone, large and straight. This crystal still had its gleaming points and facets preserved; it therefore inspired me with a dread of the jagged hole it could smash in the skull of the largest animal.

Amazed as I was by what I saw, my astonishment was instantly increased when I observed the only female creature I had yet beheld. She issued from a copse and took her place beside the giant, who stood leaning on his club, eyeing myself nervously. She was a pure albino. Her hair, which was long and coarse, was as white as foam, her eyes were as pink as a rabbit's; her complexion was florid red on white. With a rudimentary modesty, she stood partially concealed behind the giant, although she was clothed in a patch of skin from a pure white gull, in addition to a sort of rude necklace of claws.

What were they? Where was I? What would they do? These questions I asked myself rapidly a hundred times, as

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the creatures continued to edge about me and to chatter obvious comments. I could only answer what they were, and my premature conclusion may have been wide of the truth, yet I dubbed them Missing Links without the slightest hesitation.

For a space of at least ten minutes I was subjected to the closest scrutiny, during which time I kept the keenest possible watch on every movement, behind as well as before me. Resistance, however, would have been madness, had they closed in for a battle. There was evident indecision among these Links as to what they should do, and I was equally at a loss to determine what I most desired with regard to themselves. I now underwent another sensation. Pushing his way through the circle came a fat, waddling fellow, who afforded as great a contrast to the ordinary Links as did the female albino. He was entirely black. As if to render him quite grotesque, his legs were thick and bowed, his stomach was large and glistening, and his head was crowned with a skull, securely tied in place with thongs which passed beneath his chin. But his face was so irresistibly comical, with its broad, good-natured grin, that I smiled in actual forgetfulness of where I was.

At this he approached, holding forth in his hand a luscious fruit, the like of which I had never seen. A murmur plainly of dissent, or warning went up from his companions. Two or three made as if to drag him roughly back by the leg. I fancied I understood him to be an emissary of peace, and therefore deciding instantly that I preferred to be friendly, I took a step forward and held out my hand. With a look of gratitude, mingled with one of suspicious uncertainty, the fat chap gave me the fruit and capered clumsily away, out of possible reach.

Grunts of wonder and perhaps also of relief, greeted my acceptance of this overture of hospitality. The Links settled in their tracks, to see what would happen next, many of them standing with arms akimbo and glancing from me to the giant, rapidly, by which I concluded that he was a chieftain to whom they looked for a final decision of the case. Trusting that the action might create a salutary impression on the audience, I drew my knife from its scabbard and proceeded to cut away the thick, hard rind of the fruit, paying not the slightest attention to the exclamations which followed this exhibition of the sharpness and use of the gleaming blade. When the fruit was peeled, I put the knife away and ate as delicious and juicy a thing as ever a man has known, provoking thereby a feeling of undisguised pleasure in the Links and of apparent ecstasy in the breast of the fat one who had provided the breakfast.

Now, said I, when the thing was gone, who are you fellows, and what do you want? I was surprised at myself for thus addressing this half-ape gathering, but they were smitten temporarily dumb at the sound of my voice. I made a gesture of cordiality and turned completely around in the circle, finally holding both my hands extended to the giant.

The chatter was instantly resumed. One of their words, in a language which seemed to me to be exceedingly limited and primitive, was, as nearly as pen can write it.

Tzheck.

Having caught this I attempted to repeat it, pointing to myself meantime with my thumb, for it occurred to my mind that they called not only myself but also their species by the name, and I desired to assure them I was one of themselves, for at least they were better than no companions in this unknown land.

My action evidently met with approval. They advanced, retreated, pushed each other near and otherwise exhibited a desire to know what I was. But still they had a fear of my presence, although they were now in a mood of timid friendliness. Up to this the chief of the Links had not spoken a word. He now gave a command, or something of the sort, when each of the others raised his club to rest it on his shoulder, as if in readiness to beat me to death in case a necessity should arise. The giant then came boldly up and extending a finger, touched my clothing. The feeling of the cloth caused him to tell something to his followers, all of whom were breathless with attention.

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Thinking I understood his perplexity, I quickly unfastened my coat and shirt, exhibiting the whiter portion of my neck, for the part exposed was tanned very much the colour of his own. This action begot a great enthusiasm, responding to which I pulled my coat off entirely, when the amazement of all was complete. I repeated their word Tzheck again, whereupon they set up a clamorous conversation in monosyllables, among themselves, and came yet closer, the better to place their hands upon me. The impression was borne in upon me that they knew somewhat of what I was, but were puzzled by the clothing I wore.

All this preface to a mutual friendship and understanding, which I much desired as a guarantee of my personal safety, was progressing well when a sudden scream threw all into a state of violent alarm. No sooner did I turn than I beheld the appalling sight of thirty or forty huge, genuine ourang-outangs, descending upon us from the near-by jungle. Two of these had swooped upon the albino female and were struggling to carry her off. I saw the giant nearly smash the head from the shoulders of one, with his iridescent club, and rescue his mate in a second. Then a fierce engagement commenced about me on every side.

It was a horrible conflict. The monster ourangs, half erect, appeared like so many fiends, as they launched themselves in overwhelming numbers on the Links, their mouths drooling, and bristling with fangs, their hatred of the more human creatures expressed by the fury with which they attempted to mangle and murder all the band. The Links, screaming out a word which thrilled me as a battle cry of a courageous few whose fight was all but hopeless, smote lustily with their clubs, sinking the rock-end in many a skull, breaking arms, legs and ribs, yet wasting superlative effort from lack of skill and discipline. Although they fought their foe with more acumen than as many undrilled men could have done, I thought they must fly or all be killed, for the odds were too heavy by far.

In the midst of the uproar and turmoil, of which I had been the centre for a time, a singular snarl, as of triumph, issued from one of the attacking brutes. He had discovered myself. Immediately half a dozen would have rushed upon me, had I not been still somewhat surrounded by the Links. As it was, two ourangs rushed in, headlong, to do me violence.

I had been about to fight for my friends, and therefore held my dagger in my hand. I plunged it quickly in the throat of the beast that gripped my shoulder, nearly severing the creature's head from its body. As he fell I stabbed the other to the heart, but felt so great a rib that I knew I had reached his life by the merest good fortune.

That I then grew hot and eager for blood, I admit. I received the next that came with a lunge which ripped him open entirely across the abdomen. My knowledge of boxing and fencing stood me well. I attacked a monster who was all but killing my fat, good-natured Link, and crashed the steel fairly through the spinal column at the base of his brain. The smell of blood and the flash of that gory knife seemed to affect the attacking brutes with horror. Yet the next ones that came would have killed me outright had not the fat Link beaten out the brains of one and broken the arm of the other, which then was readily despatched.

Seeing the advantage of a club, I clutched up one which an overmastered Link had dropped, and swung it madly. With this and the knife, I not only defended myself but became a champion of the Links as well. The fight, with its din of thuds and animal shrieks and screams of agony, began to concentrate about three Links and myself. A long, hairy arm, with an iron-like hand, was thrust across my shoulder and my throat was in a deadly grip. I dropped the club and slashed my blade across the wrist, severing the stiff, white cords. Then I swung in a blow that buried the steel to the hilt. The brute fell heavily, dragging the knife from my hand. Instantly two more great animals were upon me and over I went, already scratched and slightly bitten. For a moment I struggled in desperation; then a horrible black face came down toward my own, the jaws awide for a fastening on my neck.

Down swept a gleaming streak. The rock-crystal club knocked the face, head and all, away, as if it had been a potato on a stick. Another blow killed my second assailant like a fly might be killed on a window. I bounded up with a club in my hand. The giant Link was beating his way through the foe like a doomsman. With a cry of

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hatred and fear, the remaining ourang-outangs, and many of the wounded, suddenly turned and fled. The battle had been brief and bloody; it had demonstrated a fierceness and power incredible in the Links, a power which, if concentrated and properly employed, would excel that of twice the number of human savages.

I found my knife and pulled it forth from its sheath of flesh. Collecting his following about him with a word, the giant leader touched me on the arm and pointed toward the jungle. The wounded of our force limped from the scene; our dead, who were three in number, were carried by those who were still unhurt. With the albino mate of the chief I walked away, surrounded by the chattering Links, whose conduct toward me, I was sure, was that of a friendly people. The fat fellow was next to idiotic in his gratitude for the stroke which had saved his life.

I had fought with them, bled with them, eaten of their food and endeavoured to show them my good intentions and wishes toward themselves. They were manifestly aware of all. I felt strongly drawn to the singular beings, alone with them and dependent upon them; I felt that for weal or woe I was at least a temporary companion to, if not an integral part of, a band of Missing Links.

CHAPTER III. THE HOME OF THE LINKS

FILLED with strange sensations, thus to find myself in the midst of a company so extraordinary, I kept my appointed place in the march, looking about me in an effort to discover what manner of country it was into which I had dropped. I wondered what I should do to get back to civilisation, and how this could be accomplished, and when.

About us the jungle closed in thickly. Huge trees, gigantic flowers and creepers, hanging like intertwined serpents, and with others like the cables of incompleated suspension-bridges, convinced me at once of the tropical nature of the land. We were walking in a rude sort of trail, which I concluded had been formed by some ponderous animal, for the growth had been smashed down or beaten and trampled aside.

This trail became uncertain, in the gloom, for soon the light was almost entirely obscured by the super-abundant verdure. Had any of the Links meditated treachery, or to take advantage of me while unprepared, this jungle darkness would have afforded an exceptional opportunity; but on the contrary my fat friend waddled actively before me, clearing the way of branches, and the person next behind me was the albino female herself. Nevertheless I was grateful for a glimpse of light, now and again, which gave a promise that beyond we should find something less forbidding. During this march I noted how silently the Links glided onward, how lightly they stepped and how alert they were at every sound, in that silent region of growing and prowling things.

Thus we finally emerged from the forest, into an opening of limited extent. Here I noted fruit-trees and evidence of former occupation on the part, I thought, of the Links, but they left the place behind, to plunge again through the jungle. A shorter trudge brought us out of the trees once more, at the foot of a hill of no considerable height. This hill we commenced to ascend.

At last I could see for a distance about me. The prospect was disappointing, almost bewildering. Instead of a glimpse of the ocean, which I had thoroughly expected to get, I saw nothing but hills and valleys, clothed endlessly with the dense, luxuriant growth peculiar to the equatorial zone, all of it seeming to breathe of heavy blossoms, heat and the moisture from the universal green. The solitary exception! to this condition of verdure was a bare hill, not half a mile away, green in spots, but evidently volcanic in origin.

At the edge of the forest we had quitted, a thousand monkeys appeared to swing from the branches, into existence and then to sway back again and disappear. A snake glided off in the rank grass; a flock of birds, decked in brilliant raiment, arose with a great confusion of flapping wings and inharmonious cries. I believed myself to be on an island, perhaps of the greater Sunda group, but there was nothing in the visible world, either to confirm or

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to deny my theory. I felt that the sea, which had swallowed Ford and which had so nearly been a grave for myself, was in reality my best friend, but lost completely, and in which direction who should say?

Soon I observed that the hill we were climbing was a sort of terraced mountain, low and broad. As we neared its summit it widened out, revealing endless features of beauty and natural provision. It was wooded with trees in great variety, many of them over-laden with fruits and nuts; springs of water bubbled forth from bowers of vines and ferns; birds and game abounded on every side; and its surface rolled sufficiently to comprise not only hummocks and swales but also ravines and walls of rock as well.

As we reached the edge of the largest clearing I had seen, a chorus of cries arose from the further side. Immediately the woods disgorged a great collection of Links, young, old, male, female, and babies. All were similar to those about me, save that the children were more like little chimpanzees, running about frequently on all fours, swinging upward to the branches of the trees and otherwise exhibiting animal spirits.

More than a hundred of these inhabitants came running and walking toward us. Many of the males bore clubs, of the usual pattern, while the youths were to be distinguished not only by their looks of immaturity, but also by the undersized weapons in their hands, not a few of which were like toys. Of the whole population, none wore the slightest suggestion of clothing, excepting the female albino, mentioned before. What a lot of terra-cotta gorilla men and women they were, as they dashed out to meet us!

I found it difficult to be calm as they bore down upon us, yet I was forced to note what magnificent action was shown in their movements. A tremendous excitement arose among them when they had me surrounded. Evidently emboldened by what they were told of my nature, by my captors, yet timid and suspicious of what I might do if aroused, they presented a singular study of primitive curiosity and caution. The women were bolder than the men, a condition of fearlessness which I attribute to the fact that, like the animals, the males never fought with the females nor struck them for what they did. These females, however, although to be classified with animals because of this immunity from punishment by the men, presently exhibited the rudimentary modesty noted before in the conduct of the chief's mate, which was distinctly a human thing. But this diffidence was not so great as their natural desire to investigate, and they plucked at my coat and trousers before many of the newly met males among the number dared to come so near.

The chief having continued to stalk ahead, we all made more or less progress toward the place whence the Links had come. In all the chatter I could occasionally distinguish the word Tzheck, and this I again repeated, smiling and nodding as I walked. The creatures amused me, for I now began to note certain characteristics that made a distinction between one and another. Thus, one of the females carried a large baby. She was a sharp-featured person, who employed one of her hands to brush a straggling wisp of hair from her eye, and the baby as constantly dragged this wisp again from behind her ear. Another was an old woman, obviously deaf, for she placed her hand behind her ear to listen, and she nodded and grinned in the way of people who catch but fragments of a conversation. With this chattering, scampering escort I came to what was evidently the camp of the tribe. This was marked, principally by the trampled condition of the earth and the number of lively babies about, on the ground and in the lower branches of the trees. There was a large cave in a wall or terrace of rock. This was apparently used for purposes of sleeping under cover, or of other protection when needed. Into this place, the dead of the band were carried. There was no exhibition of grief, however, and indeed no one seemed to take any special interest in the corpses. There were no constructed shelters about, no signs of permanency nor of provision for the morrow. Except for one thing I might now have hesitated to place the creatures above the highest order of animals, but this one thing was conclusive. They made fire.

Animals may live together in a colony, and even inhabit caves or burrows of their own digging, but the animal will always be animal until he starts a blaze and cooks his food.

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Their fire at that moment was merely a smouldering heap of ashes and charred ends of wood; there were no utensils about, no suggestions of a meal in process of cooking. Presently, however, an old female who muttered to herself and who paid no attention to me nor to any of the excitement, threw fuel on the embers and blew up a flame, after which several Links borrowed a burning brand with which to start other fires in various places. Soon thereafter a desultory cooking—bee commenced, each cook providing for himself.

Their process was crude; it consisted merely in spitting a raw piece of meat on a stick and thrusting it into the blaze, or the coals, according to the fancy of the chef in question. When this meat began to burn, the hungry Link blew it, to cool it a trifle, bit out the smoked and barely heated spot, and ate it greedily, the while he or she thrust the remaining piece in the heat for another bit of roasting.

The interest in myself had in no wise abated. The majority of the Links who had not been of the discovering party, having thrown aside their clubs, surrounded me still and placed their inquisitive hands on my shoes and clothing. My knife was a source of awe and wonder. Its bloody handle only was visible, yet scores of those who had not been present at the fight listened with manifest amazement to what I knew to be primitive tales of my prowess, and to explanations of the uses to which I put the weapon. Even the children, the greater part of whom were as shy as little foxes, gave over their play to stand behind the trees and behind their elders, from which places of safety they peered at me with shifty, bright eyes. One little monkey—like chap gave no heed to anything but a noise he was making by clattering several small empty sea—shells together with all his power and possible speed.

I missed my comical Link, whom I had mentally nicknamed Fatty. He now appeared with an armful of fruits, and laid them down at my feet. There were cocoa—nuts, a melon (papaw), mangoes and other things of which I never learned the names. Being exceedingly hungry I assailed these refreshments with vigour, to the intense delight of all. Fatty disappeared again, returning soon with a bird, half plucked, ungutted and warm. He stabbed it on a stick, borrowed some fire and gave me the morsel to cook to my liking.

Without thinking, I glanced about for a pot or a skillet. In a second I realized the hopelessness of the situation. The incident served to set me thinking. I was lost in a land of which I knew nothing; I was safe, apparently, in the company of a tribe of Missing Links; I might not be able to escape from the place very soon and therefore I must rely upon myself, if I were to have anything like comforts, either of food or shelter. It was a situation to be pondered, carefully. It would certainly be folly to attempt to leave these creatures, with whom perhaps I might be able to exist for a time, without first acquiring a knowledge as to where lay the sea—coast. I should not only be lost in the jungle at once, if I started away, but I should doubtless be an immediate prey to prowling brutes. Yet already I began to feel as if I had stayed there too long and as if I ought to be starting for home, or back to a land peopled by human beings. I could not imagine myself accepting the company of these creatures seriously, nor of remaining long where they were.

The present moment, however, was the most immediately important. I was too hungry to be appeased by fruits alone, but I felt no desire to eat scorched bird. As I looked about, a novel idea was suggested to my brain. Striding forward I picked up a fine large shell which had doubtless once been occupied by something like a giant scallop near the small ones with which the baby Link was playing. This I washed out at a near—by spring, and filled with water. Then I placed it on the ground and propping it up with stones, conveyed some fire beneath it, to heat the water. The bird was speedily prepared, and cut into bits, after which I held out my hand for more.

The Links had all abandoned their several pursuits to crowd about. They were eager to see what would happen. Fatty was inordinately tickled. He ran clumsily off, with others, and brought me three more birds and the meat of some small animal, already in the larder. I was not at all sure that my shell would do for a kettle, as I feared the heat would make it crack or scale off in pieces. It did crackle, as if about to split, but the water soon began to sizzle at the edges and was nicely boiling by the time I was ready. All my meat went in, and then I longed for a few potatoes and a bit of salt. However, I was gratified exceedingly by the whiffs of steam which floated away, and I thought of numerous things which I must soon devise.

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Before my dinner was sufficiently done, I speared out pieces and found them good, especially the birds. Then to Fatty and also to the chief who with his albino mate had watched proceedings with flattering attention I gave pieces of the meat to try. The exclamations had been numerous when the water boiled; the Links were silent now until the leader had tasted and uttered a doubtful verdict, when grunts, eager questions and sounds of peculiar laughter ensued. Bits of boiled dinner were sought by many of the bolder fellows, after which I was obliged to laugh myself, for a dozen new fires were started and over each a Link or two prepared a piece of meat in their usual manner. Evidently stew was not to their taste.

CHAPTER IV. A RECONNOITRE

WHETHER the fruit I had eaten produced a soporific effect, or whether I was physically exhausted by my recent experience in the balloon and the subsequent events, is more than I know, but in the heat of that day, in the camp of the Links, I grew so drowsy that sleep was not to be resisted. For at least forty-eight hours and perhaps for sixty, or more, I had not so much as taken off my shoes. Feeling confident of the friendly attitude of the tribe of creatures, I finally removed nearly all of my clothing, made a bed in the shade of a tree and sank at once into dreamless slumber. The last thing I remembered was that Fatty had taken up a position near by, much as a faithful dog might do, to watch against intrusion. Necessarily my every movement had been observed by a large and appreciative audience of Links.

In the late afternoon I awoke, amazingly refreshed. Such a chattering and game of chase was in progress that I sat up abruptly. Every stitch of the clothing with which I had covered myself, had disappeared. In a moment I beheld it, then, in fragments. The male Links all but Fatty had gone off on some expedition, but the females were there in force and these had appropriated coat, vest, trousers and shoes. My trousers were occupied by two different ladies, one of whom had a half, pulled wrong side out. She wore it jauntily on her arm, while the other had both her feet inside the other portion, and was consequently falling down at every movement, thereby furnishing no end of enthusiasm in her efforts at marching on dress-parade. My vest had become a breech-clout, ripped up the back. Evidently instinct suggests robbing the legs, for my coat was employed in this manner by a female of peculiarly thin proportions. Her inordinate vanity, begotten of the attention she attracted, was quite human, as also was the savage jealousy of other females who made ineffectual efforts to rip the article off for themselves.

The fate of my shoes concerned me more than anything else, for my feet were too tender for tramping about without protection, not to speak of the risk incurred from the presence of poisonous snakes.

Here, I shouted, bring me those things, you critters!

They started in alarm at my voice, but none made a move to restore my property. I then discovered one of my shoes suspended on the breast of the tall albino woman, hung about her neck by the laces. The other had fallen to the lot of perfidious Fatty, who, having put it on his foot, heel foremost, was hopping about on one leg only, while he held the other, more precious, booted leg as high as possible, and pounded on his great glistening stomach as if executing an eccentric dance to his own music.

I strode over the ground gingerly, clad in a shirt, and the belt with the knife about my waist, going first to the dancer, whom I bowled on his back and divested of the shoe, literally before he could say Jack Robinson. After that I jerked the other shoe from the neck of the female so quickly that she ran away in alarm to the cave. This latter action incited a show of incipient resentment on the part of the old female who muttered to herself. But inasmuch as she beheld some of the other guilty creatures divest themselves of sundry pieces of my wardrobe and flee, leaving them on the ground, she conceived an idea of the respect my knife had engendered in the tribe. She therefore stood sullenly watching me as I made shift to put on my shoes, a pair of leggings and a loin cloth, which I hastily constructed of the pieces left of my pantaloons.

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The lady with my coat had quickly climbed a tree to avoid being obliged to deliver the garment. Fatty, bearing no resentment and being obviously devoted to my interests, gave chase. Although the female proved the more agile of the two, she fell into the clutches of another of her sex and between them they tore the coat all in shreds many of which Fatty finally brought to my feet with excessive demonstrations of pride.

By the time my toilet was complete, nearly all the females were up in the trees, looking down upon me with nervous, questioning eyes. I reflected how fortunate it was that they were at least partially human, for their strength was enormous and had they been unreasoning animals, and therefore ferocious, they might easily have rended me to pieces for less exasperation than I had already given.

I felt ill at ease as it was; I began to be restless, worried, eager to be gone. Where had the wind-driven balloon landed me, I wondered? What course had I best pursue? What would these Links do, or attempt to do if I sought to leave? I could not remain here, under any circumstances, I said to myself. Think how absurd it would be to live with a lot of Missing Links!

From where I stood I could see the peak of the volcanic mountain, less than half an hour's journey away. Instantly I made up my mind to visit this eminence and get my bearings. I might be able to see the ocean itself; if I could, then the sooner I made a bee-line for the coast the better for me.

There was considerable excitement among the women when I started away. They had doubtless been instructed to keep me there in safety till the return of the males. Fatty made an eloquent verbal protest, singularly plain to comprehend, although the words were the merest gibberish, but seeing that I intended to be master of my actions, he followed anxiously at my heels. Fortunately there was open country between the camp and the volcanic pile. Nevertheless the way was not all of grass and flowers, for we were obliged to fight our way through narrow belts of trees and vines and to scale the sides of several chasms, all but one of which had been formed, apparently, by earthquakes of the greatest violence. In the one exception, which was the bed of an ancient river, I saw much evidence of mineral deposits, chiefly iron. Strewed along here, in the sand, were bright, crystalline formations which I recognised presently as being pyrites of iron. Afterward I thought of these, having remembered that with this stuff and flint, a spark of fire may be procured quite readily. None of the mineral features held my attention above a moment, however, the peak being the objective point of my march.

It is difficult for me to express the feverish anxiety I felt to mount the summit of that hill. It seemed as if everything depended on what I should see from the elevation. Half way up the slope, which was not at all steep, my weight broke away the top of a ledge of crumbling stuff, which proved to be sulphur of great purity. I had never seen a deposit of natural sulphur before, although I had read of mines of the mineral on volcanoes of Mexico, notably Popocatepetl. I merely placed a bit in the pocket of my shirt and went on. Further up, my attention was attracted by innumerable fragments of glass-like substance, with dark, smoky lines woven through, in the form of a rude feather. Such stuff had often come to my notice on the mountains of Nevada, where, as boys, we called it flint, erroneously, I afterwards was informed. A few pieces of this I likewise placed in my pocket, but my main desire was to hurry upward.

We reached the summit, from which all traces of the crater had disappeared, through lapse of time since the last eruption, and there my heart sank within me. There was no sight nor sign of the sea on all the wide horizon. Far and away below me lay the dark, undulating cloth-of-green, jungle after jungle and range after range of densely wooded hills. In one direction, about forty miles away, were mountains of greater height than the one I was on. These tempted me to hurry onward toward their peaks, but I knew how vain was such a desire. To the eastward I caught a glimpse of a shimmering lake, hedged about with forest which I knew to be practically impenetrable.

All this panorama was marvellously beautiful, but for me beauty was mockery. I stood as good a chance to fly over the hills and trees to the sea as I did of reaching the coast by tramping across the country. I realized that without a guide and a force of resolute, hard-working men, loyal, and afraid of nothing, escape was a dream a

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hope as fatal as a will-o'-the-wisp.

Nevertheless I determined that I would regain the world I had left in such an amazing manner. Wild dreams of enslaving the tribe of Missing Links, whom I should make my warriors, and who would then escort me to the coast, danced through my brain. Prodigious schemes for accomplishing some superhuman feat which was wholly vague and constructed of air made me twitch with nervous energy. It seemed as if I ought to be able to grasp something big to force the marvellous to come to my aid. Then the reaction of despair succeeded; all my intangible ideas mocked me with their silliness. I felt inconceivably helpless. The enormity of the tropical hedge by which I was completely surrounded a hedge alive with venomous snakes, doubtless with tigers, with droves of savage beasts, and with perhaps more savage men, this arose in my brain as a picture which made me ill with dread.

Great Scott! I finally said aloud, to myself, are you such a miserable coward, then? By gracious no! There must be some way there has to be a way! Hang it, at the worst a man can merely die!

This speech, which startled Fatty not a little, gave me a new sort of courage. I began to think of things I must do to live, and of plans I must formulate to explore the country. I nearly forgot that my lot had been cast with the singular man-gorillas, but this was presently thrust upon my notice by Fatty, who made a noise very like to whining, to indicate his uneasiness and desire to return to the camp. The sun was nearly set. I fancied I saw something move, in a tangle far below, but concluded this something was merely a shadow.

All right, Fatty, said I, and we started down the hill.

CHAPTER V. HOSTILE NEIGHBOURS

DOUBTLESS I grew absorbed in thinking, as we made our way to the base of the hill, for I was startled by a singular cry from the Link.

What I saw confused me for a moment. Three Links, taller than any except the chief of the tribe I had joined, were darting toward us with the wildest of gestures, three Links as black as tar. Inasmuch as Fatty was nearly as dark as they, and considering the treatment I had already received, I felt no alarm and failed to comprehend what the situation meant.

Like a leopard for quickness, Fatty darted away, uttering sounds of fright. Instantly one of the Links approaching started on his trail in hot pursuit, a club in his hand which was glinting with colour in the rays of the setting sun. I was surprised and somewhat amused as I saw the clever Fatty elude the larger creature and gain the trees. Once in the cover he swung himself upward and out of sight with all the agility of a monkey.

Suddenly the two I had failed to watch were upon me. I was thrown down, pinioned to the ground a second and then dragged up, hastily. Then the pair began to hustle me off with astonishing force and with method in their frenzy, for they attempted to get me away as nearly unharmed as possible.

Here! I cried in a moment, endeavouring to check my progress, let go of me you devil!

I had hardly noted their faces, but now, as I struggled, I saw that the two were tremendously like a pair of burly Negroes. That they were Links, as much as the others were, that indeed they belonged to the very same species and genus, there could be no doubt, but they were as widely differentiated from my Links as a black ant is from one that is red.

I jerked myself loose from the grip of one, by losing a part of my shirt, and struck him a blow on the point of his

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jaw that laid him flat on his back, stunned and helpless. I was annoyed by the liberties the}' were taking, more than angered or rendered desperate. I therefore kicked the other in the stomach and beheld him double like a hinge. A chorus of cries arose at this and I looked about to discover ten or a dozen more of the fellows, all black, swarming up the slope to assist their friends.

At that moment the third one, who had ceased pursuing Fatty and returned, launched himself upon me from the rear and bore me down. Fight as I would, he was the equal in strength of three of my build and easily kept me on the ground till four of the others, quickly followed by their companions, rushed to the scene and secured my arms and legs.

There was no resentment, as far as I could determine, for the blows I had given the two. The pair, in fact, soon regained their senses and breath, respectively, and joined their kind, in a dazed and half-hearted manner. I was aware that I was being considerably handled, though roughly, to be sure, and was quite unable to think of a reason, until the fellows began again to convey me away. I realised then that they were actually abducting me and proceeding straight away from the camp I had left. Had I been a thing of rare value and highly prized by the creatures, they could not have acted with more care to avoid inflicting an injury on my body, nor with more resolution in their obvious plan to carry me away to their own retreat.

In the midst of the Babel of tongues and confusion of getting me across a chasm, to which we came with surprising promptness, a cry resounded through the cleft, and instantly a force of the red Links leaped down on top of the Blacks and commenced a furious attack. I was dropped as if I had been a cumbersome rock, but landing on my feet and clearing myself of the scrambling fellows, who shot forward to meet the onslaught of the Reds, I whipped out my knife, prepared to defend myself at any cost and to fight for my friends, if I mingled at all in the fray.

The battle with the huge ourangs had been hot enough, but this present combat exceeded all bounds, in the rage of the creatures pitted against each other. I could see at once that Reds and Blacks were old-time foes, as sure to fight on contact as are the different coloured ants. They smote at one another with the wildest ferocity. Club crashed on stone, and rock thudded fearfully on skull and ribs, till blood splashed widely about the place and heads were pulp.

It had all occurred with surprising abruptness. The contending bands were inextricably mixed; they surged together and swayed from wall to wall of the chasm, yelling defiance, snarling in wrath, groaning with agony. The crunch of bones and the thuds of those terrible clubs against naked flesh were awful to hear, yet the fight was such a whirlwind of action that no one thing could hold the attention a second, where deaths and mighty actions, and the crude but deadly club-play made a picture of such close-knit battle.

One second I noted the great chief of the Reds mow down two of the Blacks at a single swing of his blood-painted, light-flashing club of crystal; the next I noted how like the writhing of a snake was the death contraction of one of my friendly Links. Then the flash of a club swinging quickly to its living cushion of ribs and flesh made a brilliant streak against the background of dusky forms. I saw that the head of this weapon was a massive nugget of gold. In that second I also detected a movement from the corner of my eye where *a*. black creature, wounded and desperate, was rising up, club in hand, to strike me down. It flashed upon me instantly that the Blacks, if they could not possess me themselves, would rather I were dead than allied with their enemies.

I was standing with my back to the wall, willing to see fair play, but too wise to become entangled in that medley of physical giants. The treachery now revealed made me angry in a second. The smell of fight in my nostrils had been working on my animal nature; a pin-prick would have been sufficient to arouse all my human frenzy for slaying. I turned about, burning with wrath, and had no more than struck down the wounded monster than three others leaped to perform the office in which he had failed. A reeking club was swinging in toward my head like a shot from a cannon. I dived below its line of motion and drove home my knife with all the lust of vengeance. My

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falling antagonist tripped and overtopped—the second, destroyed the blow he was about to aim and made him an easy mark for the dripping rock—crystal that crushed his shoulder and part of his neck to a boneless mass. The third met another of my friends and beat him down, only to be killed himself a second later.

Shrieks of agony had rent the air and screams of rage and yells of triumph made discord as a number of the black Links now fled abruptly down the chasm to escape. And the fellow with the nugget club turned to hurl his defiance and to shake his reddened fist at me, as I stood on a rock in a circle of my friends: The cause of the Reds I had made my cause; I had slain a Black. The feud between these warring tribes included myself. I had created deadly enemies in the land of Missing Links.

CHAPTER VI. LANGUAGE AND WEAPONS

THE darkness had begun to descend before we reached the camp, plainly causing anxiety to the Links, who were hindered on the march by the burden of several dead members of the tribe. Various sounds issued from the jungle, where brutes that eat flesh in the night were beginning to prowl. Doubtless no few of these smelled the blood that laded the wind which was sweeping down through the chasm.

I thought of all this and meditated much also on my peculiar situation. Why these two opposing bands of Missing Links should so desire myself as a prize as to fight with such fatal results, was a puzzle too deep for solution, considering that I had been treated by both parties in a manner far from being inimical to my safety. Were they cannibals, I asked myself, did they desire me for a dinner? Manifestly such was not the case, inasmuch as no man—eating creatures should be expected to be so moderate as to permit me to live in freedom as long as I had lived already in their settlement. No, their purpose involved something more permanent.

There was no end to the chatter as we hastened home. Though I failed to understand this, yet the gestures were easy to interpret. Reason also made it plain that Fatty, when he fled from my side and escaped the Blacks, had darted toward the camp to give the alarm, meeting on the way the Links who had come to the rescue, they having started beforehand on information furnished by the females, who had watched us start toward the peak.

I recapitulated the results of my exploration. I was hopelessly lost, as far as any human beings were concerned. I was in the hands of friendly creatures, more primitive than the lowest mortal. My only chance of escape lay in cultivating the friendly feelings and in endeavouring to understand my companions, with a view to inducing a force, later on, to accompany myself on a march across the country to the sea. Incidentally I had much to do to keep myself partially civilised. I must fashion tools, in the use of which the Links must be instructed. We were surrounded by dangerous animals, and we had a powerful enemy, the force of whose numbers might be greater than our own. This would mean that I must make our tribe superior, and arm them with a better class of weapons. Fortunately the country promised to be one of great resources. Yet the only tool I had with which to start was my knife.

I thought of the endless array of implements of war and peace to be had in the poorest modern community. Such meditation being idle, I reflected how glad I would be to hammer out my own requisites from the crude iron, but this was equally vain. In short my thoughts came tumbling down the age of iron and the age of bronze, as if I had fallen back through time and history, to land at the very age of stone itself. Here I must work with stone for hammers, axes, drills and even for an anvil, supposing I had my white-hot metal ready to forge into shape, for there was nothing else to be had.

All this made me excited, eager to be at work. I was forgetful of all that it meant, as my brain pictured stage after stage of this new development, but when a cool night wind blew across my half-clothed body, I was aroused from my reverie and confronted by a pitiless array of facts. I then foresaw personal suffering, mayhap a miserable death, and toil and disappointment, before I could wrest even something small from the list of Nature, while I

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should have about me a tribe of semi-animal beings, fighting constantly for a bare existence. My hope and fate were rapidly being entangled with the lives and fates of these extraordinary creatures.

Before we reached the camp, the glow of fires shone brightly through the trees. The Links had learned the use of a lively blaze in keeping off the beasts of prey. I wondered how they had first started their fire, admitting that I should doubtless find no end of trouble if I were obliged to kindle one myself, without a match.

We were met by a large and enthusiastic band of the males, with Fatty in their midst. His capers, at seeing me whole and hearty, were enough to shake an ordinary individual to pieces. He made me ponder on another peculiar thing. How did it happen that he, being black, was not only living among the Reds, but was also at feud with the fellows of his colour? I made up my mind that he was either a freak, like the albino, born in the tribe, or else that he had been captured when a baby, and reared away from his kind. It was certain the black Links recognised a foe in the fellow, whatever his pedigree and blood.

Having conceived an idea, I was glancing about at the trees revealed by the glow of the fires, when I discovered a growth of stuff wherein there was a large portion dead and dry. Going to this, amid evident protest and questionings on the part of many Links, I took out my knife and cut away some likely looking branches. The wood I found to be exceedingly tough. It was hard work to get what I wanted. On bending it over, in an effort to break it off, where my cut had been made, I found it to be exceptionally elastic and stubborn, although I could see it had been dead and seasoned for many months. Getting out a long straight shaft, half as large as my wrist, and several other straight pieces a trifle larger than a pencil, I brought it all to the circle about the fire.

The Links, who were much excited over recent events, watched my every movement with the gravest concern. I faced them and attempted to convey, by signs and pantomime that I intended to make a bow and several arrows with which I could kill six of the number in the briefest time. They understood enough to be highly amused and delighted. There were an incredible number of things they did and said of which the meaning was clear, and with comparative ease I made Fatty understand that I wished him to boil me a dinner in the way he had seen me do already.

Fatty, I believe, was one of the most intelligent of all the Links. He made blunders enough in doing what I wished, while I tried to keep at work on my bow, yet he was insanely anxious to do me any favour and crazy with delight at being considered worthy of employment. Dinner cooking went forward again in the same desultory manner I had noted before, but a large majority of the Links sat or stood about me in the semi-darkness, seeming more than ever like apes as they glanced about with their nervous, round eyes, chattered their monkey-like language, and released the muscles of their long, uncanny arms. The glow that was tossed from the fire, making silhouettes of many an astounding red statue, painted a weird picture that night beneath the trees.

As I looked in their faces, many of them drawn with the first vague efforts of thinking, I beheld strange, fleeting promise of things to be, dim lights, as it were, of ambitions desire to grasp a something just beyond their mental capacity. Many seemed awed by the simple sight of that knife, cutting away the stubborn wood in thin, smooth shavings, as it flashed in the light.

I put my finger on the blade. Knife, I said, knife.

A few, including Fatty, attempted to repeat the word. A chorus of peculiar laughter followed and the spell of awe was gone. As I worked, then, I pointed to various things and gave the name in English. There was not even one of the Links who failed to comprehend that I was making an effort to establish a means of communication between us, but a very few only tried my easy lessons. Fatty, however, was quite willing to make a fool of himself, for he essayed everything, manfully. But better than this, the fellow attempted to reciprocate the favour. Thus when I had given a name to the blazing pieces of wood he waited a moment and then pointing to it earnestly said, distinctly:

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Ouch.

Then he pantomimed burning his finger, and jerked it back, saying Ouch again. He made it plain that the fire would hurt if touched, that a Link would cry ouch at the smart, and that therefore a fire was named for this cry. When I proved that this much Link language was mine beyond a doubt, the ecstasy of my fat friend was most extravagant. Gratified with his effort, he soon made me acquainted with the names of a number of articles. These names were invariably chosen in a manner analogous to the one by which they had arrived at ouch for fire. For instance, a gurgle, impossible to set down in letters, was the name for water; a sound like a thud meant a club; an audible breath through the lips, (wind), signified a tree. Manifestly such words as these defy all efforts at spelling. I found them difficult to imitate, for the throat was largely employed to make the noises and my tongue seemed to be very much in the way. I tried my best, as I worked out my first crude bow, and when I had finished my dinner I felt that no little progress had been made toward a better understanding all around.

Inasmuch as there was more need for haste than there was for finish on my weapon, I made short work of tapering off the ends of my bow and cutting the notches. I then prepared several arrows, somewhat clumsy, but still fairly straight, after which I feathered them all, roughly, and attempted to break some of the glass-like flints, I had found that day, into shapes that would pass for arrow-heads. This was a most unsuccessful business. An accident formed the only piece which by any stretch of the imagination could be conceived as what I desired. This I bound at the tip of a shaft, with cord similar to that which the Links employed on their clubs, but it was hopelessly awkward. Being then provided with more of their string, I bent my bow and had the satisfaction of seeing that it was fairly symmetrical in form and amazingly stout. Indeed, it broke the string, and I feared it had split at the sudden release, but this was not the case. In excitement and admiration, the Links now furnished me with a stouter cord, a cleverly twisted deer-gut, or tendon, which was nearly perfection for the purpose.

Fitting my pointed arrow on the string and bidding the Links stand aside, I drew it as far as I could and let it drive at the nearest tree. The twang that followed gave me a thrill of delight, as always it had done in the days of my youth, and I felt a gush of pride in my veins when the shaft stood quivering in the bark, its head so deeply buried that the greatest effort to drag it out merely broke it short off in the hands of the giant chief.

The Links knew not whether to be alarmed or delighted. Again I placed a shaft on the string. This time I signed for silence and turned the arrow straight up toward the star-dappled sky, to give my friends a rough idea of the height to which the wooden messenger would climb. In the absolute silence I drew even further than before. With a swish the arrow sprang from the humming string and disappeared like a bullet as it cleaved the upper darkness, near the trees.

I threw up my hand for continued silence. In eager expectation we waited. Beat, beat, beat, went my heart as the seconds were multiplied, the long stillness proclaiming the distance to which the arrow had sped. Longer became the time; I was thrilled with pleasure and surprise myself; it seemed as if the shaft never would return. How still was the night for that minute; not a breath was stirring.

Suddenly there was a swish a plunk! as the leaf of a palm was punctured, and then a quick, incisive plith! as the shaft was driven forcibly home in the earth. It had come down about ten good strides away!

We hastened in a body to find it. There it was, standing straight as a line, stabbed six inches deep in the sod and roots of grasses, and marvel of accidental things! impaled upon it, half way up its length, was a bat, transfixed in action, still holding in its mouth an unswallowed moth.

Circumstance had completely eclipsed my humble skill, for this miracle of chance made me at once a species of god and devil, in the eyes of my wonder-smitten companions.

CHAPTER VII. IMPORTANT DISCOVERIES

IN the morning I witnessed a primitive ceremony, the burial of the dead, killed in our latest battle.

The ones who had been despatched by the savage ourang-outangs had been buried the day before, while I lay asleep beneath the trees.

The males proceeded, this morning, to a rocky gulch, not far from the camp, where the soil was largely of gravel and bits of stuff which I thought indicated a chalk formation below. Here they began to dig as if their lives depended on their speed, all of them scratching out the dirt with powerful, claw-like hands and sending it flying behind them, between their legs. In fact, they dug like so many dogs.

It was surprising how soon they had excavated a great hole, but they kept at it, hard and fast, taking turns, as if they had learned that depth was the only virtue of any vault for the dead. Chunks of rock flew out, with lesser debris, and some of the pebbles being smooth and round, I gathered half a dozen as large as a mango and pushed off the dampish soil adhering about them. This revealed their colour, which was chalkish white. I could not rely upon my limited knowledge of geological formations, yet I thought the pebbles looked very like chalcedony.

On a large rock, with another for a hammer, I struck one of my pebbles, when it split most neatly in twain. The inside had a moist appearance the like of which I had never noted before, but it was decidedly like flint, and I was therefore confirmed in my classification. Well satisfied with myself, I struck a half again, when I succeeded in splitting off a thin, flat section. Astonished at the manner in which this substance broke, I selected a neater hammer from among the rocks and began to knock off chips from my fragment, and almost before I could believe it myself, I had a crude arrow-head of which I felt I need not be ashamed. I was thoroughly amazed. Had I discovered a stone which lent itself peculiarly to chipping, or had I stumbled upon some flint in a natural condition for being worked? I remembered to have heard of rock which certain savages notably those of Alaska take from the earth while moist, in which condition they carve it with ease, and which subsequently grows as hard as glass. I wondered if this were not a similar material. Also I reasoned that savages must always have had some flint which was capable of being worked with the poorest of tools and by persons of no intellectual attainments, for all had made arrow-heads from the year of one.

In my zeal, I split the original pebble into six thin slabs, nearly all of them as regular as if I had cut them with a knife. These I wrought at with feverish eagerness. Too much haste soon ruined one for any purpose, but out of the others I got several heads, which should have been better, but which made me ready to dance with joy, for they suggested such wonderful possibilities, when care and patience and better tools should be employed.

I had quite forgotten the burial, but looked up from my hammer-hunting in time to see the stiffened bodies of the Links, who had given their lives in the fray, go rolling down to the bottom of the grave where they lay, looking terribly human. Then without even a moment's pause, for regret or touch of reverent feeling, the Links above turned their backs upon the bodies and began to scratch the dirt once more into place. A pang of sympathy welled up in my breast, for the brave fellows so lightly considered. I breathed a little hope that their rest might be that of peace.

Before the hole was full I had gathered together a lot of the pebbles. Later we all piled rocks on the grave till no animal of the jungle could have dug out the bodies in a week. I signified then that I wished my geological collection carried to camp, and this was accordingly done.

On arriving at the cave, I selected a rock for an anvil and others for tools, for a fit of work was on me. Fruits gave me breakfast enough. I chipped away rapidly, with never-ending astonishment at the rapid results achieved. It was easy even to indicate to Fatty and to one or two others what they could do to promote the manufacture of

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needed things. They were able to cleave the pebbles with reasonable accuracy and skill. I then made them understand that I wished the smaller pebbles split into thin slices and the larger ones into sections that were thicker.

I make no pretence that my arrow-heads were as fine as many a primitive man has fashioned in ages past, but at least they were sharp and provided with shanks for binding them to arrows and, what is more to the purpose, they accumulated fast. Of the longer pieces of flint I formed a number of spear-heads and knives. Some of these latter would doubtless have been as well named had I called them saws. With some pieces I made what I mentally dubbed experimental hatchets. All these things, as fast as made, were placed in the large sea-shell, which answered well as a receptacle.

Without interrupting my labours I managed to convey to the marvelling Links that I needed more of the wood for bows, arrows and handles. How they would manage to cut this material was more than I knew, yet I reasoned that inasmuch as they must have cut the handles of their clubs, they could do the work by some means or other. Their method surprised me. They built a fire near the place where I had cut the branch for the bow, and getting a peculiar hard wood into a glowing state, pressed the incandescent surface against the limbs desired, and then by blowing, burned them off, not rapidly, but with great neatness. The fiery brand passed through the wood much as a red-hot iron might in the hands of a smith.

We were an enthusiastic lot that morning, I directing and working at my flints, some preparing cords, many scraping handles with bits of the glass-like material I had found, and with which they were already familiar, while others bound my hatchets to hafts, rudely finished, and knife blades to smaller odds and ends of wood. It was remarkable how readily they grasped the meaning of various things. Their exclamations of surprise and acknowledgment of the virtue of our growing arsenal frequently suggested to me a something as if the fellows were surprised at the real simplicity of all and were wondering why they had never done the like before.

After three or four hours the heat of the sun became so great, on my unprotected head, that I abandoned the pebbles long enough to construct a makeshift for a hat. For this I employed some palm leaves, excellently suited to the purpose. The chief eyed all our business with something of a look of sullen disdain. Perhaps it was jealousy beginning to work. He held to his precious club of rock-crystal which certainly gleamed with great beauty in the rays of sunlight piercing through the leaves as if it were the all in all that a warrior should require. At his side was a fawning fellow whom I had marked before as lazy, small-headed and much too fond of grinning, in a manner which conveyed no idea of mirth nor good-nature, but which, on the contrary, threw his teeth into disgusting prominence.

At about noon, when I was cramped and tired, from my close application to the work, I was glad to see a small detachment of our number returning from an excursion in quest of meat. It was not until a subsequent time that I learned how they drove their game into pits, to replenish the larder, but this day I inaugurated a new system of cooking. It was too great a waste of time for each to cook for himself, or herself, and the women being employed at nothing more arduous than gathering fruits and suckling babes, I saw no reason why they should not become the chefs for the tribe.

Accordingly I soon had two uprights driven in the ground and a lot of meat spitted on the green branch of a sapling. With glowing embers from two fires, collected between my uprights, and the wooden spit resting upon them, I showed a female how to keep the roast turning. Again the Links approved of the plan, for they were quick to see that one person working in this manner, could cook for all as readily as for one. They were restless to be at the meat as soon as the first bit of brown appeared, but I kept them off, made them replenish the embers from fires burned down, and then I cut off the places where the meat was done with my knife, for general distribution.

Again at this meal I was mad for salt. What did these fellows do for this requisite seasoning? I asked myself, for I had always understood that even savages grow unhealthy, if they lack this mineral, and become willing to barter

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off their souls for a small pinch. There was no explanation of the riddle that day.

CHAPTER VIII. ATTACKED AND BESIEGED

WE set to work again in the afternoon, getting out a lot of material to be finished later. The following morning I won the regard of all unless I except the fawning creature mentioned before by giving lessons in archery, another bow and several arrows having been hastily completed. The Links proved themselves not only practicable, but most excellent pupils. They were magnificently muscled, to begin with, and therefore shot with force from the start, while all seemed to possess a natural knack, as if the weapon had once been theirs and then for long had been mysteriously lost.

In the midst of our tournament and while I was walking cautiously about, to get a shot at a brilliant bird which had flown into a near-by tree, a peculiar sound was uttered by many of the Links. The cause of their exclamation was revealed a second later, for moving through a clearing, not forty yards away, was a large black bear.

My heart leaped with excitement. I moved quickly to gain a point of vantage, raising the bow for a shot, when a dozen of the Links leaped in alarm between myself and the bear, raising their arms as if in affright and plainly imploring me not to shoot at the creature. This I thought absurd. I believed them to be a pack of cowards who feared the arrow might only serve to irritate the brute and so bring down its wrath upon us all. But in this I was mistaken. As I tried to wave them away for the bear would be gone in a minute they became frantic in their appeals. They indicated clearly that if I wished I might try the shaft on any one of themselves, if only I would spare the beast which had walked thus deliberately into camp.

There was nothing else for it; the creature disappeared before I could argue the question. Thereupon a score of males, foremost of whom was the chief, hurried to the place where the bear had paused a moment and there each placed his head on the ground with such a show of reverence and primitive superstition, that even I could comprehend the}' attached some great significance to this peculiar visit. When I reasoned how easily two or three with their terrible clubs could have despatched the animal, I concluded that they all regarded bruin's visit as an omen of particular good fortune.

I was speculating upon this occurrence when suddenly another cry this time of alarm startled us all. The males came dashing back from their adoration of the bear tracks, making a shrill sound of warning and waving their arms wildly. The females and scores of others ran pell-mell for the cave. Children came swinging down from trees as if the sky were raining little Links. Mothers fled with babes in their arms. There was sudden arming of the fighters.

Somewhat amazed I stood where I was, bow still in hand. Then the reason for the visit of the bear was speedily furnished. I was clutched and hustled off with the others, while with screams of savage vengeance which mingled with a war-note, easy to understand, innumerable black monsters swarmed from the woods and charged upon us.

The whole fighting tribe of black Missing Links, it appeared, had surrounded the camp. They were armed and ferocious, thirsting for revenge for the defeat of two days before, and seemed equal to the task of annihilating all our force. They had frightened the bear there before them.

In a time incredibly short, the Reds were in the cave. I was dragged and pushed in among the last. Then I saw my precious new weapons, twenty feet away arrow-heads, spear-heads, knives, hatchets, handles, bows and all. Tearing away I dashed out to these and brought the sea-shell, with its contents back to safety. Fatty darted out in my tracks, saving a number of unfinished bows, but the foremost Blacks were almost upon him. The chief himself who thereby testified his high appreciation of the collection leaped from the cave, to get all he could of what we had missed. I turned about in time to see him fill his arms and hands. A great black Link bounded swiftly

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up with brandished club, to smash his rival's skull. My whole being thrilled, thus to behold the bravery of our great red fellow who, leaping like a panther, refused to drop anything, in such a moment of peril. Cries of warning and of terror went up from the cave. I jerked up my bow, with a pointed arrow, strung. Lustily I drew against that powerful deer-gut. There was only a foot in which to miss the chief and hit the pursuing Black. The arrow sped like a streak. It struck the murderous creature fairly at the base of the throat, crashed clean through his neck and protruded on both sides at once.

He plunged forward, striking such a blow on his face that the arrow was driven to the feathers in the hole it had made. A chorus of howls resulted. The Links immediately on the heels of their fallen companion, halted abruptly, in dread and horror, yet on came a hundred behind them, mad for blood.

A blunt arrow, shot too high, but which nevertheless struck another black Link in the forehead, smashed its way through his skull before it shattered and split into pieces. Then the crystal club caved in the chest of the only assailant who had reached the cave, for the chief had recovered his fighting position like an elastic spring, and was ready to deal a fearful death to any who should dare attempt to enter the frowning mouth of the cave. Reinforced by another fighter, the chief could almost have stayed the rush of an army, coming in singles and pairs through the open door.

This fact the attacking creatures realised quickly. Another of the arrows, which missed the mark for which it had been intended, broke the arm of a powerful Black and compelled him to drop his club. His cry was a signal for all to halt and draw back, to consider what had best be done. They had us trapped, but how should they now proceed to beat out our brains?

The last of my arrows was gone too soon, but the visible effect of these silent messengers of death was that of terror on the part of the mystified Blacks. Had we possessed a score of bows, with a quiver full of arrows for each, in the hands of skillful archers, we should have won a bloody battle and driven the foe away, hopelessly routed, but they had surprised us completely, in our unprepared condition, and the situation was decidedly theirs in point of advantage.

Behind me, in the cave, the females and young ones were being sent to the rear. There was much excited chatter and much uneasiness of movement among all the huddled creatures. What the Blacks would do was evidently a matter of great concern.

Our besiegers decided soon on aggressive measures. They gathered all the loose rocks, which were practical as missiles, and rushing forward, hurled them into the cave with tremendous violence. Not a few of our party received bruises from the first volley, but many stones missed the cave entirely and many merely struck the rock walls and so fell harmlessly down. All that came to hand were immediately gathered, so that when the second company advanced to supplement the first fusilade, they were met by a fierce return shower of rocks, which stretched two Blacks on the ground.

This business proving unprofitable was not long continued. The Blacks retired again for consultation the result of which was that more than a dozen soon lighted brands at our smouldering fires and threw these in upon us as they darted by the opening of the cavern. No serious injury came from this. Our fellows would have flung these fiery spears back again, had I not restrained the action. The branches, it occurred to me, made torches too good to sacrifice for nothing. I therefore extinguished a number and kept several lighted. These latter we passed to the rear, in order that our positions might not be revealed to the foe.

This throwing in of fire was concluded abruptly when the giant chief, watching his opportunity, sprang out, as one of the Blacks was running by, and battered in his head with the gleaming club. The rage of the assailants increased momentarily. They saw themselves baffled by a force inferior to their own, although they had us cornered.

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With no little anxiety, we watched them detach a company of powerful fighters and send them off out of sight. This could not indicate retreat, I knew, for the ones who were left were too expectant. Perhaps, I thought, this was a blind to make us believe the force was now so reduced that we could charge them from the cave in safety and drive the invaders from the camp. There were, indeed, a few in our party, as I could see, who desired to attempt such a sortie, but fortunately the chief and other wise fellows overruled the suggestion.

While we were waiting, restless and worried, the plan of the Blacks was suddenly revealed. Amid yells of triumph and hatred, there came a thundering shower 'of rocks and boulders from directly above the cave, falling down across its mouth, heaping rapidly up, filling the place with a stifling dust and obliterating much of the light of day. The party detached had gone around and climbed on top of the terrace in which the cave was hollowed out. It would simply have been to court a sudden death had any of us attempted to dash from the place. Startled, undecided as to what we ought to do, we stood there paralysed, while the bewildering Niagara of sand and stone kept rumbling and crashing down. Before we realised what was occurring, the barrier had grown to a heap that was midway up across the opening of the hole.

There were strange cries, roars and howlings, from those behind us. Above the din rose the piercing screams of delight from the horde without. All of them now rushed to the spot in a body and began to heap up all the stones they could gather. Blinded, confused and frightened, my friendly Links began to jostle about, in the dread and anguish of the doomed.

In less than five minutes the last rays of light were being blotted out. The sounds of the army still building the barrier higher and thicker came dully in. The cave was sealed; we were buried alive in an unknown tomb!

CHAPTER IX. THE CAULDRON OF GOLD

THROUGHOUT the mass of Links in the cavern, the news of the unforeseen calamity spread with great rapidity. Some of the females set up a wailing; the men all chattered at once; baby Links caught the infection of fear and began to cry. A more demoralised collection of beings it would be hard to conceive.

The tremendous advantage gained by the Blacks was readily comprehended by all the older males. They knew, as well as I, that did they attempt to dig out, the Links in waiting on top of the heap could kill them as fast as a head appeared; they also seemed to know that their enemies would wait outside, long enough to be sure that all of us had starved to death, before they finally decamped.

So desperate seemed the prospect that I got in a fever myself. We should all have been in absolute darkness had not the torches been lifted up, and these cast so feeble an illumination that the crowded—in mass of Links appeared like a great serpent, along the body of which weird muscular contractions were flitting. The place was stifling, for the day was hot, and here we appeared to get no air. I began to think we should never live long enough to starve.

To all my attempted questions, by signs and otherwise, concerning the further end of the cave, the chief and others gave answers which were decidedly in the negative. They seemed even fearful of the chamber, now that we were trapped and unable longer to go out into the light and air. Nevertheless I did not propose to remain there motionless till death should bring me to a finish. I therefore made my way through the moving crowd, toward the torches. Fatty followed closely. His face was positively ludicrous in its solemnity, which was oddly mocked by the skull he wore on his head, for this ghastly thing had slipped rakishly down on one side.

So helpless and dependent had the Links become, in the face of our danger, that it seemed as if they could not bear to let me out of their sight. In consequence of this all tried to follow where I went, but so densely were we packed very soon that this became impossible. The chief, however, thrust himself along in our wake, apparently

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bidding the others be still and remain where they were. Taking one of the torches I worked my way past the last of the females and youngsters the latter like frightened little monkeys, unable to escape me and dreading to be touched when I soon came to what seemed to be the wall at the end of the cavern.

The light was so poor that for a moment I failed to discover a small hole to the right. Into this I thrust the lighted brand. To my great delight it cast a glow on the walls of a cavern beyond, quite as wide as the one we were in and the end of which was not in view. Believing that anything was better than stagnation in such a tomb as ours, I attempted to kick off the edges of the hole, to render it large enough for a man to pass. I succeeded in breaking away one small fragment only. My knife came out and I should have sacrificed its point and edge to widen the aperture, had not the chief pushed me gently aside. With his magnificent club he smote the rock a score of giant blows, knocking chunk after chunk into the gloom beyond.

That's good that's enough! I cried finally, and climbing through with Fatty almost on my back, I beckoned to the chief to follow with all his people. I reasoned that nothing could be worse than to remain where we were, no matter where this passage might lead or end.

Misgivings were rife, but the chief was evidently in undisputed command. Some of the Links followed eagerly, others with moans of doubt and fear. Nothing so much resembles the sound they made as the uneasy whining of a dog that is driven or dragged to a place of which it has a terror, but this sound was magnified till it filled the place.

Ouch, I said to them, pointing to the torch,

ouch.

They understood and lighted more of the brands from the one just behind. The added light gave them added courage. The tunnel we were now in was spacious, and cooler. The floor was rough with rocks, yet I think we made excellent time. The passage wound and its grade was uneven, up for a space, then down, then level.

In half an hour I came to a halt, for the rock half-way divided; a branch led off to the right and another went off to the left. In order to save time, should the wrong one be selected first if there was a wrong one, I determined to go up the left-hand passage alone. If I came to an exit I could hurry back and bid the Links to follow. If, on the contrary, I discovered any barrier which compelled retreat, it would certainly be better for one only to be obliged to return, instead of all, and then we could make a trial of the second tunnel. Enough of this I was able to convey to the chief to make him content to wait. He instructed the Links to sit down on the floor, setting the good example of patience himself.

Fatty felt privileged to dog my heels. As a matter of fact I was glad enough to have him go along, for the place was none too cheerful at the best. We came upon difficult walking presently, and also the corridor narrowed down. I believed it would end in a mere fissure, yet I could not afford to condemn it, nor to decide where it went, without a thorough trial.

After plodding a mile in this stuffy place, we climbed a jagged heap of fragments and paused abruptly, for the sound of a roaring and rumbling came from the darkness in a manner most disagreeably impressive. It continued a brief time only and then the ringing silence of a sepulchre ensued. We resumed the onward march. Passing down an incline, where the rocks slid under foot, I fell heavily and rolled toward the bottom. Unable to stop, I dropped the torch and underwent an instantaneous sensation of fear, as I continued downward toward the abyss of night. Then Fatty clutched me by the ankle; we slid together a second longer, and stopped. He lifted the torch. I was on the brink of a yawning precipice.

A chill flashed down my spine. Most cautiously I arose and took the light. There appeared to be no bottom to the pit.

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Gee whizz! I muttered.

Gee wizz! said Fatty, with remarkable distinctness.

I looked at the creature in a sort of wonder. Animal or man, my heart sent a great gush of feeling all through my being toward him, as I saw him smiling fondly in my face. He should always have my friendship after this. I could almost fancy the old fellow was wagging a tail all to pieces, such a light was in his restless eyes; and yet his face was almost that of a fat, good-natured Negro.

Being careful where I stepped, I moved along the edge of a great well, came to a place where the shelf widened, and found myself facing a short hall, at the end of which there was light, dim and diffused. We were soon at the limit of our journey in this direction, for here also the precipice terminated the passage.

As I looked below I saw that vapour was rising, as if from heated rocks. Then I made out fissures in the floor, fifty feet below us; and this floor was covered with peculiar excrescences, half-hidden by the steam. When revealed, these resembled stalagmites, melted and slumped down like great nodules, double-chinned, I am tempted to write, but double would not express the multiplicity of chins. These nodules appeared to be of the brightest yellow colour, but so often were they veiled in the mist that I could not be sure of anything concerning their appearance and formation.

Presently, while I was trying to study the odd features of the place, as well as to determine the source of the light, the rumbling and roaring we had heard before recommenced. It was louder, more awe-compelling, for it came from the fissures directly beneath us. It seemed to go booming upward and through the cavern as if the god of the under world were grumbling out a huge complaint. This noise increased, in wave-like volumes; the rock gave a tremor, and then with a seething and hissing, with a tumble of sound which issued from the depths of the earth-creature, as if it were growling at having to work, a great geyser of boiling water and steam shot upward and toppled back to its bed. I reeled away, with an involuntary movement. Below, the water swashed about and foamed in mighty agitation. The cauldron heaved up swirling tides and the drowned murmur burst forth through bubbles. The giant below gathered anew a mighty strength and blew up a fountain as high as where I was standing.

I saw a falling blob of the water strike on a small projection near my foot. Then the demonstration ceased, the roar became subdued, as if the grumbler withdrew to his realm of molten substance, and only great clouds of the vapour arose as before. The projection where the water had struck caught my glance, for assuredly it possessed a remarkable gleam. Stooping I looked at it closely. It was a nodule of something metallic, shaped somewhat like a small pear. I touched it, finding it barely warm; then I grasped it firmly and gave it a wrench. It came away from the rock in my hand.

By its remarkable weight, its colour and its lustre, I knew it instantly for gold. It was solid gold, Nature's own deposit a nugget most peculiarly constructed. I knew in that moment that all those massive nodules below had a right to gleam with yellow colour, for all were gold the purest gold, from the great inscrutable laboratory of earth itself!

I recalled what I had read and learned of the waters and acids mingled with the molten interior of the planet; how they dissolve the precious metals, hold them in solution and come with them bubbling to the surface, spouting through the fissures in the crust; how through the centuries they deposit atom by atom of their rich freightage on the rocks, permeating the very tissue of stones and porous substances, to leave them at last all streaked and flaked with gleaming yellow; and then how the fluids retire, the earth cools down, and man ages after comes wandering by and delves day and night to rob the fissures of their hoardings.

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I knew that below us a monster treasure-house was being filled by this wonderful process, slowly, surely, regularly, hour after hour, while generation after generation of men came and strove and went to their graves, willing to bargain off souls to know where to get but a little of this cold, glinting metal of the earth. We had come upon the hoary alchemist and caught him at his work.

But the pit might as well have been a mile in depth, as far as reaching the wealth, or the outside world with which I believe it connected, was concerned, for we had no means of getting down in the place and its heat would have made this impossible, even if we had possessed the best of ladders or ropes. All the gold in the world, moreover, was worth no more than so much dross to me; the dream of emerging again to the light was vastly more to be coveted. Reluctantly acknowledging that the diffused light which was here probably came from the outside world through a cave which I could not by any possibility reach, I placed the small nugget in my pocket, and making sure that the passage through which we had come was of no value to me or to the party of Links, I retraced my steps, with Fatty following noiselessly behind.

CHAPTER X. DAYLIGHT AT LAST

THERE were many expressions of relief on the part of our waiting friends when again the forward movement was commenced, in the right-hand tunnel. Those at the rear had become particularly anxious; the darkness was evidently a source of much vague alarm.

The passage we were now in was inclined downward. It wound in a general direction at right angles to the one which led to the cauldron of gold. In places it became so low that we were obliged to creep on hands and knees. This condition finally prevailed, so that I began to believe we were wedging ourselves into a crack. If this were true, then the case would be worse than hopeless it would be most horrible. The death, one by one, of all the Links, in such a place as this, would be appalling to the last degree.

I went steadily on, my knees growing tender from contact with the rocks. Presently Fatty and the chief, directly behind me, gave a low exclamation of affright. I halted, but heard nothing.

Perhaps they were able to smell some enemy, for certainly their monosyllables gave a warning, easy to interpret.

What is it? I said, as if they could understand and let me know. What's the matter?"

Those behind made low sounds of worry. It made me desperate. If anything confronted us now, it was too late to pause; there was no such thing as turning back. I drew my knife and advanced, feeling cold creepers go down my back. It might be the den of a tiger I thought, but surely such a beast would prefer to run out rather than to face so weird a foe as we would have seemed to be, proceeding through the cave, for we made a strange sound, moving, breathing and expressing our various emotions.

Fatty was halting, whining, coming on and halting again in a most disquieting manner. The chief seemed to realise that we might as well die in one way as another, yet I noted a look of dread on his face, such as one often sees in the eyes of a startled horse, when approaching dangers which he feels by instinct. It occurred to me now that if anything were in the cave, then the end must be near an opening to the outside world!

Come on, you fellows, I said at this, and holding my torch before me, rounded a corner. Immediately a glimmer of light, through down-hanging foliage and vines, revealed the exit we were seeking. Made careless for the second, I was suddenly startled most loathsomely. I had placed my hand on a cold, moving body a snake which was crawling toward the light.

Electrified into galvanic action, I plunged my knife into the body of the serpent half a dozen times, as fast as I

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could strike, feeling my hair crawling as I did it. The head of the reptile came backward a great flat head with bulges of poison-glands making it hideous. I knew he was deadly. The knife stabbed clean through his neck and ground on the rocks beneath; his jaws stretched open fearfully; his lip receded from the two great fangs, but he was killed, though the body writhed and twisted belly upward in powerful muscular contractions.

Ugh! I had said, as I struck.

Ugh! repeated Fatty and the chief.

Ugh! Ugh! Ugh! went echoing back through the cave, as the Links repeated the utterance, in dread. I had stumbled on their word for snake, or any reptile.

I thought we should encounter more of the snakes, but not until I had come, most cautiously, to the growth which formed a door to the cavern, did I see anything move. In the vines a few inches of tail were intertwined, but before I could deliver a good stab, this serpent escaped. I now slashed away tendrils and creepers in a sort of frenzy, for the darkness and closeness of the cave had oppressed me with a feeling which developed into horror. We in the lead were soon out, on a small bluff, overlooking a dense wood; indeed there was jungle all about. I heard not a few sounds of crashing branches, where heavy-weight animals made away from the neighbourhood and sound of our voices.

What a strange sight it was to see the cave pouring forth that collection of ape-like Links. Nearly all were chattering not talking like so many monkeys, frightened to the point of being crazy. On getting out into the light, not a few ran about as if they would leave us altogether and hide in the trees. The fighters, however, huddled the females and young ones together, and glanced about and at me, with their round, restless eyes, as if to know what to do next. Left to themselves they would doubtless have soon been self-reliant and capable of thinking and acting for themselves, but having followed me blindly, through an ordeal totally foreign to any previous experience, they were hopelessly dependent upon me now. This I knew, for even the fawning creature was humbled.

I knew also that our old home would have to be abandoned and a new one made. I was likewise aware of the necessity of selecting a place which could be more easily defended a point of vantage. This base we must secure as speedily as possible, for already the sun was nearly down. Studying the faces of the calmer Links, as they looked about, I was not encouraged to believe they knew where we were, with regard to the abandoned camp. To get my bearings I went up the hill we were on, to the edge of the jungle. From there I was able to see a portion of the lake which I had seen from the volcanic peak. Above this water, on the summit of a hill, was a clear space, discernible, with rock formations and indications of springs. If it had fruit-bearing trees it would be nearly right for our needs and purposes.

Fatty and several others, including the chief and his albino mate, having followed me up the hill, I indicated the spot to which I desired them to lead the way. They comprehended and conveyed the whole plan to the tribe in about three separate monosyllables, whereupon we made a start.

CHAPTER XI. A CAMP ON THE HILL

WE found signs of wild animals in great number and variety, as we forced our trail through the jungle, but so considerable a concourse of creatures as ours was sure to frighten anything and everything from the line of march. It seemed to me to be a place in which company was exceedingly desirable.

A feeling of relief came over me when at length we reached the clearing we had selected from afar, and made our way to the rounded summit of the hill. No sooner had I signed for a halt than half a dozen of the fighters advanced

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and laid at my feet the sea-shell receptacle, filled with our flints, and everything else which had been saved when we fled into the cave, all of which had been carried at great pains through the tunnel. These things I had quite forgotten in our stress of cares.

The place we had reached proved to be ideal for a settlement. Not only were fruit and nut-trees abundant, but the forest contained countless woods of value, while huge bamboos were flourishing not far away, at a marshy spot, and the hills and ravines about us were teeming with birds and game. We held a commanding position, the rock-formations of which made a natural fortification nearly complete. Through the trees, in one direction, I could see the lake, a thing which gave me the greatest delight, for I thought it might mean almost anything to me, later on.

Although we got the benefit of a cooling breeze, the end of the day was intensely hot. While we had been out of the tunnels probably no longer than about an hour and a half, yet the whole adventure made the day seem very long. Thirsting for water, I hastened down the side of our hill to where I saw signs of a spring. Clear water, sure enough, was gushing out of a fissure, and I hastened to drink. The first mouthful fetched me up standing, bitterly disappointed. The water was salt. For a second I was ready to curse the living fountain, and then I fairly danced with delight.

Salt! The only thing I really needed, and the rocks and banks of this little stream were white with the precious incrustation! I lost no time in scraping some off the pebbles at the edge, after which I got some pure, cold water for drinking at another spring a hundred yards away. I had known of hot springs and cold springs, almost side by side, in Nevada, and of sulphur springs and iron springs and countless other varieties, but it had never before been my fortune to drink from a spring of brine. This elated me beyond anything yet discovered.

Before I could rejoin the main body of my fellows, a few were striking off hap-hazard, for rations. Some vigorous sign-language, which I found I could make more forcible if I also talked out what I wanted to convey, in Anglo-Saxon, begot a show of order. Twenty fellows went after fruit and nuts for all; as many crept into the woods to dig some pits and attempt to drive in some game; others fetched wood for the fires, as well as for more of the bows and arrows. I had a lot of the females gather a species of tough reed, much resembling osiers, and although I knew little of weaving, I succeeded in making a small, clumsy basket, which at least served to initiate the scheme, but it took some time before we achieved any results worth mentioning in this needed line of utensils.

At the head of a gang I began to supplement our natural ridges of rock with a wall made of piled-up stones. It would never do to be defenceless again. During all our work and hustling about, the chief stood leaning on his rock-crystal club, his albino mate at his side, and the fawning-fellow whom I named Grin smiling maliciously at all I did. The chief saw a certain amount of usurpation in my ordering the work. The new mode of things amazed him, for the Links not only had a keen comprehension of what I wanted, but they actually vied with one another in the zeal with which they laboured to perform my bidding.

Darkness came on before we had accomplished much in any direction. The old female who muttered had preserved a glowing coal from the torches, a trick made the easier by the wood she employed, for it possessed the property of retaining fire for a time incredibly long.

Here, Granny, I said to her, as if by habit, make ouch here, ouch over there, and ouch against the rock.

By the light of the flames, I constructed a rude shelter for myself. The Links had a way of massing up in bunches on the ground, to sleep, a system which hardly appealed to my fancy. Already two or three dozen of the youngsters were curled on the ground and were doubtless deep in dreams.

We ate no meat that evening, for the hunters came back empty-handed, as soon as the light began to fail in the woods. An hour after night had settled down, they were all at rest, save Fatty and myself. I sat before a glowing

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fire, thinking, wondering what would come, out of this strange caper of my frolicsome fate. I planned out work, with escape for my motive, and builded strange structures in the air, as I looked vacantly into the embers. Fatty watched me eagerly, his nervous eyes as lively as quicksilver. The light shone on half of his face and illuminated the skull tied on top of his head, with a changeful glow. He tried his best to remain awake and help me to think it all out, but his head would nod, and his eye-lids insisted on drooping, till at length he slumped, rather than curled down, fast asleep.

How long I sat there, getting drowsy myself and intending all the while to go to my shelter, is more than I know. A scream woke me suddenly at last. The moon had nearly set, but still was casting a mellow light on the world. A mass of the Links made a singular picture, as they scrambled about in a great confusion. Then out of their midst leaped a monster beast a long, thin tiger, with a female Link, now flung upward, now dragged, now half across his shoulder, held in his mouth, and she fairly splitting the air with her cries, as he ran away with her bodily.

I saw the brute clear the ridge of rock and bound down the slope to the region of shadows, like a thing of evil; I heard a Babel of affrighted chattering; I heard roars and howls and death-songs, out in the jungle where the creatures held carnival of blood. I saw the fear of my men-children, huddling about me; and I felt a longing to hover them all from harm.

They were badly demoralised, but we built up the fires anew, and made more, to enclose all the tribe. Then for hour after hour I walked about the camp, keeping the fires from dying away, while out in the savage world beyond, the prowlers ate, and growled at the kill.

CHAPTER XII. A DEADLY FOE

AT sunrise, when all the Links were actively awake, there appeared to be a strong inclination, on the part of many, to leave this new settlement and flee to the woods. The visit of the tiger had terrified the females and not a few of the fighters. The fawning creature, Grin, was the moving spirit in this scheme of flight, but the chief could not be readily persuaded to leave when he saw that I was strongly opposed to any such measure of retreat.

I knew the tribe to be more or less nomadic, and I believed them capable of finding a clearing wherein we could live, by constantly fighting the jungle brutes, yet I was convinced that the welfare, not only of myself, but of all concerned, would be better served by remaining where we were. Attempting to show them how we could guard ourselves against future enemies by adopting various measures, I set them the example of working on the wall and of building sheltered dug-outs, succeeding at last in quieting many fears and convincing the chief that we were the safest on the hill.

All day long we toiled at sundry occupations, but the work to accomplish was great and the efforts of my workmen, though the fellows were strong and willing, were so crude that progress was slow. We needed weapons, more than anything else, unless I except the shelters. I worked continuously at making bows and arrows. In this labour I was considerably assisted by three Links whom I finally selected as the most ingenious and teachable fellows of the tribe. To my great delight I found that my flints had already become exceedingly hard from being exposed to the air. This rendered the hatchets and knives remarkably efficient as tools.

The fighters dug seven or eight large, shallow holes in the earth, during the day, and a few were covered with branches of trees and thatched with enormous leaves before evening. What with helping to carry stones for the wall and wood for various purposes, the females accomplished but little on the baskets which I had hoped they would make. They were not as practical as the males, having never been obliged to construct so much as a blanket or a string of beads.

As a relaxation from my other employment, I busied myself with weaving a basket, that night by the fire. The

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material was none of the best, and I could only guess how the work should be done, nevertheless I succeeded in finishing an awkward affair which would hold above a bushel of fruits and which required two men to carry it home when filled.

For two more days we swarmed that hill-top like a colony of ants. At the end of that time we had three good fire-places, builded of stone, thirty-odd bows, more than eighty arrows, four baskets, nine tolerably decent dug-outs, and a wall nearly completed about our city. Also we had plenty of meat, for the hunters had driven some goat-like deer into their pits, after their primitive fashion, not to mention a number of birds cleverly captured. In this latter business they utilised a sticky substance procured from a weed-like tree, the stuff being plastered on the branches of trees much frequented by the birds, which, alighting, got their feet, feathers and wings quickly gummed, so completely that escape was impossible. I was anxious to have the fighters begin practise with the bows, but as yet we had been too busily engaged with work for any such diversion.

Just before evening that day I strolled to the edge of the jungle, with the faithful Fatty at my heels, to try for a shot with some of our latest arrows. The chief being away, at the head of a hunting company, I waved back all others who would have followed. We found nothing to shoot at but a squirrel, and this lively little animal evaded me time after time, as I stepped quietly about.

I was just on the point of raising the bow at last when from almost under my feet a fine turtle started to run toward a heap of rocks. He was almost round and his back was unusually high, so much like half a sphere was his shell. Immediately I thought what an excellent bowl or basin this would make, and thereupon abandoned the squirrel and started after the tortoise.

He moved much faster than one might have supposed possible. Nevertheless I lifted him plump on his back with a movement of my foot, and then I jumped violently away. I had almost trodden on a hooded snake, which struck at my foot most viciously and then attempted to escape.

Fatty lost no time in getting too far away to be of any help. I tried a shot at the reptile with the bow, but missed. The creature would have escaped in a moment. I dropped everything to gather up some rocks, and a large one of these I succeeded in smashing upon the creature so hard that it broke his back and pinned him down, close behind the head. Despatching my turtle then I hastened back to camp.

In the great sea-shell I boiled the turtle, not without the greatest trouble. The Links ate the meat, for I felt no hankering after this species after one trial. The shell was all I had expected, when at last it was clean, for I had felt the need of a basin in which to wash.

Well satisfied with the work of the day, and having impressed a trio of Links into service as guard for the night, I turned in early and soon dropped off into the heaviest sort of slumber. Sometime in the night a hideous noise and a violent jerking at my foot brought me suddenly to my senses. I rushed out, bowling over Fatty in my haste, to find the Links again verging on insanity from fright.

The man-eating tiger had crept upon us again and borne off one of the very guards themselves, who had gone to sleep promptly, upon my retiring.

I believe I cursed the wretches who had slept at the post of duty, for I had much to do to restore the slightest resemblance to calm among the excited creatures. Then in the morning, as I thoroughly expected, the tribe was unanimous for deserting the works at once, to go anywhere whither they cared nothing at all, so long as they put the deepest jungle between themselves and this dreaded foe. A tiger such as this, I could see, created a terror as great as the Links could contain. There was no suggestion of a courage sufficient to battle with the brute; there was one adequate scheme only, in their minds and this was flight.

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Situated as we were with that lake below us, on which I had builded a vague sort of hope, I was determined to go the utmost bounds before I would consent to move a yard. I pantomimed in desperation and jabbered fairly good English and added my few words of bad Linkish (or Lingo), to make them understand that I would undertake to kill the man-eater myself, that coming night. Even this announcement appeared to be in vain, for a time, especially as I had to work against the wretched influence of Grin, the fawning coward, who had an unmistakable power in getting around the chief. At length, however, my counsel prevailed. But I could see that failure to execute my boasted vengeance on the brute of the jungle would mean the total overthrow of my city and my hold upon the primitive imaginations of the Links.

Feeling that if they did leave all behind and plunge anywhere through the forest I should be obliged to go along, regardless of the fact that this would make my escape even more than ever hopeless, and realising also that I had assumed a large contract under any circumstances, I was decidedly anxious, the moment after they finally consented to my rash suggestion. Indeed, though I kept at the work, as I strove to devise a plan of attack on the tiger, throughout the morning, I became nervous and doubtful of my ability to perform the vital deed. My brain seemed capable of only the wildest schemes, all of which were as utterly impracticable as flying to London for a gun—Having never killed a tiger I knew nothing of his habits, beyond the fact that he was almost always sure to return to his kill, if undisturbed, on the second night, and even on the third, if there still remained undevoured portions of his victim sufficient for a meal. I could fancy this brute treading silently up to the ghastly remains; I could picture him, bloody of muzzle, fierce-eyed, alert and terrible, as he dined in his dread loneliness. How I wished that a snake, more silent than himself, might glide upon him and strike him deep with its venomous fangs!

A snake! Why a snake to be sure! It suggested just the plan! I had no weapon reliably stout enough to give him a mortal wound, but I could, perhaps, bury a poisoned arrow in his blood—a shaft that need but scratch to do its deadly work. The snake I had killed the day before might still be fresh enough to furnish the fatal juice, and then if I could find the mangled body in the jungle, perhaps perhaps

I was more excited and nervous now than before. Three times I was on the point of crying quits. Once I was nerved anew by the contemplation of the lake and our settlement, which meant that I was working out a plan of escape, already nicely started. Again, I was hardened to the task by the thought that, surrounded as I was in this unknown region, with death so easy on every hand, I was childish to wish to avoid this one particular danger, perhaps only to plunge into others far more awful. The third time I was steeled by observing the sneering smile on the face of Grin, which seemed to mock my show of manhood. This was the thing which made me put all doubt and hesitation away.

In the late afternoon, having selected five of the straightest and truest of the arrows tipped with flint, and having seen that the bow-string was stout and reliable, I walked off boldly, alone, and went to where the hooded snake lay crushed beneath the rock. Until I was out of sight the Links watched me, narrowly, all of them standing together on the hill. The body of the snake was where I had left it, the tail partially eaten by something, which must have been desperately hungry. Cutting off the head I pried open the jaws with a stick and my knife, finding the poison-glands of great size.

The venom flowed thickly out when I tore the sacks open with the point of an arrow, and although the whole revolting operation made me nearly ill, I fairly bathed the flints in the viscid substance. Holding the arrows carefully from me, to let them dry, I concealed the serpent's head beneath a rock, for I did not wish the Links to know what I had done, and so to learn the use of so deadly a creature.

Skirting the edge of the woods, I came opposite our settlement, at about the point where I judged I had seen the tiger disappear, in the jungle, the night when he carried away the female from our midst. Here I had not far to search before I found trampled grass, vines ripped aside and even the tracks of the brute's massive paws. With a fast-beating heart and also with a tremendous desire to turn and run, I stepped noiselessly along in this suggestive trail.

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The stillness, save for the note of a far-away bird, or the quick start of some porcupine or sloth, frightened from its haunt, was terribly oppressive. I confess to have had a constant feeling as if my hair were standing upright on my head, as I slowly made my way into that tangle of greenery. The day seemed suddenly to have grown old and dark. I felt horribly near to the lair of the man-eater, knowing that he had actually been in the place such a short time before.

Presently I came upon a clearing which was hardly thirty feet across in either direction. Approaching the centre of this I started violently, for I nearly stumbled across the mangled body of my sentinel Link of the night before. I had not believed it could be so near the edge of our own clearing. The tiger, I thought, had grown thus insufferably impudent, not to say indifferent to our nearness to his feast, because he had never been hunted, nor even threatened with retaliation.

The body was a ghastly sight, so human-looking, so fearfully fresh! I turned away my head and somewhat retreated. How much I desired to dash madly away out to the sunlight I can never convey to another mind. I had no feeling of bravery left; it seemed to me as if the jungle were filled with deadly creatures, prowling about me as I stood in the place.

What should I do, now that I had found the spot I had dreaded to find? Would the tiger come back that night? I felt only too sure that he would. Looking about me I saw that a great tree held out a branch which was easy to climb. It was such a relief to think of getting off the ground, up out of reach of the creatures which might come creeping or prowling along, that I waited only long enough to tie the end of a long, cord-like creeper about my bow and arrows, when I scrambled up in the tree as if all the fiends of Hades had been upon my track. I make no excuse for the lack of courage I felt, for absolutely I could not help it, strive as I might.

Once up on the branch, however, I felt better. Moving along to a bend, where a lot of creepers were thickly interlaced, I found a sort of natural seat, not quite directly above the terrible kill, below in the trodden and red-painted grass. In this seat I could rest my weight, my position then being one of half erectness, my feet on the great branch, my body leaning against the supporting vines. Drawing up my weapons, I so disposed four of the arrows that I could easily and safely find them in the dark which I tried by closing my eyes. Then I fitted the fifth one to the bow-string and prepared myself for a lengthy wait.

CHAPTER XIII. THE NIGHT IN THE JUNGLE

IT SEEMED as if I had been in the tree for an age when the sun finally sank behind the hill. For long the twilight had been dim in the jungle, and creepers and shadows made a picture of grotesque forms, wrapped about and hung as if with serpents, like a weird conception by Dore. There was rarely a sound. It seemed like the hour when the day-creatures crept stealthily home to caves and covers, afraid they were already too late and sure to be overtaken by the prowlers of the darkness.

Once I had a fearful up-welling of excitement suddenly flood my being and make my heart to thump heavily. An armadillo came trotting quietly into the open space below me. The movement was what caught my glance, and for the second I thought only of the tiger. Then the little animal sniffed that gory object and darted instantly away.

The darkness increased. Some early com-plainer howled out a dismal note. Now and then there came a rustling sound from the trees or vines. An hour after the darkness became complete, I heard a pounce, a struggle, the quiet moan-cry of something which gave up its life, and it made a chill go down my back and spread through my nerves. Sounds of birds in the air and forest inhabitants hiding in the trees, came occasionally, now, with surprising distinctness. All of this kept me in a high state of tension. I wished myself anywhere on earth other than where I was. I confess the woods at night, where merely bears and owls were at large, had awed me earlier in life, and this jungle, alive with poisonous reptiles and blood-hungry animals, terrified me beyond expression. If I had

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only had a companion, if there had even been another man awaiting my return somebody to talk to, somebody to think about rejoining, or even a soul who would dare to hunt for my body if I never returned, it would have been a little comforting at least.

I managed, with an effort, to pull myself together a trifle, by thinking that it was now too late to meditate retreat. I would not have climbed down from my tree and attempted to find my way out of the darksome forest taking the chances of starting wrong and getting lost for the price of a mine of diamonds. Thus the hours went by and a score of things kept me startled constantly. I feared the tiger would fail to come; then I feared he would arrive at any second.

It seemed to me that midnight must have come and gone ages since. Suddenly my breath came fast, my whole body was rigid with attention as I noted a dim form, apparently standing in the tangle, directly across the clearing. I knew I had become pale; I knew I trembled with agitation. I was cold and my teeth did their best to chatter, as I watched to see if the form moved.

There were ample sounds about me, some slight, some heavy, but I think I paid little heed to anything except that dim, uncertain form. Then I was sure it moved. While I was still at the height of my excitement I noted a leaf, which became clearly defined. I knew immediately that the form was merely a patch of half light, cast through the foliage by the moon.

The excitement subsided as if I had pulled out a plug and let it run away. And while it was going, I heard a wet lapping and chewing, beneath me, which told me instantly that the man-eater was below and dining at his cold and ghastly feast. He had come unseen and unheard, while I was being frightened at a patch of light!

I looked, but so dark was the place that until the monster moved around I thought his body was exactly on the opposite side of his victim, to which it really was. The excitement had flushed upward in my veins again, but not so strongly as before. I was angered, as I have often been to hear a cat lapping at the meat in a cupboard.

Moving cautiously on the branch, I half stood, half leaned against my seat and slowly brought my bow into position. I was stiff in my hands and joints, from sitting so long in one position. Having made a slight slip and noise, the flood of nervousness leapt upward in me at once; I perspired coldly; my heart beat a violent measure; in my mouth the saliva became like gluey cotton. But the beast below kept on chewing, with a horrible noise of drooling chops. I dared not try at him yet, both because my hands were too unsteady and because the brute was too undefined an object to be seen.

I underwent a trying ordeal for half an hour. While I was watching below, straining my eyes to pierce the gloom, slightly bending the bow and holding the poisoned arrow in readiness, the tiger shifted about in his feeding. Abruptly I saw a patch of his hide, a small irregular target, full in the light of the moon, where a ray shone down through some open shaft between leaves and branches. I could see a dark stripe across the dusty-looking hide. Even the play of a muscle was visible.

Doubtless the thrill and ardour of the hunter came to my rescue in that vital second. I only know that I was eager, steadied, released from all that had made me nerveless and cold. I even forgot what a deadly brute he was and what he might be capable of doing, if only slightly wounded.

The bow became vertical in my fist, at the end of my arm, now as rigid as oak. I drew the arrow backward to my ear with a strong, confident pull. Then the point came down, toward the lighted patch. I aimed as one aims at the head of a nail with a hammer with no need to see my shaft. Then it sprang away like a flash, the twang resounded in my ear, and I saw a streak stab straight in the middle of the target.

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Instantly a furious lunge and a roar that all but shook me down made the place terrible. I clutched another of the arrows, and fumbled it, so that it fell. Another then I got upon the string. All the while a most awful uproar was continued below. The arrow that had dropped betrayed my presence. The tiger leaped toward the branch, fell short, leaped again, thrashed in the grass with frantic force and bellowed a doom-song that made my flesh creep on my bones.

In his madness the brute was in the patch of light and out again, constantly. Once, as he oscillated there for a whole second, making ready to jump toward me, I fired another arrow with all the power of fear and hatred. It struck him, I could not determine where, and a moment later he reached my branch with his two great paws, and hung there by his claws, bending the limb so low and shaking all so tremendously that I clung on for very life. I felt his paw against my foot and stamped upon it viciously. He lifted that one; the bark gave way from beneath the other and down he thudded.

Again and again he leaped in his wrath. It sounded as if all the beasts of the jungle were there in mortal combat. I tried with another poisoned arrow, though I was sick, from my dread that he was proof against the venom. This shot I missed. It served to make the brute more furious, however, but finally I thought his ravings began to lose in force.

Once more he crouched in the light. This time my last arrow met him just as he rose in his spring. I failed to notice where it was planted in his body, for so tremendous was his leap that his whole head, chest and paws were up on the tree. The shock knocked me off; I fell, grasping a creeper, that stopped me with a jerk and a painful wrench.

The tiger dropped, striking me down the leg with one of his out-thrown paws; I thought my time had come. With a superhuman effort I chinned myself on the creeper, clutched the limb again, got an arm about it, reached a twig higher up and threw my leg fairly over. I was quickly in my old position again, blown, dizzy and wholly unable to believe the tiger had been evaded by such a clumsy scrambling. He was beating about in the trampled grass below, but his roar had grown hoarse and guttural; it seemed no longer so savage. Then I heard his breath blowing froth and bubbles-of-blood through his nostrils. My heart leaped exultantly I knew an arrow had reached his lungs!

CHAPTER XIV. AN OLD ROUE

IN A TIME incredibly short I heard sounds growing fainter where the great brute stiffened out in the grass. The poison, I knew, had gotten in its work at last. When the final convulsion had shivered itself out, what a death-silence settled on the jungle! It seemed as if for miles about, the lesser beasts had held their breath and fled from that theatre of throes and roars of the master-murderer.

The hush affected me deeply. I felt so alone with the dead, and yet not confident of my safety. My imagination pictured a ring of leopards, cats and other creatures stealing silently up, like the curious women who enjoy to look upon a corpse, these all half afraid that the king was not really lifeless after all. Probably no creature was then within half a mile of the spot, for the noise had been sufficient to frighten away even the snakes, it seemed to me, yet I never for a moment entertained a thought of climbing down from where I was.

The wait, through the midnight and the long chilly hours of morning was the harder to bear because of the weakness I felt, after all the overwrought emotions I had undergone. It was difficult, moreover, to cast off the dread of the still brute below me, not to mention the sounds which recommenced in the animal-haunted jungle. I was exhausted, for the strain had been as hard to bear as severe physical labour. In addition to this, I had performed a good day's work, before I came to my tryst with the tiger. How long seemed the time since I left the friendly Links, on my quest of vengeance and retribution!

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I may have dozed, as I half lay against the woven creepers, and although it could not have been for long, dawn had come when I started awake. In the forest the shadows were still too deep to be fathomed, yet at last I made out the rigid form on the ground. My enemy was almost directly under the place where I was sitting. I could see no arrows at all; and my mind had pictured him bristling with the shafts.

Slowly the light increased. What a gaunt, unhandsome form it was in the grass! Then the sunlight struck on the tree-tops and bird-notes, not particularly musical, began to make more cheerful that dark abode. With a new impulse of courage, I dropped myself down, laid hold of my bow and a leg of the tiger, and dragged with all my strength to get him out of the place.

Then I got a good look at the carcass. He was old, wretchedly thin, scarred about his bleary, dead eyes, nearly toothless and as worn-looking as an old hearth-rug. I saw where my first shot had struck him above the shoulder. The arrow, which was broken off in the wound, had jabbed in and plowed along under the skin for six or eight inches. The second had ripped through the flesh of his right fore leg, leaving a gash which the brute had widened when he broke the shaft out, sidewise, in his thrashing. The last shot had sent the envenomed flint tearing into his breast, an inch below the throat, where it had penetrated to a considerable depth. It also was broken, but a tough shred of the wood still held the feathered portion dangling from the wound.

As I looked on the thin, old reprobate I was silly enough to feel a little pity, so tragic seemed the poverty which he had known, as testified by his miserable condition. My fears too had been wholly dissipated by the sun; I wondered why I had been in such a plight of dread throughout the night.

A final tug brought the roue of the jungle clear of the undergrowth. The second I emerged to the edge of the hill clearing, a chorus of cries came down from the camp. I turned to see the whole drove of Links coming madly down the slope from which they had been watching for more than an hour.

Such a commotion the simple creatures made, as, crazy with joy and awe, and still dreading the foe they knew so well, they pressed about me and chattered and made me a hero and struck at the ground all about the tiger with their clubs! Fatty went through a sort of blubbering welcome and got down and licked at my shoes until I felt obliged to give him a trifle of a kick. The chief made no effort to conceal his admiration for my feat, but he was dignified, after the manner of a great Newfoundland dog among the lesser canines. His albino mate, however, gazed upon me from her round, pink eyes with a look of worshipping to which I very much objected. At her side the carping Grin was doing his best to belittle the tiger and to sneer through his expression of amazement. On the whole, one would have thought the tiger a monster and a prince among his kind. I began to feel my glory to be somewhat tawdry.

After half an hour of tribute, both to the brute and myself, on the part of the tribe, I rolled the beast over to look for a decent bit of hide. He was not worth the skinning, and that is the truth.

However, I had my plan and therefore I whipped out my knife and skinned a part of the shoulders and back. After this I took off the head, for I meant to have the skull for a trophy. Then I directed the Links to dig a grave.

CHAPTER XV. A GLEAM OF HOPE

WHEN I finally fastened the tiger's skull above my shelter, and girded my loins about with the skin, I was conscious of having attained a great respect among my primitive friends. Not a few, I soon became aware, would have followed me readily in any measure, not requiring too vast a courage, even to the point of seceding from the semi-command of the chief. They attested this feeling, which resembled that evinced from the first by Fatty, in all the work and in various smaller matters, from daylight till dark.

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I might have been more flattered than I was at my exaltation among these half-human creatures, had I not easily detected the jealousy of the chief, which feeling Grin continued constantly to feed. Indeed in spite of all I could do, a division of parties was growing every day. Unfortunately the females were more fierce in their partisanship than were the males. Moreover a majority of these ladies evinced a strong desire to ally themselves to the side of which I was becoming the unwilling leader. Prominent among them was the chief's albino mate, who was far too persistent to give me any peace of mind. I foresaw trouble to come from this unhappy complication.

Had all the Links united in considering myself a leader and governor of the tribe, I should have enjoyed very much the recognition of my talents, especially as such an outcome would have furthered the scheme I had, to make them fit as warriors and then persuade them to march as my escort to the coast. Indeed I was planning and working deliberately to become commander-in-chief. But this division was not at all assuring, for although all had a wholesome fear of the Tartar they had caught, yet any one of the creatures, turning treacherous, could have killed me outright with a single blow.

. I made no end of attempts to procure the confidence of the chief, and frequently thought I was winning him over, but always Grin got in a stroke which set my endeavours at naught. I could have killed the beast with great satisfaction to myself and with profit all around. The albino female I ignored pointedly at every opportunity afforded. This gave some degree of satisfaction to the chief, but like Othello, he grew insufferably suspicious.

Our work of providing weapons and utensils, and also of securing a better state of existence and defence, proceeded daily. I worked like an engine, myself, to employ all my thoughts, which began to be disquieting. Although I strove to avert what was slowly coming, the conviction was borne in upon me more and more that if things continued as they were going, I should either be obliged to fight a pitched battle, backed by my voluntary adherents, against the chief and his party, or else abandon my scheme of escape altogether.

But if I brought about the internecine strife and even won the battle, my force would be utterly inadequate for an escort, (provided I could get them to leave the wilds to which they were all accustomed), for the whole tribe did not muster half the number of fighters which the black Links had assembled against us that day at the cave. If we started through the jungle, who should say we might not walk straightway into the settlement of our hostile neighbours? Besides this natural enemy, the woods were sure to be filled with ourang-outangs, snakes, tigers and no end of other animals that would snip off man after man, if they did not annihilate the party entirely.

The situation was trying. If I discontinued the archery practice and the teaching of civilized arts, my Links would never be fit for my army; if, on the contrary, I proceeded to place the fellows on a fighting equality with myself, they would all be the worse as enemies, if ever a genuine rebellion should occur. Having thought and thought till my brain was weary, I decided to take my chances on having them understand the bow, trusting that something might happen which would make us all united. I reasoned that if our foe, the Blacks, should swoop upon us again, we might all be killed, if they found us unprepared, and then all schemes of escape would be equally vain.

Our programme of armament therefore proceeded with all reasonable haste. We had frequent practice with the weapons, many of the Links soon giving promise of great proficiency with this natural weapon of early man. During this time the strained relations were in no wise improved, thanks to the ceaseless efforts of Grin and to the idiocy of Madame Albino, who became the more zealous as I treated her with greater contempt. I grew desperate, for matters were tending toward disruption too plainly for any concealment.

For this business I should require a boat. Perhaps this would be no better than a raft, in the end, if nothing better could be constructed, but something floatable would be necessary before I could move a mile down or about the sheet of water, for the jungle grew to the very edge of this shimmering gem, rendering its circum-exploration on the shore as good as a physical impossibility.

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It was easy enough to induce the Links to help me force a path to the water's edge, but I soon discovered that without exception they held the place in awe and superstitious dread. It did prove to be generously inhabited, but this was quite to be expected. For the matter of that, the whole country was crawling with deadly reptiles and brutes, so that choosing the lesser evil was not too decidedly easy.

One would have said that material was plentiful, even had I contemplated building a fleet, but the growth was so dense that I knew it would be a gigantic task to cut down any timber. The Links were anxious to leave the shore for the safer hill, but I kept them with me and communicated to several the fact that I was searching for a log. This was an excellent move, for Fatty soon underwent a paroxysm of delight at his cleverness, and at my open satisfaction, when he jerked away a snarl of vines, already concealing the trunk of a tree which apparently had succumbed to a violent gale.

We soon had the log laid bare for more than twenty feet of its length. It was twined about by creepers, but it had no low branches to give us trouble, while its size was entirely satisfactory. With our tools of flint we started to cut the thing off in two places, the root end being in no wise fit to form the prow or the stern of a boat, but our efforts seemed so feeble and childish that apparently it was next to an insurmountable difficulty to perform even this primary office. I felt so discouraged that I nearly gave it up then and there.

However, one of my admirers was willing to run to camp for a brand of fire, for I had resolved to burn the log in two. This was a task which opened up large possibilities for the expenditure of time and patience, although we constantly removed the fire, as soon as its flames had eaten inward, charring the wood, when we chopped away this softened portion and began again. At the end of the first day we had accomplished so little that the task, merely of getting the log cut off, seemed hopeless. I determined that if we did get the log free at last I would have it rolled into the water and content myself with its plain, unvarnished bulk for a craft, for digging it out to form a boat I feared would be more of a job than my patience could endure.

CHAPTER XVI. TREACHERY AND A BATTLE

THE labour at the lake—shore, day after day, somewhat reduced the party—feeling brewing between the chief and our respective followers. He was with us often, but quite as frequently went hunting in the jungle at the head of a dozen fighters.

Our practice with the bows had proceeded so well that we bagged a good deal of our game with the weapons, squirrels, various birds and hogs proving to be the most abundant and easy victims. Of the skin of one of the hogs so secured, I made myself a clumsy sort of quiver, which held my arrows to perfection. Of another I fashioned some thick but serviceable leggings, which afforded me a much—needed protection.

What with sundry interruptions, for needed labours about the camp, it was more than a week before we finally completed the burning and hacking off of the log by the lake. Then we began to roll it and push it toward the water, a task requiring more patience than ingenuity, for we had an abundance of muscle although I found it not always easy to direct this crude force to the best advantage. I set my fellows to work getting out rollers, so that if necessary, later on, I could use a lever and get the log in the water alone.

Having brought it near the edge, I was tempted to proceed with my original plan of digging it out to form a canoe, trusting that the trouble which threatened between our divided forces would merely smoulder, at the worst, for a time and that before it broke out dangerously I might be better prepared to make my explorations and my attempt to escape. Deciding to try this plan, I had the log lifted up on two rocks, one under each end, after which I had my Links dig me a quantity of stiff red clay, which we worked up with water and plastered thickly over the sides and ends of the log, leaving a wide place uncovered on the under side. We then made fire all along underneath, and by constantly digging away the portions that were charred, and then by burning and digging again, we made

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considerable progress with the work. The clay, of course, protected the parts of the boat so covered from being consumed. By plastering more of the clay inside of the sides and ends, as soon as the boat began to be hollowed out, we protected them also, and thereby directed the flames in such a manner that they burned deeper into the wood all the time, without endangering the portions which I desired to leave stout and thick.

It was hot work and hard, to get in under that boat and dig out ash and charcoal, but several of my loyal workers conceived a tireless enthusiasm for the task, although none could have guessed what I was fashioning, to save his life. Their industry and tractability reminded me always of the faithful work which dogs will perform for a master.

While the burning-out was being done, I hacked and worked away to make the bow and stern of the craft a bit more shapely than they, were after our crude log-cutting process. Also I formed a clumsy keel, of straight, slender saplings, which we fastened firmly in place by boring several holes straight through them and then hammering plugs into these and into corresponding holes made, at the cost of infinite pains, along what would be the bottom of the boat when we turned her over for launching.

This keel was finally finished, and by that time all along underneath we had burned and dug away a foot in depth of the wood, which meant that after the log which was about three feet in diameter was squared off to form the open top of the hull, the inside hollowing-out was only three or four inches deep, and we had still to dig it out fully eighteen inches more. Altogether I began to feel no little amount of pride in the general appearance and promise of the craft, hence I worked at it with feverish impetuosity.

My affairs were still at this stage when, one afternoon, I headed a large party of the Links on a hunt in the jungle to the east of the camp. It was a sultry day, peculiarly still, for we nearly always had a cooling breeze. Doubtless our usual quarry had crawled away to various places of concealment. Certainly we found nothing stirring, and after we had tramped unavailingly for more than an hour, I fancied I detected signs of uneasiness among our fellows.

The chief was along, closely followed by Grin, whose malicious face seemed particularly wicked in the shadows of the forest. When a cloud rolled sullenly across the face of the sun, the Links came to a halt, as if undecided what to do. The chief gave a sign and uttered a word conveying his intention of returning to the camp. At that moment we started a hog from his wallow near a small marsh, and calling out eagerly to all to follow and surround the animal, I darted ahead, bow in hand, excited by the prospect of a shot. My enthusiasm carried the main body of the Links, who joined me readily enough.

I noted as I went that the chief brought up the rear, in a sulky mood, while the fawning Grin pointed a finger at myself and laughed in a manner fit to make a fiend of a saint, such ridicule did he heap upon all who would suffer themselves to be led by this power-usurping stranger.

The hog eluded our vigilance completely. We arrived at the base of a mass of rock which towered up like a heap of ruined masonry. Thinking I could command a wider view from its top, while my fellows thrashed the undergrowth about its neighbourhood, to drive the hog from cover, I climbed laboriously up, intent on having a shot if possible.

No sooner was I fairly on the peak and moving about to get in sight of all the Links below, than I noted Grin come dashing out of a jungle, making a noise for all the world like the trumpeting of an elephant. Undoubtedly this sound must have been their name for the huge pachyderm, and it was equally certain that the cry was a warning which inspired the greatest terror, for without delaying a second for anything, the whole force ran madly away from the place, back along the way we had come.

I bawled out lustily, to halt them, and then to try to make them wait, but again Grin sounded the startling trumpet and not a Link not even Fatty turned or paused for all my shouting. I scrambled along the rocks to descend as

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rapidly as possible. It was not an easy task to regain the lower level; I was occupied several minutes by the task. I fell the last five feet and the vines wherein I landed held me back a time which became exasperatingly long.

At length I started away in pursuit of my friends, but not a sign of one could I see, not a Bound of one could I hear. Soon I began to doubt if I were on their trail. However, I felt that I knew my way as well without as with them, and therefore made what speed I could to overtake the band.

Presently I paused to see if they had gone through the vines in the path I was attempting to follow. A low sound came from the distance; with amazing suddenness the forest began to grow dark and oppressive. I fancied for a second the sound was made by the elephant. This theory was abandoned a moment later, for an echo of the rumble proclaimed the noise as thunder. Like a flash, the thought came in my brain that there was no elephant that Grin had purposely given his cry, knowing well what a terror and consequent flight would ensue, with the deliberate purpose of leaving me abandoned in the jungle. I remembered the uneasy feeling which had been manifested by all the Links; they had doubtless been aware that a storm was approaching.

Intent upon defeating this scheme of treachery, and reviling the whole Link nation for cowards of the most consummate type, I stumbled on, through the gathering gloom and through the vines that tripped my feet, growing a trifle anxious about the approaching shower.

Almost before I had gone a hundred yards, the sky was a sea of tempest and driving clouds of the blackest hue. Gusts of heavy, hot wind shook the tops of the trees and crashed through the creepers, swaying them roughly where they hung. The darkness of night descended like a mist of ink. I floundered forward and fell. A flash of lightning and a crash of thunder seemed to rip the very firmament in twain. I was blinded and utterly confused. I ran ahead, only to find myself confronted by an impenetrable fabric of vines and creepers. This I strove to go around, but it seemed to hedge me nearly all about. In desperation I hastened through the only opening I could find. This appeared to lead me into a trail, along which I ran.

Again a brain-scorching glare of lightning threw everything into weird relief, the trees like living creatures which struggled in the mesh of creepers, writhing like snakes, in the bluster of wind. Then a lesser illumination, when I had torn my way along for some distance, cut out of the ebon depths the great mass of rock I had climbed such a short time before. I reeled backward it seemed preposterous some enormity of fate it could not mean that I was lost no, no I would turn about I knew the way I should reach the camp in an hour. What a child I was to be so confused and alarmed by a storm!

Again I started. The flashes and the deafening peals of thunder increased. In five more minutes I stood still, confused, for the fearsome play of lightning illuminated the jungle clearly and it looked all wrong all unfamiliar about me and all deadly thick. I must hasten back to the pile of rocks, I thought, in a sort of despair. I could wait there wait till the storm had passed, and then, when the sky became clear again of clouds, I could easily find my way to the camp.

For fifteen minutes I fought my way through the vines and plants. The flashes were more intense, and nearer than before, but of rocks or of anything familiar I saw not so much as a shadow.

I'm lost! I cried at last, I'm lost!

The confession burst from my lips as if to mock me. The stupendous meaning of the truth burst in upon me ruthlessly. I was lost alone in this terrible jungle and night coming on apace! Every horror of my night in the tree, above that ghastly banquet of the tiger, came vividly back. Every thought of the snakes and the prowling beasts, in search of blood and meat, seemed to burn deeper into my brain with the blinding shimmer of lightning. I fled in one direction, then in another then anywhere, at random.

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It was foolish and weak to race hither and yon as I did in my semi-madness, but the dark jungle created an unspeakable dread in my brain; its terrors were magnified by my contemplation of one danger after another. I foresaw nothing but a dreadful death, which might come soon or late. To find the camp of my Links I felt would be quite impossible, for I knew absolutely nothing, by this, of one direction from another.

Wildly and thoughtlessly I kept on going. A crash of thunder now split open the clouds and let down a deluge of rain. It made no difference to me, any more than did the darkness. But while I was pushing senselessly ahead, I slipped on a patch of wetted clay and slid to an unseen edge, over which I shot, going down below like a sack of bolts. I struck on my feet, landing on something half soft. Instantly a furious growl of pain and rage made me leap away forward. A brilliant dance of lightning made the spot as bright as day and I beheld two hideous ourang-outangs, which had just been in the act of crawling into a cave, and on the legs of one of which I had landed. They came quickly toward me, in a frenzy of anger.

I dashed away, along a well-beaten path that was made through the growth, the two brutes hotly pursuing. The darkness that followed the glare of light was of only a second's duration, so continuous had the electric display in the heavens become. The beasts were gaining upon me. Across a leaf-hidden log I pitched headlong. The ourangs were nearly upon me when I sprang again to my feet and raced away. Still they gained; and the noises they made chilled the blood in my veins, so diabolical was the sound. My breath grew short, my bow, which I had continued to hold in my hand, got caught for a second, yet I dared not let it drop, though it caused me the greatest of trouble.

Behind me now I could almost feel my infuriated foes. I dared to dart a glance across my shoulder. What a snap-shot picture it was, of awful forms half erect and fearfully active, a picture of monsters, suggestive of most inhuman humans, with fiery eyes, with hideous muzzles, massive, prognathous jaws, with terrible open mouths which were filled with drooling fangs, and with black, leather-and-iron hands, now on the ground, now up and reaching, as if to clutch and drag me down!

I knew they would certainly overtake me unless I could do something desperate at once. I jerked out my knife recently whetted on a stone. By the continuously fluttering lightning-shimmer, I chose a spot, ahead, which was comparatively clear. Then while my flesh fairly crept for my dread of being reached, I slacked off my speed a trifle and let the nearest ourang gain a yard.

Suddenly leaping aside, when I bounded to the selected clearing, I swung around with my arm extended, the knife gripped hard, and quickly aiming at the monster's throat, stabbed him with all my might. So great was the impact of the blow, increased by the brute's momentum, that his head was nearly slashed from his body. I saw it lop limberly over on his shoulder. Then the larger brute behind struck the falling body and both were toppled together in a heap.

Again like a madman I darted away. In a few seconds on came the now doubly raging creature, behind. My breathing had become so painful that it seemed as if I could taste my own blood in my mouth. I dared not stop and I dared not attempt my trick a second time. A fearful note of wrath was in the sound which the gaining monster now began to utter. I knew he was sure he should catch me soon. Before me, abruptly, the growth was as thick as a hedge. I saw that I must change my course. Baffled, not knowing what else I could do, I pulled an arrow from my quiver and notched it on my bow-string as I ran. Then stopping I turned, drew it quickly and let it drive point blank at my on-rushing foe. It flew too low, for the string was wet and in no fit condition, and struck the beast in the fleshy part of the thigh.

Emitting a scream of agony, the brute snapped the shaft short off in the wound, with his hand. I took advantage of the opportunity, nearly winded as I was, and plunged desperately through a maze of vines. It caught me, but I tore away a long wire-like creeper that dragged behind for twenty feet. And the gnashing ourang, limping on an almost useless leg, came after me, relentlessly. It seemed like a nightmare endless, although, like a terrible dream, it had not been of more than a few minutes duration from the start.

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My bow-string had apparently stretched, and this effect I had increased when I shot; the weapon was therefore temporarily useless. Had I now been fresh, I believe I could have beaten the wounded brute in the race, but I was ready to sink from exhaustion. He got nearer and nearer. What to do next was more than I could tell.

Panting and fetching my breath by the most painful of efforts, I blundered heavily through a net-work of branches and got my second sudden fall over a bank. This time I struck sitting down in a stream of water which, swollen by the rain, was a roaring torrent. It swept me downward, gasping and battling to keep my head above the surface.

Then with a splash the ourang-outang landed headlong in the flood. He also came rolling and tumbling along with the turbulent volume of water. But he clutched an overhanging limb and hauled himself out and up on the bank, as if he found the plunge exceedingly hateful. Whether he lost the scent, or whether he was convinced that I also had scrambled out of the stream, would be hard to determine. Busy as I was to keep from being drowned, or dashed to death on the rocks, I yet had a flash of relief and thankfulness to find myself freed of the terrible pursuer.

My bow, to which I had clung with such a desperation, was lost from my hand when I fell into the torrent. As I righted myself, a trifle, on my downward sweep, and tried to mark out a branch or a creeper to clutch, a terrific bolt of lightning struck a tree not a hundred feet below. As if a thousand cannon had burst, the din and crash of thunder fairly stunned me for a second where I was. I got a mental photograph of the tree flying apart in monster splinters, as if a charge of dynamite had rended it asunder; and then followed a total annihilation of all light and a downpour of rain which was simply overwhelming.

I was bowled downward helplessly, tossed through a drag of vines that were growing over the bed of the stream, and then, before I had half collected my senses scattered as they were by the stroke of lightning, I was shot through an agitated run-way and plunged below my depth in what I thought to be a large pool of water.

Almost immediately, as I began to swim, on arising to the surface, I pushed against a great piece of timber on the top of which I climbed without a moment's hesitation. Then came a flicker of lightning a mile away, illuminating all the scene, when I discovered that I was crouching on a large section of the very tree which the fearful lightning blast had shattered, and which was floating on the surface of the sheet of water which I had previously dubbed My Lake.

CHAPTER XVII. SAURIANS AS FOES

AS if the culmination of the electric discharge in that particular quarter had come with the bolt which struck so near myself, there was almost a complete cessation of pyrotechnics which would have been visible from the rain-pelted lake. Distant thunder grumbled incessantly, but the gloom which descended over water and jungle was only rendered more intense by the fitful glow of light which trembled upward so far away.

Inasmuch as my log was steady, I sat down as comfortably as possible. Soaked through as I was, I paid no attention to the drenching shower which continued. It was warm enough, and while it could hardly be pleasant, when thus continued such a time, I felt as if it were less than trifling, after all I had recently undergone. Naturally enough the shore had no immediate attractions which would tend to make me wish to paddle in. From the sound of my stream, tumbling noisily into the lake, I concluded the log could not be drifting to any considerable extent. I would wait for the light to come before I moved.

One usually feels entitled to suppose that a thunder-shower is fleeting, here one minute and gone the next, but I was in for a disappointment. Though the wind had ceased to blow, the lowering clouds continued rank with rain and apparently as dense as lead. The darkness of the storm continued till the margin between day and night was

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passed. I realised at last that there would be no light till dawn.

What shall I do? I muttered aloud, but I knew as I spoke that I would sit all night on that floating log, wet, somewhat chilled and ravenously hungry, to say no word of being alone and lost.

The prospect was not exactly bright, but I felt so grateful for my miraculous escape, and so much more content to be on the water than alone again for a night in the jungle, that I entertained no fears for present or future. I tried to think of any duties I owed to myself, which I ought in—reason to perform, and then the obvious impossibility of doing anything at all made me smile.

It was still early evening when the rain ceased to fall. I laid out full length on the log, to see if I thought it safe as a position in which to sleep. It served to ease my joints directly, though I found it as a bed rather hard and lumpy. Sleep being about the last thing possible, I remained on my side, gazing absently at nothing, engaged in reviewing my own mental panorama of events. From time to time I dabbled my hand in the water, as I always had done when in a boat as a child. I was not so peaceful as this apparent mood of dalliance might imply, for my brain was painfully alert, both on the things already done since my memorable ballooning trip with Ford, and concerning what would happen on the morrow and the days, weeks and months to come.

In the midst of this business something gently nosed my fingers in the water. I jerked them away quickly enough to have startled anything alive out of all its wits, but nothing dived or swam away in alarm, so that after a minute I put my hand downward again and felt it come in contact with something which was touching against the log. Exultantly then I grasped this something and pulled it aboard.

It was simply my bow, which had floated down the stream, when I lost it by striking in the water, and which had drifted in the only current there was. In this current, of course, the log was also drifting, hence the coming together.

A feeling as if an old comrade had rejoined me made me joyous, as I held the weapon up to let it drip. Its return to my hand made me think of and feel for the arrows. Five were still in my quiver, and having been protected as they hung on my back, they were as good as ever, except for the wetness of the feathers. The string of the bow was flabby and useless. I held this friend in my hand for more than an hour, rubbing the wood with my palm till it felt as dry as an idol in a temple.

The night advanced. I sat down, lay down and then got up on my feet a dozen times. Once I fancied the log was drifting in toward the shore. With my hands I paddled it slowly away. The stars shone brilliantly at last, for the final cloud had disappeared from the sky. From the jungle issued sounds in plenty, repetitions of what I had heard before, but I thought myself secure and tried to catch a bit of sleep.

A night more long than that one on the lake I have never passed. It was made more interminable by the five—minute slumbers which came to my senses after midnight. I grew uncomfortably chilly. Two things happened before the morning finally dawned. The first was that weary nature asserted herself and I became lost in dreams of that horrible pair of ourang—outangs; the second was that a breeze sprang up and drifted my log where it listed.

I awoke with a start, for something struck the log such a blow that it lurched heavily and all but pitched me end—ways in the water. I sprang up, on my tossing craft, beholding myself less than quarter of a mile from the nearest shore and surrounded by the rings of a great ripple which something had evidently caused on the lake's surface.

It was morning and already warm. My bow string was not only dry, but it had shrunk to nearly its old condition. The stream of water down which I had tumbled was neither in sight nor hearing. I began slowly to realise the

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truth; I had drifted almost entirely across the lake. I scanned the scenery on every side. There were jungle-covered hills in front, the same, but more distant, behind me, and again the same toward the North, where the shore was two miles away. To the South I saw familiar slopes and features of the mountains. This meant that I was looking on the lake as I had when at work on the boat. Plainly my boat and home then, were northward a goodly distance.

Suddenly, while I was looking about, the maker of all the recent disturbance appeared an alligator. He was not very large, but black, hideous and actively concerned about the log. He must have overlooked me entirely to have struck such a blow, and then doubtless he had dived for safety. Now as he jugged up darkly, dividing the waters which rolled off his revolting head, his two little eyes gleamed with a look which made me think of my weapons in a hurry.

He came toward me cautiously, circling slowly about. There was nothing to do but to get an arrow in readiness, and then to wait, but I shuddered to think of a fight with such a powerful monster. The creature, I am convinced, thought me a larger one of the monkeys on which his kind were fond of dining. He presently headed straight for the log. Knowing he would dive in a moment I shot at him quickly. The arrow struck him just beneath the eye. It broke and glanced from the tough wet skin, but a splinter actually struck in his eye-ball and ruined his sight on that side of his head. He sank like a thing of iron. A second later the end of the log went heaving up and I was thrown violently off into the lake.

The log came down with a force that beat up a fountain of spray. I was struck on the foot by the half-blinded reptile as I struggled to get back to my place and out of his way. He began furiously to lash the water as he rammed about in a circle. Rising to the surface like a small living island, he turned upon me again and came ahead with all his speed, making me think of a deadly torpedo.

There was no time for arrow or bow, and the latter was gone again in the bargain, but it took me only half a second to rip out that ever-needed knife. Over we went, more abruptly than before, the water churning and boiling up in foam about my ears. He had calculated poorly and now he closed his awful jaws upon the jagged end of the log, not a foot from my shoulder. I jabbed at him frantically stabbing at his other eye which suddenly popped fairly out of its socket as I pried and gouged with the end of the blade.

The beast raised a snorting noise at this, which made me ill with fear. With the power of a whale and the ferocity of a shark he whipped the water into froth and snapped his jaws in every direction. He was head on, side on and tail on, alternately, feeling for me and grinding pieces out of the log whenever he found it. He clawed me once and knocked me clean over the log with his tail a moment later. I stabbed at him wildly, but with no effect, a dozen times. I was nearly drowned and the creature seemed to be everywhere at once.

Had he been able to see me, my life could not have been saved by any chance, in such a whirlpool of wrathful attacking. I was nearly blinded by the spray which flew from the waves. The log, which was pitching madly, with a force only second to the creature's own, arose abruptly from a plunge and, like a lever, pried the alligator fairly over on his back and threw me almost upon him.

I stabbed him twice in the belly, the last blow tearing a deep, wide hole, as he rolled to right himself, and then to my great astonishment he dived like a porpoise. I lost not a second in getting on top of the log. But the water grew calm and a deep red dye came floating up, to weave a strange device in the ripples.

Breathlessly I waited, for a time that seemed endless. Cautiously I drew in my bow, which was floating near. At last there came a small commotion fifteen feet away. The alligator rose, fought a second with the foe which is Death, and sank again from sight. I believed then that my knife had reached his heart.

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Up to this moment I had taken not so much as a glance toward the shore. I did so now and discovered myself to be something like fifty yards off. The breeze had drifted me rapidly while the fight was being waged. Looking hurriedly about, I saw a rude sort of path, leading into the jungle from the shore, made through the growth, which all along was so thick that I could see no beach in either direction. At the same moment I beheld another huge alligator some distance away, up toward a jutting point of land.

It took me about an instant to decide that I had experienced all the alligator tactics I needed. Quietly pushing my bow downward, to sound the water's depth, I was surprised and glad to have it strike bottom at three feet only. Using it then to pole myself and the log forward, I headed for the trail on shore.

The alligator saw me before I had gone ten feet. He started, full steam ahead, to overhaul my craft. I worked like a maniac; the monster was closing up the gap between us with alarming rapidity. My raft was heavy and deep in the water. Nearer, nearer I drew to the shore, and terribly nearer came the fierce and hungry saurian.

I had twenty yards, fifteen, ten to make; the creature was hardly more than five away. In a second he would strike the log. Leaping madly into the water I dashed to the bank and bounded up a slippery way, less than six good feet from the creature's snout.

Knowing I could beat him on the land, I dashed along full speed. Forty feet up Lord save me! it seemed as if the woods were full of the monsters, several of which moved sluggishly as they heard me coming. These got no chance to be dangerous, for I ran the gauntlet between them almost before they were awake. In five minutes more I was clear of the marshy border of the lake and up on higher ground. Here a large tree, twined in a thousand folds of the creepers, offered an easy retreat. I climbed up among its branches and finding a natural seat, where my back was supported by the extra growth, sat down, weak and winded.

CHAPTER XVIII. THE ENEMY NEAR

IN fifteen minutes after I settled myself in the tree, in a position of comparative ease, I fell into a deep and dreamless slumber. I had not intended to give up in any such manner, but the warmth, the relief to my mind and my weariness, combined to send me off before I realised what I was doing.

It might have been a noise and it could have been pangs of hunger that awakened me finally. The hour was certainly that of noon, if not later. I felt hazy in my notions; it required no little blinking to get the webs from my eyes and brain. Then I heard voices. What was being said sounded to me like Link language.

I nearly cried out, thinking some of the tribe were near at hand, but fortunately I was still too lazy and exhausted to make such an effort. Then a movement attracted my gaze and I saw several Links, sure enough.

But they were black!

I was wide enough awake in a second. I crouched low and got a mass of leaves between these vengeful creatures and myself, for I knew it would be death, or worse, if once they clapped eyes upon my form. Peering furtively down, I saw that all of them were standing perfectly still, just as if they might have halted abruptly and remained in various poses of action. There were eight in all, every one of whom was looking intently at something across the little clearing.

Without moving my body I turned my head and discovered a small black bear, which was sleepily smelling about and moving through the grass and giant ferns. Wondering if presently the Links would dart upon the inoffensive animal and beat it to death with their clubs, I looked them over carefully. Except that they stood erect, they did certainly look like close relations of the savage ourangs. Their ears were large, foreheads low and receding, and

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jaws tremendously heavy and protuberant. Their noses were flat and broad, while their eyes, like those of my friendly Reds, were small, round, near together and nervously watchful. I was not at all gratified to see them here; I wondered if, being so near, they had discovered our settlement on the hill. Our settlement! Would I ever get back to my barbarous company and that city again, I wondered.

The bear shuffled off, with the utmost indifference to anything which might be near. Then I beheld those black Links, one of whom possessed the club with the nugget of gold on the end, do precisely what I had seen my Reds do, the day we were driven into the cave. They crept up to the tracks which bruin had left in the moist earth and kneeling, as if in adoration, each placed his forehead down where the bear had trod. Plainly the creature was held in great reverence and awe by all the family of Links, whatever their colour. This seemed to me a remarkable and wholly inexplicable thing.

Two of the fellows, I noted, had fruits and cocoa-nuts in their hands, having probably gathered them recently for the dinner of the party. They now parleyed a moment in monosyllables, with the others, the result being that all of the food was deposited on the ground, doubtless with the thought that the bear might return and be pleased to find something to eat. It was doubtless a primitive sacred offering. As silently as so many snakes, the fellows then withdrew, on the side just opposite to that in which their adored one had disappeared. I heard their voices die away in the jungle.

In order to be sure that I incurred no risk, I waited for fully fifteen minutes. The forest was particularly still. Slipping quietly down from my perch, at last, I possessed myself of those fruits in the twinkling of an eye, and devouring a part then and there, I ascended to my throne with all I could carry, and finished a meal, the relish of which surpasses all human imagination.

When I had done at last and that craving, inward system was fully gratified, I heaved a big sigh of content and gazed off listlessly into the ocean of endless verdure. A soft wind fanned lazily by; there was nothing to threaten my life; the tropics were at their loveliest. As naturally as it comes to a tired animal, sleep again came creeping across my senses. Without even moving into an easier position, I slept away the whole balmy afternoon.

I waked at last and found it was night. How drowsy it was, how blissful to sleep and sleep. My brain was too dull to receive an impression of alarm at my being alone in the jungle; I felt that I did not care what occurred. If anything wished to come and eat me up, it was all right, but I did wish they might not make me awake while the job was being done. Howls, death-screams, roars of the prowlers all made a lullaby that soothed me more. I turned the other way about, heavily, and sank again into slumber.

CHAPTER XIX. ADORATION SCORNED

NOTHING was fresher nor keener than I when again the sun touched the tips of the trees. Asleep one second as soundly as a hibernating squirrel, I was as sharply awake the next as a ferret in a coop. I shook myself and stretched.

Great Scott! I exclaimed, that was a nap!

Swinging down from my berth I ate of the food which was still on the ground, where the bear had neglected it quite, and then taking my bearings as best I could, from memory of my imaginary map of the lake, I struck off through the jungle for home.

Of the hours which it took me to force my way between tangles and around a marsh and over hills and down dales, to accomplish what I thought to be something like two miles on an air line, I have anything but pleasant recollections. That I met with many creatures, flocks of parrots and a troop of apes and monkeys; that I recoiled

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from a path in which a huge boa-constrictor was gliding, and that I cursed my luck repeatedly for ever having landed in such a place, is all a matter of small account, compared to the fact that I stood at last on a hill and saw our very camp. I came to it then in less than one more hour of hottest work and travel.

An excited yell announced my approach before I had walked ten feet on the slope of our hill. If the Links had been enthusiastic on the morning after my night with the tiger, they were crazy and flabbergasted all at once on this occasion. The whole population came tumbling and running down the slope. They were worse than a pack of great, rough dogs that nearly knock one endways with delight. They made me fairly wild, the idiotic things, for my patience was gone to the winds, after my struggle to win through the jungle, and besides, it was they who had plunged me into all the trouble. I batted them off with rare satisfaction and punched a couple of heads in the bargain, but the fools were more tickled than ever, though I would wager that some of them smarted.

They fell all over one another as they crowded me up the hill, but my temper rather rose than lowered, for I began to pile my accumulated grievances up against them. I wanted the whole outfit to understand that I thought them cowards, for running from a noise, that day in the woods, and that I now owed nothing to any one in the tribe for my whole skin and presence once more in My village.

When I arrived inside the walls I was made decidedly more angry to find that Grin had stolen the tiger-skull off my shelter to fasten it up on the one in which he slept at night, and also by the fact that every blessed arrow we owned had been shot away by the fellows, as a lot of inconsequent boys might have done, merely to see them fly and to meddle with the bows. These bows, by the way, were strewn about on the ground where everyone kicked them carelessly and walked on them with utter unconcern.

It took me about one minute to exhibit a bit of temper that scared the creatures so thoroughly that all but Fatty jumped smartly away and stood at a distance, eyeing me painfully, ready to fall dead, if such act could calm me down. Fatty had hastily and exultantly jerked the tiger relic off from Grin's abode and fetched it over to mine, after which the old idiot clung to me patiently through rain of blows and kicks, content to receive any amount of punishment, but wholly unwilling to leave the region of my feet. I believe he would have smiled affectionately up in my face and refused to run away if I had raised my knife to kill him on the spot.

You Grin, there, I snorted in my wrath, if ever I catch you in another of your beastly, treacherous tricks, I'll rip you in two and beat the pieces on a rock!

The females, seeing in a moment that the fawner was the chief object of my anger, and cordially hating the fellow in the bargain, pinched him and struck him and bit him on the shoulders till he was constrained to run away to preserve his miserable hide. Had they killed him at once I confess I should have been delighted to witness the deed.

I moved about, with Fatty, in the fine large circle which the troubled but respectful Links maintained, while I drank some water and ate up a mango which was left in one of the baskets. This was evidently taken as a favourable sign, for immediately old and young, male and female made a great demonstration of procuring me anything and everything that Link or Link-governor could possibly desire to eat, in hopes of propitiating the demon of temper which they readily comprehended was raging within me.

CHAPTER XX. THE CHIEF IS PLEASED

MY INDIGNATION having produced a wholesome effect, I decided not to be placated readily by anything, and determined thereafter to maintain a certain strictness which should compel a greater respect. It is not entirely a human characteristic for a creature to grow too familiar when treated with easy-going indulgence, for I have often seen dogs and other animals impose on good nature with manners almost insolent.

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For several days I treated the Links somewhat harshly, requiring much work on the boat and on more of the arrows. I encouraged also a species of fear which I found my conduct had created. It was high time, I knew, to dominate the creatures, unless I was willing that they should dominate me.

They were quick to see that I rarely even threatened physical violence, however, and this soon tended to give them a confidence about approaching my sacred person. I had been in hopes that my gruffness and show of impatience had so discouraged the albino female that she would keep her distance, for she did exhibit a becoming timidity for a time, but this gradually wore away. I was exceedingly annoyed to observe, not only that her disquieting symptoms were returning, but also that she manifested greater ardour than ever before. My efforts to appear disagreeable were producing an effect exactly the opposite of what I desired.

That trouble would be brewed again I felt was inevitable. The chief had somewhat manifested a spirit of doubt and alarm, in common with the others, when he found me aroused, but this he was daily attempting to overcome. I could see that the fire of jealousy, especially in regard to the manoeuvres of his fickle and silly mate was getting more assertive. It could only be a matter of time till his animal-rage would burst all bounds, and then one or the other of us would get hurt, for I had early decided that my life was quite as important as his, and I therefore watched him narrowly, always.

The work on the boat and weapons was progressing, but I was all impatience to make things ready for my contemplated flight. In the midst of this state of affairs, the albino increased her advances, by bolder demonstrations. Exasperated beyond endurance, I seemed powerless to perform anything which should end the matter decisively. Upon coming from my shelter, one morning, after having been to the spring, I saw her down the hill, adoring my tracks.

She was on all fours, worshipping, by placing her forehead on the ground where I had stepped, just as Reds and Blacks had done to the tracks of the bear. She was obviously in a state of ecstasy which was most insane. She had never before proceeded so far as this, to my knowledge. It made me boil with wrath. I should have liked to box her ears smartly. How alert and secret she was in her unseemly behaviour was demonstrated by the activity with which she made off when her chief appeared around the slope.

Two days later I was exceptionally provoked to find this female within a rod of my dug-out, indulging in more of this madness. Moreover she was being observed by the angry chief, although I was not aware of this at the moment. So disgusted and desperate did I feel that I stepped quickly to a rock, whereon my tortoise basin was standing, filled with water in which I had washed, and grabbing it up I jumped toward her and dashed the contents all over her head and body, while she was still upon the ground, adoring.

She was simply wild. A wet cat could not begin to be half so surprised, indignant and outraged as her ladyship became, instantly. She leaped to her feet, gasping, dripping, shuddering at the contact of all that water, her mouth wide open, her eyes afire with the light of sudden hatred and fury. Not even a woman scorned could have been so ready to shred my flesh from my bones. I thought for a second she would fly at my throat, in her passion, and gouge out my eyes, but the fiendish laughter of the chief and of ten or a dozen other females who, of course, had seen the whole performance turned her attention. This derision, however, made her face the more diabolical in its expressions of wrath.

Fortunately what the lady said to myself was wholly unintelligible, for I had mastered hardly as much as twenty of their words at the time. But I was left no room for doubt that the language was as burning as it was impetuous. I laughed with the others; indeed the whole thing struck me as being so comical that I was fairly doubled over with unrestrained merriment. This acted like oil on a blazing fire, and being no longer able to control herself at all, the drenched female dashed madly off to the edge of the woods, to vent her rage as best she could. The chief was immensely pleased.

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In the immunity from the female's attentions and the consequent jealousy of her mate which I now enjoyed, I drove the work with hearty zest. The boat was all but finished, yet it needed digging out at least two inches more, and this I felt to be important, knowing how heavy was the log of which it was made. I had even fashioned a pair of oars, the blades of which were firmly lashed to the handles, but by then our tools of flint were almost entirely useless. Many had been lost and all had been more or less broken. The work actually ceased for lack of these necessary implements. I set my fellows to digging up the ground, in the hope of unearthing more of the pebbles which furnished the flint. In the forest, where the soil was damp, we found a white, efflorescent substance in great abundance, near the surface. This, from its peculiar taste and general appearance, I knew to be common saltpetre, doubtless of value to the commercial world, but of no account to me when I wanted flint. We tried the hillsides and various localities, but not one of the precious chalcedony pebbles could we find.

The suggestion occurred to me at once that we could go to the old camp and dig all we needed, but this presented difficulties which aroused my impatience. I desired to get away before additional complications could arise. As a matter of fact, I was watching Grin very closely for evidence of further duplicity, which I thoroughly expected to detect, soon or late. If once I could find the outlet of the lake, I thought, I would say goodbye to these half-animal beings without the slightest pang of regret, for they grated on me daily, more and more.

I determined to launch the boat as it was and begin my explorations. This work we undertook one sultry morning. The clay which I had plastered over the surface of the wood, where I had wished to protect it from the fire, was baked hard. We broke it away in pieces, and when it was off and the boat turned bottom downwards, I felt exceedingly proud of the work and gratified to find the craft in much better shape than I had thought to be possible.

It was placed on the rollers, after no little amount of pulling and hauling, and we were all engrossed with the preparations to shove her across the intervening beach to the water, when without the slightest warning there was a sudden rush and yelling about us, and we were almost instantly surrounded by a force of the savage black Links from the jungle.

CHAPTER XXI. WAR WITH THE BLACKS

WHOLLY UNPREPARED as we were for this attack, and with the only clubs we had lying about in the grass, it seemed as if we should be overwhelmed in a moment and killed where we stood. My fellows, however, were not only marvellously quick to regain their weapons, but they also set up a series of cries which alarmed the camp on the moment.

A score of fighters had been left in the settlement that morning, to prepare the skins of animals recently taken, and to point some arrows with what flints we had remaining. These now came running down the hill, not with the bows and arrows, as I had hoped they might, but with their usual weapons.

Before our reinforcements could arrive, the Blacks rushed in and killed two of my workers as if they had been a pair of helpless worms. We were in the midst of a mass of the black devils, about three to our one, making terrible sounds of triumphant yelling and snarling. Fortunately the chief was with us, and now his great crystal club retaliated on one of the foremost enemies and cleared a space for a moment, while I hurriedly pushed my fellows back to back in hollow-square order, and tried to let them know we must move all we could toward our hill, as we fought.

The Blacks were fiercely impetuous mad to wipe us out. They dashed upon us with total lack of order, and therefore we beat down many before they killed one more of our number. Had my fellows not been used to obeying what I ordered, I could not have kept them formed together for a moment. It was only this condition of semi-order which saved us from total annihilation, for our mad antagonists rushed the fray with most

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inconsequent violence and force.

There was singular din of blows clubs on flesh and clubs on clubs, cries of rage and agony and shouted words both of Linkish and English. It was a spectacle of wildest action, the quick, muscular Blacks, inconceivably savage, dancing, leaping about and hurling themselves upon us, their clubs fairly flaying the air, their faces fiendish with animal ferocity, teeth revealed and eyes darting fire of hatred, while we were equally wrought up, vicious and thirsty for blood, smashing them down, waging war of defense and war of vindictive aggression.

They were winning, crowding us too near together, beating our outside fighters to death and dragging them feet first into a melee of descending clubs, when our mates descended on the rear of the ones between ourselves and camp, and broke the cordon completely. They screamed with hideous delight as they bowled over a dozen of the foe, but over-confidence would have cost us every life and the Lord only knows what after results had my comrades not understood and obeyed my commands to fly, for we were still outnumbered by heavy odds. Pushing my Red fellows, guiding and endeavouring to retire them in order, I suddenly saw a club coming straight for my neck. I dodged, but got a scrape along the scalp and a thud on the shoulder, when I drove home my knife for the first time during the fight, and ripped it out from a three-cornered wound. Then we darted through the battered-down opening in the ring and ran as hard as we could drive for the camp.

Up the hill we surged with the Blacks swarming up behind us. We had gained fifty yards, owing doubtless to our perfect familiarity with the ground; nevertheless a pair of our wounded fell behind and were overtaken and beaten to a pulp at once. Through the gate in our wall we scrambled, and then I got my bow in hand at last and flew about frantically, shouting and urging my fellows to arm themselves with the others.

While only about twenty of us rushed back to the wall as archers, the foremost Blacks, outstripping their comrades, bounded through the opening, or over the wall, insane with the hoarded rage of former defeats, and ignorant of what they should find. The chief had halted just inside, with two of his mightiest fighters. They smashed down Link after Link that attempted to rush the gate. Then we with the bows arrived on the scene. The black demons in solid phalanx stormed the wall and came climbing up over its top.

Now! Now! I cried, Shoot the pigs!

It made me thrill to see those powerful fellows making crescents of the bows. My heart leaped exultantly to hear the twangs and to see the small but deadly shower of arrows suddenly pierce the air and sink in the scabbards of flesh. The very first flight toppled five of the creatures endways.

Shoot! Pigs! I shouted again, for these two words my Links comprehended.

More came running to join us with the bows. We spread out in something of a line. The air became thick with the hurtling arrows. Some struck the wall and some flew high, but we mowed down many a Black, dead or wounded, till the fierce attacking devils were appalled to see us and to see this mysterious work of slaughter.

They halted; the back-bone of their mad impulse was broken; they could not endure to advance in the face of fatalities about them, much less to carry the place, over the bodies of their fellows. Yet they were still more than we in numbers, and had they known of and adopted the bloody tactics which sacrifice many, in those heroic, irresistible charges by which men win a fearful battle, they would still have swept us off the hill to the forest beyond, for our meagre supply of arrows was nearly exhausted already.

Below the wall they rallied. The fellow who was armed with the gold-nugget club which was dripping with gore seemed to be in command. He flourished his terrible weapon and fired the Blacks with courage anew. They came for us, hot and eager to even up the score.

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I saw the great ebon creature head their charge, and notching my last remaining arrow on my bowstring, I waited for him, in great excitement. They paid no attention to the gate, but crying out madly, swarmed up over the wall again as if nothing on earth could check their career. Those of my fighters who still had arrows shot with vengeance in every vibrating muscle. The Black who led, presented a splendid target, presently, though he was moving quickly. I let the shaft drive straight for his breast, but he was leaping downward at the second it arrived, and it struck him squarely in the top of the left shoulder, near the neck and just inside the collar-bone. It seemed for a second as if it had gone in half its length, but beyond stumbling forward a trifle when he landed, the fellow appeared to have received no harm.

I heard a cry of despair go up from the Blacks when they saw their leader struck, but I gave no heed to anything, so intent had I become on watching this active creature. I was so absorbed, indeed, that before I realised what was occurring, the fellow had bounded near enough to swing his club to slay me where I stood. Half falling backward to escape, I lost my footing. The club came swiftly through the air, my arm was knocked aside and the nugget thumped ponderously on my ribs and bowled me end over end.

It had all happened in a second. I was down and knew I was badly hurt before I could have winked. I thought the furious Black would rush upon me and batter in my head, for I could not have risen to save myself from anything. But the savage creature fell dead in his tracks for my arrow had found his heart and he had died even as he struck that powerful blow. Had he not been fatally hit, his blow would have slain me outright.

In the meantime, my fellows, having brought down three of the foe with arrows, had grabbed up their clubs again to beat in the heads of the Blacks who dared jump down in the field of death. Seeing their chief as he sank, without so much as the nicker of a movement, the remaining besiegers gave a yell of dismay and fled in a panic.

Our forces savage and aggressive the moment the tables were turned became the hunters instead of the hunted. They descended upon the flying Blacks, slaying all the wounded who hobbled in the rear of the wild retreat and all whom they overtook before the jungle received its defeated children back.

CHAPTER XXII. HOME JOYS AND TROUBLES

I MUST have swooned, for I knew no more of anything until I awoke, in a dazed condition, and found old Fatty bending down above me, while near at hand nearly all the beings of the tribe stood gazing on my prostrate form with expressions of grave concern.

Upon trying to arise I was so shot through with pain in my side and chest, that I felt things go dizzy directly. Then after a little I attempted to move to a more comfortable position. This was accomplished only at the cost of great agony. I found that my left arm was badly injured while all the upper portion of my body seemed quivering with pain. Never had I been so wounded in my life.

I asked for water, for the Links were but little better than so many faithful dogs, who could whine over my helpless carcass, but who had not the slightest idea of what to do to relieve my suffering. Never had muscular action caused me such pangs as I underwent upon trying to swallow.

The thump I had received, slightly back of the region of the heart, had come so near to being my pass to the world beyond that I believe another volt of power in the blow would have done the work. As it was, I refrained from crying out only by exerting my utmost will, when the chief and Fatty carried me bodily and laid me down on the skins in my shelter.

My consciousness went again as soon as my body touched the couch; yet I rallied soon and attempted to nod my recognition as the chief came back again, bearing the great gold-nugget club, which he leaned against the wall.

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It became manifest early that if I survived the shock to my system and the fracture of at least one rib, which I felt sure had resulted from the blow, it must be through sheer good luck, backed by a hardy constitution, for of lotions, or bandages or skillful attendance there could be absolutely none.

That night I experienced the most excruciating torture it has ever been my lot to endure. Every beat of my heart was like the stab of a dagger, in feeling. Concussion, even that inflicted by a fist, has proved too much for the great throbbing organ of man full many a time. I thought of this afterward, but during that first twenty-four hours, I was utterly incapable of doing anything except living through the ordeal of pain.

All through the day that followed I lay there, feverish, yet too badly hurt to move on my bed. I ate nothing and drank water only, in single swallows. Fatty remained at my side as a mother might have done. Fifty times that day he ran to the spring for the fresh, cool water, as that which stood about in a shell for half an hour became too warm to be fit to drink. After a time he licked one of my burning hands, timidly, as if uncertain of how this ministrations would be received. It felt cool and not at all disagreeable; I therefore made no motion to draw the member away. Presently the worried creature repeated the favour; and after he had done this humble office for both hands and wrists, I felt so soothed and refreshed that I fell asleep at last, and got a natural rest.

Day after day went by and I was still on my back, though I could see that improvement continued steadily. It was fully a week before I was able to move without suffering agonies, and for some time after that the pain in my ribs was exceedingly sharp. During all this time I was amply supplied by Fatty with fruits and with abominably cooked meats, for the females were neglecting all my former instructions, concerning the fire and the roasting and boiling of game.

As soon as I was able to sit up, propped against a rock, I worked a little every day at making arrows, and urged my most skillful assistants to do the same. These shafts could not be pointed, owing to our lack of flints, but we finished several hundred, as to all but the requisite heads. I was visited daily by all the tribe, except two individuals, Grin and the unforgiving Lady Albino. The little Links who had fled in uncertainty before, even up to the last, now began to make me more of a regular companion. They were near me, more or less, from dawn till dusk, capering about, sitting in groups in the sunlight, to watch me with ever-nervous eyes, and rolling over one another in rough, good-natured play.

The very smallest of these children were hairy little scamps most astoundingly like baby chimpanzees, except for their lighter colour. By the hour I watched them at their play and listened to their funny little words of talk. It was not an ordinary baby prattle, to be sure, but it made me think that all babies are very much alike. Their chief amusement consisted in making a noise, by striking any two objects together. The rarest things they did were crying and laughing.

There was one little chap who never rolled on his back with the others, never made a noise and rarely spoke. He was the only one that looked in my face with eyes that were human-like and steady. I fancied his quaint little face was wistful; it was certainly serious and therein widely different from those of all his companions. This little creature approached me most timidly and yet with a certain persistency that finally made me look about, in the morning, to see if he had come.

For several days he sat near my feet, over which, finally, he laid his little arm. Gradually then he worked nearer and nearer to my head, as I sat against the rock until at last he cuddled unobtrusively up against me and permitted my arm to close loosely about his little form. Thereafter this was his one particular place. Hour after hour he would nestle close in this, his nook, turning his questioning eyes to mine, now and again, and blinking as if he tried to think out the great inscrutable problem of what we are and why we came to partake of the mystery of life. How foolishly fond of this little creature I became, I shall not attempt to say.

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This was a time of laziness for all the tribe. The Links were sun-lovers of the most ardent description. Secure on our hill, undriven by any task-master, provided with food in plenty, they basked for hours, lying flat on the back, and played exaggerated pranks, sometimes in a languid spirit of ease and sometimes with the greatest activity of movement. They appeared to know nothing of family ties, nor of sorrow for those whom they had been obliged to bury. They had no remorse, nor pricks of conscience for any acts ever performed, nor did they seem to have conceived of anything superior to themselves, except in a purely physical manner. Thus they realised nothing of an occult, spiritual power of control and nothing of mystery, either in life or death. They therefore had not the slightest fundamental suggestion of a religion, and worshipped nothing and feared nothing, save that which they could see and which they had discovered, in their animal capacity, to be dangerous to life or limb. They could be made to feel a certain sort of awe, but this was one slight degree only above that emotion which in an animal would excite the expression the creature is cowed.

I had ample opportunity to become acquainted with the various traits of my friends, for I was something of an invalid for more than two weeks. I came to the conclusion that the Links were keener than I in every natural sense; that is, they could see things more quickly; they could hear that which escaped my duller ears; they could smell odours which failed to convey themselves to me; and they could feel dangers by a sort of unknown sense, or instinct, of which I would always remain in complete ignorance. They were highly organised in the natural attributes; they were powerful and active above any animal of their size I have ever seen; but when thought of as humans, they ranked with children who just fail to clutch the ideas of older people and whose efforts in manufacturing are crude and worthless.

When at last I began to walk about again, performing small labours, I still had an occasional dart of pain through my side, which made a feeling of illness spread all through my system. However, the weather was beautiful, the food simple and wholesome and the work soon began to limber me up.

Before I was quite myself again, I commenced to be exceedingly annoyed by the actions of Grin. Although I had been the recognised superior, if not the governor, of the tribe at the moment when I laid low the chief of the Blacks and completed our victory, yet my wound and subsequent weakness had rendered nearly everything nugatory. Inasmuch as my nearness to death had robbed me of the power by which I kept the Links in awe, many had assumed an irreverent air which became positive insolence on the part of the fawner.

Having allied himself with the resentful female albino, this creature was never neglectful of an opportunity to perform some sneaking bit of meanness. For a time I was too weak to resent these impositions, and therefore the creature grew bolder in the liberties which he dared to take. Thus my tiger skull had again disappeared, and I knew he had stolen it, although I had no means of proving the theft. One morning, however, I caught the scoundrel in the act of smashing my turtle-shell basin with a rock. His reason for doing this was two-fold. First, it had contained the water with which I had dampened the ardour of Madame Albino, and second, it was regarded by all as something uncanny out of which I drew a certain power as I washed my face and hands an operation of which none of the tribe was ever guilty. Grin may have thought to deprive me of my source of strength.

This wanton destruction of my property made me exceedingly angry. Before he could leave the scene of his labour I rushed up and gave him a kick which was decidedly swift. It assisted him to rise with great alacrity. He turned with a snarl and threw himself upon me. A fight was on in less than a second. I had feared this collision for several weeks. It had come at a bad time for me, inasmuch as the creature was twice as strong as I, even when in my normal state, and now I was far from being restored to my former condition. We wrestled for a moment, the beast attempting to bite, scratch and choke me and to bear me down to the ground. I threw him off for a moment and Fatty would have jumped him instantly and killed him, no doubt, with his club had I not waved him off abruptly. I was gratified to know that a friend was near, but I desired to show the Links, who assembled at once, that I was master when it came to a battle. This decision nearly cost me my life, for the brute gave me a wrench that brought back agonies which were well nigh insupportable, while I was knocking his hideous head aside from an attempted bite at my cheek.

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For a second I regretted that Fatty had not batted off his head, for I felt as if I should drop from weakness. But when he dug his nails in my arm the smart aroused such a rage that my strength came flooding upward, like a gush of something hot in my blood. I had warded off many of his lunges and was waiting for an opening as if I had been engaged in boxing. The chance presented itself now. He was leaping toward me viciously when I slugged him with all my might, fairly in the pit of the stomach. My fist actually seemed to sink into the fellow's body. He was lifted off his feet, but before he could fall I fetched him a right-hander under the chin that jolted his head backward abruptly.

He fell like an effigy, arms outstretched, so that the back of his skull was the first thing to strike the ground. There he lay, limp as a snake and motionless as a stone, while a referee could have counted him out for the next twenty minutes. A great howl of satisfaction greeted this performance, which placed me again on my pedestal of incomprehensible power. The truth of the matter was, however, that I was ready to fall over, myself, so severe had been the strain and the injury done to my weakened frame. By the greatest of efforts I walked away and washed myself at the spring.

Grin, when at last he again assumed a perpendicular, was dizzy on his legs, ill and altogether a sorrowful object. I knew his head was aching and that his stomach would be morbidly sensitive for several days. He was hooted and picked upon also, having been utterly defeated, so that he was glad to retire from active service, muttering no end of what I supposed were threats and maledictions.

I was of precious little account to myself, or to any of the tribe, that day, but on the morrow I was mending rapidly again, and beginning to pick up various threads of the plans I had fashioned before our fateful day of battle with the Blacks.

It was long since anyone from the camp had visited the boat, but my thoughts had been there much of the time. I had feared, daily, another invasion by the enemy, whom I knew to be revengeful and who now understood the nature of our fortifications and means of defense. This feeling of alarm increased. Should they come, with a force still greater than the last, and find us armed with blunt arrows only, our resistance would be short indeed. I dared not contemplate undertaking my exploration of the lake, much less my escape, while we were possibly threatened with another attack and while I was weaponless myself, excepting for my trusty knife.

Being almost wholly fit again I determined to make an immediate excursion to our old cave-camp for the purpose of securing a supply of chalcedony pebbles.

CHAPTER XXIII. NEEDED MUNITIONS GATHERED

MY PREPARATIONS consisted merely of acquainting a score of the Links with my desire and of selecting six of the most suitable of our baskets for use in bringing the flints to our village. More of the fighters than I wanted were eager to be of the party, but I deemed it advisable to leave a number at home with the females and children.

We got an early start and headed in what I had calculated to be the right direction. In this calculation I had been guided solely by my memory of our camp and its position, relatively to the lake, as seen that day from the top of the old volcanic peak. Pushing ahead as rapidly as possible, and spending no time on the game which we naturally encountered in the jungle, we traversed several miles without coming upon anything with which my friends were familiar, so that I soon gave up hoping that they would be of much assistance in finding the former dwelling place. From what I knew of them now, I was convinced that none ever proceeded far from camp in any direction. Their longest marches were accomplished when they felt obliged to abandon a settlement, and I believe that even then they rarely travelled more than five or six miles at the furthest.

After another hour of pushing along we emerged from the forest into a small, low valley which was nearly all a

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swamp and at the head of which was a mountain of considerable height. This place discouraged me deeply for I had believed I should really discover some guiding landmark, on clearing the woods. That we had gone somewhat in the wrong direction there could be no doubt, for I was sure we had travelled far enough, by this, to have passed the old cave, had it been on our line of march.

The day was excessively hot and I was weary and sleepy, being still a bit soft after my troubles, but I was annoyed at the thought of being baffled. I determined to climb the mountain, for the sake of the enlarged prospect to be had from its summit, and therefore we toiled up, slowly, through a dense growth that covered the lower part of the slope.

Upon reaching the summit, I gave a cry of delight. I had recognised the elevation as being the very same volcanic peak which Fatty and I had ascended together, and which the party of us now had approached from the opposite side. This gave me my bearings at once. I could all but see the old camp below, when we had crossed the ancient, filled-in crater. I pointed out the lake, and I made out the true direction of our fortified settlement far away on its miniature hill. We started down in a hurry, for even the Links knew the way after this. I might have thought of nothing but the flints we were after had I not fairly stumbled against the out-jutting ledge of sulphur which I had discovered on the previous visit.

Why here, I said aloud, unthinkingly, I believe I'll take a load of this to camp. By jingo, boys, I'll make a lot of gunpowder!

Sulphur here, saltpetre at home, charcoal to be had for the burning, my thoughts ran like lightning over the possibilities thrust into my unwitting hand. Powder? To be sure I could make powder! I would make a ton of it all we wanted and more! I would provide myself with a keg or two and take it along with me when I left in my boat to escape. But how I would use it, what I could do with the dangerous stuff, when once I had it having no guns and no cannon this was more than I could tell. Indeed this part of the proposition floored me at once, but with a ready refuge in postponing the working out of this trifling problem, I dismissed it from my brain completely and had my fellows assist me in breaking off enough of the purest of the mineral to fill two baskets heaping full.

Two Links were required to each basket, when it came to bearing this cargo away, but I meditated that some wholesome labour was precisely what they needed. We reached the old camp shortly. There were the rocks thrown up to cover the mouth of the cave, which had threatened to be our tomb, but the grass and ferns had overgrown the spot and much of the rock heaps, to such an extent that no one could have guessed that a camp or a fire had ever been located in or about the clearing.

The ravine, where the tribe had buried its dead, presented its former appearance. We set to work without delay and in less than thirty minutes the pebbles were accumulating with gratifying rapidity. I was careful to select the ones best suited to our sundry requirements. Those in some of the baskets I covered with soil, in order to keep their moisture from departing before we should have the time necessary to split them and chip out the arrow-heads, axes and knives.

It was something of a giant task to convey our baskets away, when I finally had them loaded to my satisfaction, but the Links were tremendously strong, and all were willing to make the greatest possible exertion, that day, to gratify my wishes.

We ate a lunch of fruits and some cold meat which I had carried along, after which we made a bee-line for home. But I fear that any self-respecting bee would have been much ashamed of such a line as ours became before we issued forth from the trees, at last, in sight of the hill.

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When we arrived, a great surprise was in store for all. Grin, the fawner, had disappeared run away. The news was received with indifference by the chief, and with evident gladness by not a few of the others. When at last it was made intelligible to me, I knew not whether to rejoice or to be concerned and suspicious of something impending.

CHAPTER XXIV. EXPERIMENTAL GUNPOWDER

OUR WORK of creating things of flint began that same day, although the afternoon was far advanced when we arrived. I was in a fever to complete our preparations against any future aggressions on the part of the enemy, particularly as I had a growing conviction that Grin, the deserter and treacherous devil, had gone straight away to hunt for the Blacks. I believed his sole intention was that of betraying his kind and thereby of wreaking a vengeance for all the punishments which he had rightfully undergone.

All the questions I could ask about the fellow, through the medium of my few words in Linkish and my signs, which were supplemented by my native language, failed to elicit any satisfactory information. Having too much to do to spend my time in thinking of the beast, I set my selected assistants to work at splitting out slabs of flint.

The greater part of the pebbles, I had my fellows bury in a moist, shady place, for, labour as diligently as we might, we could not complete the work on a third of the stone, as I knew, before the hot air would begin to render the stuff as hard as glass and quite unworkable.

During all next day we were at it, hammering, chipping and forming. Four fellows, clever at binding were heading the arrows already provided, and lashing hatchets and knives to handles. That night, by way of a pleasant diversion, I secured some fragments of charcoal, and reducing this and some of my sulphur and nitre to a flour, mixed the three together and ground the grayish substance for a time, between two stones. Such a dust arose that I was obliged to sprinkle the stuff with a few drops of water. This seemed to help it in combining, but do my best, I could not make the mixture resemble gunpowder in the slightest degree. Having just about decided to give the task over, as one presenting difficulties too great for me to cope with successfully, I took a palm-full of my material and, by way of experiment, threw it on the fire.

Instantly the well-known hiss resulted and a dense cloud of pungent smoke arose with such a quickness that I stumbled backward from the place, involuntarily. Only Fatty and one or two others of the Links beheld this exhibition, the others being already asleep. The fright depicted on the faces of this small but select audience was a wonderful thing to see. I determined at once to set about burning a quantity of charcoal, for already I had conceived an idea that it might be possible to utilise the explosive to advantage, and I intended at least to give my scheme a trial.

On the day that followed, the first thing I did was to have the Links collect a lot of wood, the softest and driest I could find. This I heaped up in a conical pile and walled in snugly with turf and a little of the clay, which was everywhere about us. When it was lighted and smoking slightly through various small chinks, I banked it up around the bottom and returned to the work on the flints.

Before we got through with those pebbles we had rough but serviceable arrow-heads by the hundreds, knives in plenty, hatchets for all, with some to spare, and sixty or eighty spear-heads, which were bound to long, stout hafts, in the regular course of finishing up. I reserved for my own personal arsenal two axes, two knives and fifty of the finest arrows in the lot. Also I assumed a general command, as custodian, over all the weapons and utensils in the tribe's possession.

No sooner were the armaments complete than I went to my powder-making with indefatigable vigour, thankful for every day that passed without bringing the foe, which I dreaded and thoroughly expected to see come swarming up the slope from the woods. I made my fellows pound up charcoal till some were nearly as black as

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the enemy for whom we were preparing. The powdered stuff we placed in the baskets, several of which I plastered inside with clay, which dried hard and firm. The saltpetre, which we dug and brought up the hill, was treated in a similar manner, as was also the sulphur. Anyone to have seen me directing this business would have thought I intended to supply an old-fashioned navy with explosives.

During these days I in nowise neglected the archery practice, which alone could make my warriors capable of using the weapons to advantage. We shot at a target the size of a man, which I fashioned out of skins and heavy palm leaves. This being backed by a sort of hedge, constructed of bamboo and more of the leaves, we lost but few of the arrows employed. And the arrows used were not from our pointed stock, though they were whittled sharp on the end, so that many pierced the target as neatly as a bullet. Thirty of my force grew decidedly efficient, being accurate, strong shots who could be relied upon to perform good work on any attacking party. We also used the spears, in the throwing of which the Links took great delight. I was sure that come what might, the fellows would never again be so primitive as they were when first I met them in the jungle. Whether I left them or not, they would hereafter possess weapons which would place them far above the Blacks in point of capacity to kill.

One of the greatest difficulties with which I had to contend, while making my powder, was the frequent coming of rain. This threatened to make it all too wet to be of any use. There were also many days when a thick, damp fog rolled upward from the lower levels, slowly evolving into a ponderous cloud which covered all the jungle-world. The baskets containing the pulverized materials were doubly protected, however, by skins, and the roofs of the special dug-outs which we made, but the roofs were never entirely water-tight.

Being unacquainted with the recognised formulae for mixing various powders, I simply took about three parts charcoal to one each of nitre and sulphur, and set the Links to grinding these substances together, slightly dampening the whole as before. The grayish stuff, which I regarded finally as the best product of which we were capable, I stored away, next to my own shelter. There must have been two hundred pounds of this powder, the making of all of which had only occupied us for a short time, after the several ingredients in their rough state had been assembled.

In order to impress the tribe with the urgent necessity of keeping all fire away from the baskets, I dropped a glowing coal into a handful as it lay on a rock. The vivid flash did so much to accomplish my purpose that I could hardly get the Links to approach the dangerous mixture under any circumstances whatsoever.

My next step now was to visit the swamp where the thicket of bamboo flourished. In this place, as I had expected, there were all sizes of this peculiar tree-reed, but the largest ones appealed to me most strongly. I carried off what I thought I should need, and selecting the driest of my stock, cut off a large section behind the joint, on one end, and in front of the next joint on the other. The piece then resembled quite a cannon, without further ado.

This thing I was aware was much too brittle to stand an explosion, but I meant to try it, nevertheless. To begin with I bored a vent through the hard, thick shell, near the end that was naturally plugged. Then I reinforced that plug by lashing a stone across the end firmly. Next I split some more bamboo and laid the strips lengthwise along the barrel, thus doubling the thickness, after which I had the whole thing stoutly wound about with tough, slender creepers, till I was sure it would resist a powerful tendency to burst.

What to do for a fuse, when at length my piece of mountain artillery was loaded with powder and rocks puzzled me no little.

The thing was mounted half way down the hill, pointed toward an imaginary foe, and was amply weighted with rocks at the sides and on the top. At length I hit upon a plan for the fuse. It was simply to split a creeper, the outside of which we frequently employed, and to pull out the smooth, wire-like core inside, and then to fill the space so left hollow, with powder. In the sun this shell of the creeper dried out rapidly, rolling up so tightly in the process that it squirmed itself into several twists. This habit of the thing was exactly what was required, for

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when the powder was laid along inside, the chances for it to trickle out were exceedingly meagre.

About thirty feet of this fuse I laid to the gun, with stones along its length to keep it properly in place. Then, with a thumping heart under my shirt, I proceeded down the hill, alone, with a fire-brand glowing hotly in my fist. I looked all about, when I came to the match, and selected my path back up to the camp. Then I touched the end of the creeper and jerked my fire away, quickly.

There was no alarming sputter after all. I tried again. The creeper smoked, giving forth a pungent odour, but the powder must have fallen out for a short distance. I cut off six or seven inches and had the satisfaction of seeing powder in plenty. This time it lighted and began to spit in a hurry. I darted off, stopped, looked back, saw a tiny smoke-snake running down the hill, and again I ran as hard as I could, momentarily expecting something tremendous to happen behind my back.

To my surprise I reached the camp and nothing had occurred. I turned about and looked, panting and yet attempting to hold my breath. There was nothing to be seen, save the heap of rocks where my battery was planted. I waited and waited. The seconds slipped by; the Links behind me were as silent as the grave. My heart ceased its violent jumping; the thing was going to prove a failure; the Links would think me a fool.

I'll have to go down and see what's the matter, I grumbled. That fuse is no good.

I had taken two steps when suddenly a great flare of fire leaped upward, the side of the hill appeared to fly into fragments and a roaring detonation split the silence into a thousand ringing reverberations. A cushion of air gave us all a push, and a huge geyser of smoke went upward in rolling, billowy gushes. I wondered in that second, how many pounds of that powder I had put in the piece in my natural anxiety to give it a good, square trial.

Something screamed weirdly in the air, while we stood speechless, and presently it came whirring down, a rod below the wall, striking the ground with a sounding thud.

Yelling in dismay, the second they recovered power to do anything, the Links fell over each other helter-skelter, in their great confusion, and desire to take to the woods. As for myself, I laughed and laughed like a veritable maniac, and threw my arms about myself and jumped in the air repeatedly, as tickled with my exploit as a boy. Then I ran outside and found my cannon, the thing which had whistled as it hurtled back to earth.

It was a goner and no mistake. Black as a hat, ripped from *muzzle* to breach, blown to pieces at the plugged-up end, it certainly gave the appearance of having gone through the war, but it pleased me not a whit the less.

Why that's all right, I assured the surrounding stillness, I'll go to work and make a lot of bamboo bombs.

CHAPTER XXV. THE TRIBE FRIGHTENED

THE SPOT with the pile of rocks, where my cannon had been planted, bore ample testimony to the high explosive quality of my powder, for nothing was left in place and everything which had been in contact with the piece was beautifully blackened.

My frightened Links seemed to be anything but confident that I was not likely to burst myself, with a loud report, and scatter devastation everywhere. They stood off a distance that was more than merely respectful and were not to be induced to return to my side by any persuasion or assurances for more than an hour. I had no doubt they thought me a bit of a devil, for even Fatty and the children were afraid to return to my side. The single exception to this unanimity of feeling was furnished by my little favourite chap who seemed so human.

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This tot of a Link had been much neglected of late, so busy had I been with work. Now when he came and clung to my leg, as I stood in the camp eating a mango and thinking busily, I looked down in his tiny face and felt happy to see him so near. Sitting down against my rock, in the sun-light, I let him cuddle down in his usual place, and together we enjoyed a time of peace. It became one of those natural spells of rest. I felt like easing off on the pressure of work for a time, having accomplished really all that seemed to be needful by way of making ready to receive any invaders of our village who might choose to come.

The attitude of Tike as I called my little friend did much to re-convince the Links of my normal, pacific intentions. Fatty was the first to return, doubtless actuated by a trifling touch of jealousy. After him the others came edging back, one by one, every individual inordinately curious to see if I were in any manner altered by the extraordinary disturbance which I had so recently created. All that day they evinced alarm and a readiness to run whenever I stirred about. For the powder, carefully stored away, they possessed a profound distrust and respect.

During the next few days I sat around for much of the time, always with wistful little Tike nestled up under my arm. The tiny chap seemed more quiet than before, if possible, and somewhat thinner. All the other little Links were as fat, roily, bright-eyed and lively as so many Pah Ute Indian papooses, and equally red and naked, but Tike was almost a sad little fellow. He leaned his head against me by the hour, sighing now and again, and patting my big, brown hand with his wee, red one, as if there could be no greater content and happiness in the world.

The attack I had daily expected and against the advent of which I had laboured with such unremitting zeal, had failed to materialise. Day after day went by, with such a stillness and peace over all the world, that I began to forget the malignant Grin, who had kept the troubles simmering constantly, and to forget my fears of the savage Blacks. Without the slightest stir or bother, I kept my fellows in training with the bows, accompanied the parties on the hunt, kept the baskets and other essential properties of the camp in good condition and still found time leisurely to work at making my deadly bombs.

This labour I made simple and easy by selecting sections of bamboo which, when cut off to form cylinders open at one end only, telescoped together. That is the smaller cylinder, containing a large charge of powder, slipped inside the larger, and each being provided-with a stone reinforcement, where naturally plugged, I bound the two shells together firmly. Five of these bombs were enormous, containing probably twenty-five pounds of powder. Some of the others were only about a foot in length and three inches or less in diameter. These smaller ones I intended to take with me in my boat, if ever I started on my voyage of escape. I thought I could throw them at any foe which might approach too near. Each was provided with a tube-like fuse, stopped with clay, to prevent the powder from running out, and which could be broken off at a moment's notice to form a connection with the powder in a longer fuse, which could then be bound upon it. I also provided several coils of the match, made of creepers, each coil at least thirty feet in length. This became dry so that I determined that if occasion should ever arise I would make a fresh supply, keeping this other ready for emergencies.

The days of peace became weeks. So free from trouble had we become in the camp, since the disappearance of Grin, that my feverish desire to flee had somewhat abated. Moreover the albino female had partaken of such a thorough fright, on the day when my ordnance exploded, that she left me severely alone. Yet I did think constantly of the boat and should have busied myself more with my half-formed project of getting away, had I not been bound more closely than I realised to the links by little Tike, who seemed to me to be fading away.

He came every morning to my shelter, often before I was awake, and when at last I stirred and turned over, there he would be, sitting quietly by the side of my couch, looking yearningly into my face with his steady, thoughtful eyes, and holding his tiny hands together in his lap. Always he greeted my look with a strange, quiet smile, which made his wee, homely face the very next thing to divine. I got to carrying the little chap about, as I went from place to place. I found that I missed him, when resting out in the jungle, after a hunt with my fellows. It also gave me a most unreasonable pleasure to talk to the tiny mite, who would answer with a faint, half-crooning sound of pleasure. I called him frequently my Little Man. At intervals, sometimes of days, he would repeat the

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word Man in a way that caused me to feel a peculiar thrill whenever it came from his lips.

As before, my attitude of comparative passivity begot more or less of the symptoms of familiarity on the part of several Links. This did no little in the way of deciding me anew to quit the place, if possible. I was doubtful in my mind as to which method would be preferable, that of attempting to find and utilise the outlet of the lake in my boat, or to endeavour to induce about fifty of the fighters to escort me across the country to the sea. But one day which we spent in the jungle decided me without further mental debate.

We were stalking a pair of hogs, which were unusually clever at evading the flanking Links and at penetrating far into the jungle, when suddenly the great, dark form of a genuine elephant loomed up, as he smashed his way through a thicket. Instantly every Link in the party screamed out an imitation trumpet of alarm and fled incontinently, as they had on the former occasion. This time I had no intention of being left behind, nor of giving battle to the brute with my fists and knife. I joined the running fellows, endeavouring to make them halt and retire in at least decent order, but this effort was utterly futile; their panic was complete and not to be overcome.

Thankful thus to be reminded of the former incident, which I had been too near to forgetting, I decided, even as we hastened away from the monarch of the jungle, that the attempt to perform any long and hazardous march with such a cowardly army as this at my heels would be madness. I must launch the boat and proceed alone.

CHAPTER XXVI. SPORT AT THE LAKE

IT WAS NOT a difficult operation to bore some holes in the gunwale of my boat and to hammer in four stout pegs for row-locks, and then I put in a seat, constructed of thin bamboo strips, and all was ready. The craft was more than sixteen feet long, three feet in the beam and hollowed out to a depth of about eighteen inches. The launch was not effected until after I had secured a long, stout painter to the bow, the rope being made of creeper-fibre, twisted and braided. This was pliable and quite as enduring as hemp.

Although the Links were manifestly afraid of the lake, they were intensely interested when the craft upon which we had worked so hard and long, went splashing into the water. She righted herself in a second and floated high above the surface. But when I hauled her in with the rope and jumped inside, sat down and got out my sweeps, to row, the astonishment of the fellows was unbounded. They were frightened for my safety, uneasy to the verge of whining, as they ran up and down the beach, and still were all so fascinated that not one could look at anything else. Old Fatty acted precisely like one of those dogs who is crazy to join his master and yet dreads the water so greatly as to fear even wetting his feet. He lifted either foot, and half squatted and gave little jumps, as if about to plunge in and make a bold swim for the boat, till he appeared too ridiculous for words. Then he ran down the shore and back again and stood with his comical head on one side making me laugh uproariously.

The boat was great! She was inclined to roll a trifle, owing to the fact that she was the same size from stem to stern, and therefore minus the broad beam which makes a craft steady, but she was remarkably light to row and easily steered. Moreover I found, by throwing my weight to either side, that she had a powerful tendency to return to an even keel, which rendered her almost impossible to turn bottom upward. This I attributed to the fact that while her sides were comparatively thin, the bottom was at least eight inches thick, which made her light on top and heavy below, an excellent arrangement when to give her a larger belly was out of the question. I am bound to admit that she had no lines, that indeed she looked like the log she was, clumsy and quite ungraceful. Nevertheless I was prouder as I sat in her hold than is any captain of the noblest ship afloat.

I rowed her this way and that, across to a nearby point and then straight away down the middle of the lake for half a mile. When I turned I made out a floating thing a score of yards from the shore on the left one of my alligator acquaintances, swimming about. I was not afraid of any attack in so large a boat, especially as my nature could not have been so readily surmised by the hungry saurians, while I was rowing. I should not have minded a race

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anyway, for I felt secure on my own stamping ground and as saucy as a boy with a toy pistol.

Before starting back, I noted particularly the outline against the sky which our hill and its neighbours formed, thinking I might be much in need of some such guide when I came to go further from home. Then I drove my craft with all the speed I could force. Her prow was slightly above the glass-like surface and the water swashed backward from her keel with a sound that stirred me to immoderate delight in this my supreme achievement.

The oars were heavy and the row-locks a trifle awkward; we rolled a bit to one side and I was obliged to keep fetching her nose about to port at every dozen strokes, but I made satisfactory time and just before she shot across the last fifty feet of water and rammed up high on the shore, a startled fish of some description, leaped bodily out of the water and darted off in affright.

My friends gave forth various notes of alarm and fell back quickly to the shelter of the trees. I was not at all certain whether they were most afraid of the fish or of me and the magic which they seemed to think I possessed. Fatty, however, was too glad to get me back to care for anything else. He fell headlong over the boat in his crazy endeavour to get his paws upon me and to roll on top of my feet.

Inasmuch as the day was too far advanced to permit of any extended explorations, I decided to try for a bit of sport.

Boys, said I, remembering an old-time joke, which would you rather do or go fishing?"

I got them to fetch me a long line, made of thongs tied firmly together, while Fatty got a bird for bait and I cut a tough hard hook out of wood. For this I chose a V-shaped crutch, one leg of which became the shank, while the other was cut off shorter, sharpened and formed like a barb. With the line tied to this, a rock for a sinker and a piece of the bird spitted on my hook, I got out at the end of the boat and heaved the tackle out as far as the cord would permit.

I pulled it back with no result, save for a nibble when I had taken it almost in. I thought the fish must be small and near the shore. However, I tried again. The result was the same, only that I got two nibbles instead of one. The third cast was an aggravation, for some miserable sprat got my bait. We put on a fresh piece and tied it in place.

Now, I grunted, as I threw the line again, we'll see if you young sardines will

A sudden, hard jerk on the line nearly dragged me overboard, neck and crop. I had a bite which felt big enough to indicate a whale.

Bracing, I stopped the line abruptly from running through my hands; and then began a tug-o'-war. It was not a scientific fight, for I dared not permit Mr. Fish to take his head for a second, well knowing that when he turned and slacked the line, the hook would slip from its hold at once and let him escape. I therefore hauled at him hard and stubbornly, panting soon and leaning backward, for he felt as heavy as the bottom of the lake and quite as unwilling to be led as a mule. The strain came on the line and on the hook. If these held what would we see?

I worked backward, inch by inch in the boat, till at last I was out on the shore. By that time the craft had been hauled off the bank and was all but ready to float.

Fatty, come here and help,' I panted.

Fatty understood and while he was filled with misgivings that made him actually tremble, he laid hold of the line and together we drew it in, hand over hand. Presently with a mad whirl our catch came floundering and slashing upward till it splashed the surface, in violent action, when it disappeared like a piece of lead. A minute later we

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hauled the thrashing denizen to shallow water and then clean out on the bank. It was a good-sized tortoise, fairly hooked, dripping, fierce-looking and struggling with all its might to get away. Fortunately the Links knew something of turtles. Three plucked up courage sufficient to despatch our prize at my third shout of, Shoot him! Pig!

Shoot meant to slay, in any style or form, and pig signified anything in the way of game or a foe. The catch made my friends so enthusiastic that they wanted no end of fishing. It also provided a food of which they were fond, and it gave me a nice new basin. Deep-lake angling having proved to be hot, hard work, I bethought me of trying for something more quiet. Additional line was soon forthcoming, and a run up to camp provided a bamboo rod, after which I cut a smaller hook and baited as before.

At the second cast from the boat, I got a good sharp strike, and without the slightest ceremony jerked out a silvery fish a foot in length, of a species wholly unknown in my limited category of the finny tribe. In fifteen minutes I had seven of these, ranging in weight from one to four pounds, I judged, and all of firmer flesh than I had expected to find in water so warm. The enjoyable part of all this play was to hear the exclamations of wonder on the part of the Links, at every successive catch. Had I remained there a day, performing this feat every two minutes, I believe those child-like creatures would have stayed at my side, marvelling no less at the very last catch than they did at the first.

I created an incredible excitement, finally by making Fatty take the rod in his hand for a cast. He got a bite so quickly that it made him jump inside his skin, from toes to crown. The fellow would have fallen down and rolled away had I not held him fast and compelled him to land his flopping shiner. At this the Links behind us nearly had a fit. Amusement, curiosity, timidity and desire to come and do likewise made them the most excited and entertaining group in the world. One by one they worked themselves up to the frenzy of courage necessary to try their luck, but the ticklish, unique sensation of catching a fish so quickly dispelled their fears that before we finished they were fairly scrambling for the chance to be the next to try.

Beholding the immense satisfaction with which males and females, young and old, cooked and devoured our catch, I wondered that the Links had never progressed sufficiently to fish for themselves. The only explanation I was able to give was that owing to their dread of the lake, about the borders of which were innumerable snakes and alligators, they had never discovered this food and therefore knew nothing of the ease of taking all they could wish, by various primitive methods.

A small quantity of tortoise and one of the smaller shiners satisfied my craving for a change of diet, for neither was cooked to my liking, nor was the flesh of a flavour to give me any particular delight. However, I thought the Links deserved the play which the nearness of the lake afforded, and therefore I cut them a score of hooks, that night by the light of the fire, and had them prepare a lot of lines to tie at the end of some bamboo rods which they fetched before the darkness descended.

For myself, I laid out a bit of roasted meat and some fruit, got my bow and arrows together, and otherwise made ready for an early start on my tour of exploration.

CHAPTER XXVII. AN EXPLORATION

THE LAKE was a shimmering mirror, dashed with endless splashes of colour, when my boat glided swiftly away in the sunshine of the early morning. From the jungles that fringed the shores came many sounds of birds, singing, screaming and calling out. The noise made by my oars in the crude locks seemed to travel far and to echo back from every side.

Believing in systematic investigation, I chose the shore off to the right, along which I intended to cruise that day. I

THE CRYSTAL SCEPTRE

would try the left-hand side the following day, if necessary, and then, if the outlet I was seeking were still undiscovered, I might be obliged to undertake a much longer trip than either of these would become.

The alligators had apparently not begun to stir about on the shady side of the lake. I skimmed along within fifty yards of the shore, constantly watching for any indication of a stream flowing outward through the trees. The first hour brought no results; in the second I came to my creek, the stream down which I had plunged that evening of the storm, with the savage ourang behind me. Its volume was normal now, and therefore much less than when it had bowled me into the lake, nevertheless it tumbled over its last rocky leap with a pleasant murmur which sounded familiar enough, and bubbles of silver floated away on the placid surface of the water. It was good to recognise this old friend, for it gave me another guide and cleared up my mental map of the lake and surrounding country.

Beyond this point there were miniature bays and tedious windings of the shore, many of which I felt inclined to ignore, but any one of which might have hidden the outlet I felt so eager to discover. In not a few of the trees, which often overhung the water, I discerned troops of curious monkeys. Of these there seemed to be almost endless variety, but all were particularly shy upon beholding the strange creature out on the lake, though I had no means of determining whether or not they classed my boat and me among the 'gators.

From one rather narrow inlet I escaped as quickly as I could turn my craft and drive her back to the main body of water, for I nearly pushed my oar against a huge boa-constrictor, half hanging from a tree with its body partially submerged beneath the surface. Although I saw this reptile before approaching so near, I readily mistook it for a portion of the branch from which it depended. What it might have done, had I rudely disturbed the sleep in which it was quietly indulging, I did not pretend to know; it was quite enough for me that the creature was there, and that for all the snake family I have a great aversion.

The morning sped away. The heat of the day increased, so that rowing the boat became an irksome task, particularly as I found nothing but inconsiderable brooks, all of which flowed into the lake. Floating quietly, with the oars shipped, I ate my lunch and felt somewhat refreshed. A full hour of rest was spent in idly dabbling my feet in the water. Later in the afternoon I had a swim, but in this the pleasure was marred by a too persistent feeling of uneasiness about the monsters which the place might contain.

It must have been as late as four o'clock when at length I rounded a point and found a long, irregular estuary, not more than seventy feet in width, rank with grass and giving evidence of being the slack-water of a large stream. From its juncture with the lake, I was quite unable to determine its nature; it could have been either an inlet or an outlet, as far as I could see. Proceeding up the centre of this, I was not particularly gladdened to observe that my boat and oars were frightening three medium-sized alligators to the cover afforded by the growth on either side. Also there were great swarms of pestiferous insects, dancing above the water in the sunlight. However, if this did mark the outlet, I had to know it; the gauntlet would have to be run. It would be comparatively safe, I thought, as long as it was I who continued to frighten the alligators, instead of having them perform the office for me.

The place seemed literally alive with these monsters. I think it must have been a breeding ground, for there were little ones by the score. They all continued to be shy, but I confess I was not inspired with confidence in any of the creatures, nor yet with a large pressure of courage in myself. The insects settled upon me by hundreds. I slapped at them constantly, but in a few minutes I was bitten in no fewer than fifty places upon my hands, face and body and many of these spots had a drop or more of blood oozing out to mark their location.

Made desperate, I rowed as fast as caution would permit, being afraid every moment of incurring the wrath or exciting the hunger of some huge mother 'gator. The estuary wound away tortuously, into a realm weirdly luxuriant with creepers, giant exotics and trees overhung with parasitic vines. It narrowed down, also, which brought me nearer the banks, with their crawling life. I presently noted a number of water-snakes escaping in all directions, some of them near enough for me to strike them with the oars.

THE CRYSTAL SCEPTRE

The sun was down toward the far horizon so that this place was in a dense shade, amounting to gloom. It was just as much as I could do to get my own consent to going further. It almost seemed as if I would prefer to live with the Links forever than to have the nightmarish features of this place increase or be nearer to me. I do not claim to be a man of bravery and this estuary, I confess, gave me the creeps. I was enormously relieved, in a moment, to hear a sound like rippling water. Then I rounded a point on which a brood of alligators had just made a landing, and saw where the water was in motion.

It was flowing into the lake, not out toward the sea. My investigation of the place had been time and energy wasted, not to mention nerves. In haste I swung my craft about and started back. As it stopped for a space, to turn, a water-snake crawled up, near the stern and glided across. The reptile was large, glistening and altogether as repulsively headed as Nature ever constructs.

I hit at it viciously, and it dodged and plunged into the slimy water like a shot. By that time my prow had drifted against the tail of an alligator which must have been lying asleep, concealed in the grass. He waked and gave the boat a bat with his great caudal extremity that made her quiver, as he scrambled to shore. There was such a chorus of dreadful sounds then that the creeps chased from my feet to the hair on my head. Added to the maddening torture inflicted by the stinging insects some of which seemed large enough to be classed with vampires the place gave forth an animal stench comparable only to that of a den of serpents. I grew rattled," in my frantic endeavour to get out of the place, and rowed against the shore, in one place, and into a tangle of reeds and vines at another. All of this added to my own confusion as well as to the sounds of hissing, squirming away and floundering in the water produced by the creatures whose home I had rudely invaded. Had the beasts turned upon me in that maze of horrors, I should have been wild enough to jump out of the boat and try to dash to shore and away through the swampy tangle and the jungle.

As I neared the exit, I did have the misfortune to strike not only the edge of a sort of grass island, but also the head of a baby 'gator, therein hiding. The mother gave forth an angry snort and started to overtake the boat. An oar got caught for a second but I jerked it loose and plunged it deep for a stroke that shot me away toward the lake. The furious reptile gained for a moment, but then I got down to boat-race work and slid away in a desperate mood. Paying too little attention to where I was steering, I forgot the tendency of the craft to yaw about to starboard, and therefore sent it fairly through a mass of green drapery hanging from a tree on the right-hand bank; and the tail of a snake which was climbing hurriedly up in the branches, dragged slimily across my neck.

I shuddered and nearly fell forward, but the boat had gained such headway that it pushed through everything and was floating free on the lake in a second. I bent to the oars anew, but Mrs. Alligator had turned back, defeated. Without waiting for more experiences I headed for home and commenced a steady pull.

CHAPTER XXVIII. AMAZING DISCOVERIES

IT WAS nearly dark when at length I beached the boat and made the painter fast to a tree. The Links were in a state of great anxiety, fearing the dread lake had swallowed me down. They had fished, during my absence, with such success that they had lost every hook, snarled all the lines, broken several rods and procured about a hundred pounds of shiners for dinner.

A few of the fellows were attempting to fashion new hooks with the knives of flint. There was promise, in the work of some, indicating that in this direction at least there was chance for progress. Old Fatty, who had whined on the shore when I left in the morning, romped about me insanely, as usual. He and little Tike had occupied my shelter throughout the day, awaiting my return. My Little Man was asleep there when I entered, a troubled look on his serious little face. I carried him off to his mother, but he did not awake, so weary had he grown at his vigil that warm, long day.

THE CRYSTAL SCEPTRE

He was crooning Man, man beside me in the morning, happily, yet so wistfully that it played upon every cord in my breast. How thin the little fellow looked as he gazed in my eyes with that dumb affectionate expression; how different he appeared from all the other Links, with the golden sunlight streaming in on his quaint, childish countenance. When I had taken my morning bath, I washed the tiny chap. He caught his breath in funny little gasps, but I think he liked it immensely. Then we ate my breakfast. He ate so small a portion that I shook my head and pushed the fruits aside before I had taken half my usual quantity.

Having vaguely thought of my exploration business as a duty to be continued faithfully, I had half intended to leave, later in the day, for a shorter trip. When the wee youngster nestled up to be comforted, the plan faded away. We would have a quiet day of rest and peace. The elders of the tribe, discovering my mood, gave up to the laziest of lounging and rolling about, playing at indolent games and wrestling, throwing bits of twigs and pulling at each other's feet and toes. The chief and his white mate sat about in a somewhat superior style, the latter eyeing me sullenly from time to time, while her husband gazed by the hour into the half-clear depths of the great rock-crystal at the end of his club. The fellow seemed to adore this stone, as well he might, for by its weight and his own overtowering height he had made himself chief of his fellows.

His chieftainship continued, although I had long believed I could overthrow the fellow and usurp his power to add to my own, did I wish to create a disturbance. But inasmuch as I was in no way hampered, and was obeyed, my position amounted to that of a ruler, while I gave this giant Link no offense. As long as he continued to feel himself the master of the family, my own sway could never be complete, but for this I cared nothing as long as I was enabled to proceed with my plans. More than once I might have taken advantage of the awe created by natural means to bring the chief under my rule, but I was waiting to see what he would do of his own accord. The day when my cannon exploded he had been so ready to acknowledge my leadership that a look would have brought him cowering to my feet, but I had turned my back upon him and he had refrained from doing anything impulsive.

In order to provide entertainment for little Tike, this day of rest, I selected a slender section of bamboo rod and cut him a whistle. By placing a second piece inside of this and sliding it up and down, I had a primitive trombone, which begot a craze of delight among all the –Links. I played this instrument about an hour during which time the fellows all came crawling up on all fours, to squat about in a circle where they remained, nodding, blinking and holding their heads on one side, with the greatest attention and pleasure.

I bethought me then of a drum and procuring a section of bamboo six inches or more in diameter, stretched: a wetted fish-skin across the end and let it dry there. This thing produced a fine resonant tone that made the creatures jump with astonishment at first and dance with excitement later. In point of popularity this instrument eclipsed the whistle totally. The Links took to it as naturally as a cat takes to mice.

Having pleased little Tike and having rested myself, while providing a holiday of amusement for the tribe, I decided to go at my navigation again in the morning. Agreeable as some of these moments appear to have been, I was fretting constantly to be away from the unclean, semi-animal beings, and once more restored to my kind and to civilisation, where I could lie on a decent bed, eat a decent meal and listen to something besides barbarous language. So desperate did I frequently become to hear my native tongue, that I spouted every quotation and sang every song I could conjure from my memory. This performance was always attended by a demonstration of surprise and unrest on the part of all the Links who were close enough to hear.

The following morning was the cool, still forerunner of another sultry day. Fatty waddled behind me to the boat, where he whined again and started convulsively every time I bade him come along, but to master his fear of the lake sufficiently to enter the boat and trust himself away from the shore, was quite beyond his power. He wanted to go, but had he been thrust in by force, he would have scrambled wildly back to the bank, to run up and down and dance, like an unwilling dog who has been thrown in the water whether he would or no. I left him, sad and anxious, on the beach.

THE CRYSTAL SCEPTRE

According to my previously formulated scheme, I directed the prow toward the left shore this morning, and rowed as before, about fifty yards out from the wall of foliage which marked the boundary of lake and jungle. In half an hour I passed the place where I had fought the battle with the alligator, while I was floating on the log. On this present occasion not a saurian could I see, but I knew the place where I was sure there were half a dozen.

The day was practically a repetition of the other, except that this western shore had a greater number of small streams, and none that were large, contributing to the body of the lake. I dipped into bays and inlets without number, many of which were of exceeding beauty. These were frequently so large that I travelled many miles without being more than three or four from camp, by air line. In the late afternoon, when I had worked perhaps two miles further away in actual distance or about eight as I skirted the edge I approached what appeared to be a deeper and narrower bay than any before discovered.

This arm of the lake presently curved about a point, which made me think it might perhaps be another tributary stream, or river, like the one in which I had passed a desperate fifteen minutes. I felt not entirely fond of such experiences and therefore regarded this place with suspicion. It was freer of insects than the other had been, although there were some I could have spared; while the alligator population was not numerously represented. There was the grass which I thought indicated flowing water, however, and the trees on the banks were like those of the other place which I dreaded.

When I had penetrated several hundred yards into the jungle on the bosom of this winding stream, the shadows from the overhanging trees were again exceedingly dense. I confess I had a poor stomach for doing much of this sort of thing at the end of day. My brain began to invent excuses for proceeding home and coming again when the light was better. A number of scares, to which I had been subjected during the day, had contributed largely to this lack of proper enthusiasm. Soon I conceived a brilliant scheme for determining whether this stream were inlet or outlet to the lake. In either case there would be a slight current. I would stop the boat and let it drift. If it went on up I could be sure I had found the outlet which in all reason should flow eventually to the sea; if I drifted back toward the lake, I must continue my search on the morrow.

Pulling slowly to the next turning, I brought the craft to a standstill and awaited results. For a long time I failed to detect any movement in either direction, so sluggish was the current. I became absorbed in studying a number of stakes, which stood in the water, near the bank. Surely, I thought at last, we are moving slightly down the stream. Was it then actually the outlet for which I was seeking?

I grew excited as I watched the stakes. Then I began to comprehend something. These stakes suggested order. Could it be possible they had been planted? I could not see how they could get there at such semi-regular intervals, in any natural manner. How far did they extend? Where was the first one I had noticed? I looked back. Then I was convinced, abruptly, that the boat was drifting down the stream much more rapidly than I had suspected.

It was the outlet!

This truth flashed upon me with all the power of instantaneous conviction. I forgot the stakes and all the line of speculation which their mysterious presence had engendered. I looked toward that green gate of deliverance. Mentally I saw myself rowing and drifting down this gentle, winding current, hastening away from this extraordinary land away from this jungle fastness to the great open sea. A thousand suggestions came tumbling in upon me, as to how to provision my boat, how to leave the Links, how to sleep at night on Outlet river, how to search for a village when I should find myself at last free, and how then to take a steamer and hasten back to the world which was really a world!

The outlet! I muttered in fervent thankfulness. Freedom Life Home!

THE CRYSTAL SCEPTRE

I was wrought to a fever in my excitement of hope; I was all but transported, thus to find the gate that let me out of my prison of greenery, when suddenly I nearly froze from chills and paralysis of all my senses and blood-circulation.

A voice rose clear in the silence of ended day a human voice, in that wilderness of jungle and jungle-creatures, a voice pronouncing words in English a singular mixture of words with no reason. Then presently they settled into the musical order of poetry:

There was a sound of revelry by night,

And Belgium's capital had gathered then

Her beauty and her chivalry, and bright

The lamps shone o'er fair women and brave men,

And when music arose with its voluptuous

I arose to cry out at the top of my voice. A human being a man, no doubt, was in reach of my voice a friend, companion, perhaps, to share my fate and solitude! I filled my lungs for a mighty halloo a cry to this partner in exile when out from the trees on the bank, not a spear's throw distant, issued a black, ungainly form and then another.

Links! They were black Missing Links!

Those stakes were theirs! I had found their camp. The voice this human being was he then a prisoner? What did it mean and what should I do?

To cry out meant instant detection perhaps immediate death. The two had failed to see me they might go back. But I was drifting drifting toward them. One of them turned about.

A yell went up immediately. I was known. The alarm spread like prairie-fire, up through the wood. I swung the boat about like mad and headed for the lake. A club came whizzing through the air, struck in the water beside the boat and splashed me with spray. A score of the villainous looking devils came running to join their companions. Along the bank they dashed in pursuit, crying out and making crazy gesticulations. The water foamed where it left the oars and it rippled and swashed from the prow of my craft. Club after club came hurtling toward me, end over end. One of these struck the stern a resounding thump; the demons cried out savagely and showered more. A small one would have dashed out my brains had I not been quick to duck to the bottom of the boat.

I shot across the river to the opposite side, but a curve gave my infuriated pursuers a slight advantage. It seemed as if the thickets and trees were simply bridges over which the creatures hurried the faster. Making as if to sweep along below them, I back-watered one of my oars and pulled with the other, at the turn, spinning the boat clean about to hard-a-port, and sent her ahead so swiftly that all the clubs, which the devils threw at point-blank range, plunged stone-head first into the ripples behind.

Never touched me! I bawled out in derision.

They screamed in impotent rage. I rounded the curve and sped away with all the advantage mine. They gave up the chase. Ten minutes more saw me out on the lake and well away.

CHAPTER XXIX. A SACRED DISGUISE

BEFORE I got home I had ample time in which to think. What a strange concatenation of events! The outlet discovered, deliverance almost assured me, and then to find the camp of my bitterest enemy on the very bank of my gateway to freedom! But that human voice what could it mean?

I began to speculate and to reason from deduction. Inasmuch as I had lost myself and been found by the red Missing Links, it was evident that another man could have met with some accident which would have thrown him in contact with the Blacks of the same family or species. The Reds had treated me with marked consideration from the first, therefore the Blacks might do the same for another of my kind. More than this, the Blacks had manifested not only an extraordinary interest in myself, that day when first I met them at the volcanic peak, but they had also attempted to abduct me without injury to my body or feelings. I had made them my foes by allying myself offensively and defensively with the Reds, but they might not be savage to one who had not so given them cause. Undoubtedly, I reasoned, they knew man and what he is and had recognised me at once. They had desired also to possess me, an inclination, I reasoned, which had resulted from association with this other, mysterious man. What manner of person was it they held as prisoner in their camp? How long had they held him captive? To this latter question I mentally answered that they had kept him several months at the least, since I had been a considerable time with the Reds, myself, and they had apparently become acquainted with my species before my arrival in the country. Then about his capacity as a man, my thought ran quickly to the conclusion that he must be weak or at least a man of no inventiveness and of no particular inward resources. I arrived at this from two sources of argument. First, he had obviously done nothing to arm his fellows, even with primitive spears, or bows and arrows, to say nothing of never having headed their hunting or fighting expeditions; and, second, he had done nothing to escape, although he must have known that he was living on the very edge of that great outflowing river, which should suggest to his mind the sea beyond, as it had done to me.

Almost without—considering anything, my first conclusion had been that I must meet this partner—in—exile, enlist his services and make him my comrade in escaping. Indeed I had been conscious of a great elation of spirits, to think of such an encouraging piece of good fortune. Now, however, when I was sure that he was neither bold, nor alert, nor superior to circumstances, I doubted the wisdom of burdening myself with such a companion, in the midst of my accumulated adversities. This last selfish thought was hardly complete, however, before I banished it with scorn, as utterly unworthy of any man in my position.

Perhaps the poor fellow had been shipwrecked, under conditions that shattered his nerves; perhaps he was crippled, or otherwise disabled; perhaps he had undergone severe illness; he might even have been an invalid when captured; and it was always possible that the Blacks kept him bound or so closely attended that action was rendered impossible. I recalled then that his voice had not sounded strong. His recitation of verses and conning over of words, I could understand precisely, for I had done the same myself on many occasions. Whatever it was that made him helpless, he was a fellow—being and certainly in more or less distress. I felt my heart expanding toward him my unknown partner! I would see him, help him and take him with me or die at his side, fighting like a devil!

My plans, which had been nearly complete for my own escape, became immediately most uncertain and scattered. It was not a matter now merely of stocking the boat, securing my weapons and then proceeding down the outflowing river, but of bearding the Blacks in their stronghold, seeing this man and getting him away. Then would come the running of the gauntlet past their camp on the river. The first proposition, that of entering this village of the hostile Links and interviewing my partner, loomed up, unsolved, for careful consideration. That the fellows were keenly on the lookout, I had demonstrated fully; they had seen me and sounded the alarm in a style truly masterful if not admirable. That they thirsted somewhat for my unwilling gore, I had precious small reason to doubt. If I got away with their captive and the demons discovered who it was that engineered the feat, there would be a warm jungle—region all about the lake.

THE CRYSTAL SCEPTRE

How much could I count on the man I meant to assist? Not a great deal, I feared, for he was probably incapacitated in some important manner. However, he had doubtless superintended the hammering down of those stakes I had seen in the river, which evidently meant some sort of fishing operations, so that perhaps, after all, he was more inventive than I had previously supposed. All the way up the lake, I racked my brain for a suitable plan for invading the enemy's camp. There were wild ideas in plenty, but no one of these was practical or even worthy of a moment's consideration.

I gave up thinking, when at last the boat was secured on the beach, knowing how far away my thoughts would be driven by the welcome of the Links. All through my dinner, however, even with little Tike in my arms and Fatty languishing about my feet, I was lost in pondering over the doings of the day. That night, although I was weary, I tossed and rolled uneasily, catching but snatches of sleep between the spells of being vividly awake over my new discoveries and their attendant problems. Time after time I awoke with a start, thinking I had solved the difficulty, only to realise that my brain was indulging in the most fantastic of workings. My whole being was dominated and occupied by this scheme of uniting with that human prisoner on the river.

Sometime in the earliest hours of morning I sat up abruptly, having been tortured by a sort of nightmare in which there was an inextricable tangle of Links, alligators and bears. As before, this was intimately connected with the man whom I intended to rescue from the Blacks, but this time I got an idea out of the chaos and it fairly made me twitch, so galvanically did it grip my whole nervous system.

I would visit the hostile camp in safety, because I would go as a bear.

A bear yes, a sacred black bear! Those superstitious creatures should worship my tracks and make themselves fools over my visit, while I spied upon them, planned against them and robbed them of their captive! I should be more than safe, more than free to come and go as I liked, more respected than the general of the world's greatest army.

Before attempting to get my plans in operation, I must kill a bear, skin him and cure the hide. This preliminary business presented no inconsiderable sum of difficulties, as I was thoroughly aware. First find your bear, said the funny fellow in my brain. This part I thought I could manage, for I had seen a bear in the neighbourhood of the place where the one had appeared that morning after my fight with the alligator. I thought him the same identical animal, which might therefore abide in or about that quarter. But having secured my bruin's pelt, there remained the task of curing it, a work which I must conduct alone and away from camp, inasmuch as the Links would be horrified to know that I had committed the deed on so sacred a beast.

There was no more sleep for me after thinking of this. At the first suggestion of dawn I crept out, silently, avoided old Fatty, who was curled down beside my door, and glided noiselessly down the hill, armed with a club, my knife, bow and quiver of arrows. When I arrived at the edge of the lake I went a little into the forest and dug some fresh saltpetre. With this substance I intended to preserve the skin, for not only are its properties well suited to the business, but I was denied the use of our spring of brine by the presence of my bear-adoring friends.

With my cargo of stuff thrown down in the end of the boat, I pushed away from the bank and rowed slowly off toward a point around which I meant to be concealed by the time the Links would begin to stir. The dawn was breaking as I neared my destination, but I waited for full day-break before attempting to go ashore. When at length the boat ran up on the beach I was a mile from the swampy region in which the alligators had proved themselves so numerous and hungry. A small clearing afforded an adequate retreat, where I felt that I could operate without interruption or likelihood of being observed.

With the club and quiver on my back, and the well-poisoned arrow, but the time being inopportune for regrets, I silently fitted my choicest shaft on the bow-string and stepped aside for a better chance to shoot.

THE CRYSTAL SCEPTRE

The bear rose partially up on its haunches, to investigate the tree, presenting an open front, with a bit of white fur at the throat. With this white for a target, I raised my weapon and drew the arrow to the head. It leaped across the meagre distance like a flash of light and quivered a second, buried deep in that snowy fur, which was dyed with red before the creature could drop to a normal position on its feet.

I expected to hear a roar of rage, and then to be attacked forthwith by the infuriated animal, but instead the bear made a sound almost human in its vivid expression of agony. It staggered slightly and brushing at the shaft with its paw, started away toward a thicket. Not to be cheated of my pelt, I threw down the bow and dashed after the creature, club in hand.

In a second or two I was almost on his back. He half turned about and met the descending club with his head. Simply moaning, this singular animal shuddered down in its tracks, breathed heavily a moment and was dead.

If I hunt till I kill a thousand creatures I shall never feel so guilty of murder as I did to see this harmless bear lying motionless there in the jungle. If only it had fought me, threatened my life, or shown itself malignant, I could have done the deed cheerfully. If only the creature had growled, or even torn up the grass, I should have felt a bit of relief; but to see it die as I knew it had lived, unaggressive, good-natured and retiring this made me feel that I was the brute and the wanton destroyer of life. Even dead, the animal accused me of lust for blood.

No, I finally said to the body, aloud, I would never have done this merely for fun. I needed your skin, hang it! there's a human life at stake and you ought to be glad!

Fortunately I was easily consoled. I came to my senses in a business-like manner. The skinning did much to remove the last vestige of my sentimentality, for it was a tough, hot job. My knife was none too sharp, despite its recent honing on a rock, and the bear was heavy to turn. When at last I had the hide removed, with the feet and head left on, I rolled the whole mass up and got it on my shoulder. It was heavy and wet; I felt the need of haste, and therefore with my weapons duly gathered together and so disposed as to cause me the least possible inconvenience, I strode away.

CHAPTER XXX. AGAIN BESIEGED

THE SUN was ready to disappear by the time I reached the boat. Embarking as soon as I had cut a large quantity of leaves, I rowed until I was some distance out on the lake before completing my day's work. This labour consisted of skinning the head of my bear and then of wetting the whole hide thoroughly. With a generous hand I spread the saltpetre upon the fleshy side, after which I rolled the skin up in a bundle and stowed it away in the stern, where I covered it over thickly with the leaves, in order that my fellows might not see the beloved black fur.

Knowing the beach would be deserted as soon as darkness began to descend, I pulled homeward leisurely, reaching the landing after the stars had begun to twinkle. There I got a lot of clay and placed it on top of the leaves which covered the pelt. This I knew would serve the double purpose of hiding my treasure from sharp, inquisitive eyes, and of keeping the moisture in the skin till the saltpetre could permeate the whole mass and convert the perishable and evil-smelling hide into leather. In order further to insure the skin against anything which might be tempted to meddle, I tied a big rock to my painter and dropping it overboard anchored the boat about forty feet from the shore. After this I swam and waded to the bank.

As I had left in the morning before any of the Links were awake, I thoroughly expected a nattering demonstration on my return to the top of the hill. I was totally unprepared, however, to hear the wildest imaginable beating of our drum, the moment I shouted to let them know I had come. And when I came through the gate and loomed up in the glow of the fire, there was more than enthusiasm there was madness rife in the tribe.

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The fellows were nervous, wild-eyed, starting at every sound, chattering crazily in their few poor monosyllables, and they showed a readiness to bury me in a heap of their prostrate bodies, so eager was their supplication for something which they much desired. Males, females and children had evidently been huddled together in a trembling mass, at my arrival, but now the whole population was about me, mad to tell me news of some calamity, I thought, but rendered wholly unintelligible by their haste and fear. I pushed them away vigorously, convinced that something more than merely my unaccountable absence and safe return had wrought this excitement.

Fatty, I demanded of my half-blubbering slave, what's the matter? Stand still and tell me—like a man. What's eating all these idiots? What has happened?"

He made an effort that was truly heroic.

Peegs, he said. Gee wizz!

The rascal knew I never exclaimed Gee whizz! till something extraordinary occurred. So poignant did the silly words become in this connection that I jumped at what he meant to convey at a single mental bound.

He meant that we were again invaded. The black Links had marched upon the village in force. I was almost carried to the further side of our wall, from which place I could see the camp-fires of the enemy, fitfully gleaming through the trees, below. The creatures were intrenched at the edge of the jungle, just at the base of our hill. But they had not yet attacked our position, that was evident. I was amazed at this and also at the fact that they dared to remain all night so near the haunts of the savage prowlers.

I worked for an hour endeavouring to calm my fellows sufficiently to get some sort of a statement of what had really occurred. The words I knew of their language and the little they tried to comprehend of mine served only to aggravate our confusion. By means of signs and various pantomimes I was able to make some guesses. The most important of these was that the foe had come there late in the afternoon, whereupon my friends had retreated inside the walls and waited, armed with their clubs, while Fatty made a hideous noise on the drum.

Attributing little virtue to the power of our musical instrument, and groping about for the reason why the invaders had not attacked the camp, I concluded that something in the way of a deeply laid plot was being formulated by the Blacks, who were perhaps intent upon our total destruction, in payment for all the defeats inflicted upon them by us in the past. Whether only a portion of their force had come up, or whether they reckoned on our disinclination to leave our stronghold and charge upon them and so intended to surround and starve us out, was a matter which time alone could determine. I thought of Grin, however, and wondered if the wretch were with them. Also I mentally nodded my recognition of the fact that my visit to their camp had been largely instrumental in bringing about this warlike advance. I thought it likely that the creatures concluded I had been spying upon them, with a possible attack for my object, and that then they had determined to be the first to strike. Doubtless, I meditated, they had long contemplated this war of retaliation, and my presence in their river had precipitated matters, which had been delayed for various reasons of state.

Inasmuch as their reasons and plans could never be known by any man, I gave up pondering about them and devoted my thoughts to planning my own campaign. On the whole I was not exceedingly sorry to have a chance to try my bamboo bombs. I entertained no doubt of the dire effect which these would produce on our foe. For that night, at least, we were safe from attack; no Link would dare proceed a score of yards from his fire in the darkness. If they crept up the hill and surprised us in the morning, while we were still in bed then so much the worse for us, for being so extremely luxurious and confident in the noise of our drum.

I signified my desire for something to eat and then devoured a hearty meal, a proceeding which surprised and calmed the Links no little. They had been too much alarmed before to do anything but huddle together, like so

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many animals in a corner, ready to fight if pressed another inch, but more likely to be furious and savage through fear than through any sort of courage. They were not wholly cowardly, but they were mortally afraid of the Blacks (who came back so persistently for more punishment), especially while here on our isolated hill, with neither cave nor near-by jungle into which to run. They were awed by this implacable foe, and having depended on me to defeat the Black army, had become less confident of their own powers than they were when I first came into the tribe. However, they had always evinced the greatest readiness to attack a force smaller than their own, which fact, coupled with their present behaviour, was now as good as an accurate report to convince me that the fellows were sure the number of Blacks below was much in excess of our own.

Gratified to find that our supply of arrows had not been wasted again in my absence an indication of sense in my fellows which I attribute to the wholesome dread they had of the powder magazine, in which the weapons were stored I laid out the shafts, with the bows, and otherwise exhibited an assuring alertness and desire to be prepared. The Links did me the honour of picking up a bit of courage, under my influence, making me feel a half-affectionate regard and sympathy for the poor child-like creatures, for it was plain that they strove hard and constantly against their mental limitations. They wished to understand, to enlarge the scope of their brains, to be like men.

I felt a certain pride in knowing that my sentries, when I set the watch and bade the others go to bed, would remain awake and alive to their own responsible position; I felt like something of a general, to see my agitated fellows calmed down and proceeding to rest in an ordinary manner. If I could only hold them together, organised as warriors, shooting steadily in the face of a charge, I knew we could repel those Blacks much more easily than ever before and inflict upon them such a loss that they might be completely quelled for years to come.

Every personal plan had been driven out of my head by this unexpected advent of war. I thought of nothing but what might occur in the morning and what would be our most effective means of conducting the hill-top part of the coming engagement. I was undecided, particularly about the use to which I had best put the bombs, for I realised that if I attempted to throw them, I might inflict half the injury on ourselves, not to mention the panic sure to be produced within our walls. Under the influence of such a feeling, my fellows might commit the gravest indiscretions.

Dismissing the whole affair from my weary brain at last, I retired, surrounded by my weapons, and was deep in dreamless sleep in a moment.

CHAPTER XXXI. LOST IN THE JUNGLE

WHEN I suddenly sat erect, with a feeling that the battle was on and I too late to assume my part, it took me a second to realise what had aroused me from sleep. It was only little Tike, who had come to my side in the semi-light of dawn and laid his tiny hand upon my face.

Not one of all the babies I have known in my life ever made a sweeter sound of crooning than did my Little Man that morning, as I held him snugly cuddled in my arm. It seemed to me the wee chap told how he had searched my deserted shelter all the day before, and all the other days, since I had been away so much; it seemed as if he forgave me and forgot this neglect and made himself a promise that I would not go away and leave him any more. The light increased, chasing the shadows away from his thin, little face, but under his wistful eyes were shadows far too deep to be dispelled by any light of earth. I noted this and observed that his lip was inclined to tremble; his eye-lids seemed to be heavy as lead. What a singular little face it was such a homely, tiny, monkey face, with phases of child-humanism coming and going across its lineaments.

Man, he said, man, and he patted my hand and gave a little shiver of joy.

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I carried him out with me when I went to investigate the situation. Below me, where I had seen the fires the night before, there was nothing visible of any of the foe. I noted a thin wisp of smoke, curling lazily upward above the lowest trees, and I presently detected the shaking of a brush, denoting the presence of one of the black fellows, who was spying upon us, unobserved. How I longed for a good rifle to rest on top of our wall with its muzzle aimed down there at the cover of the demons!

My fellows stirred about with commendable promptness, sixty of them armed with the bows, all of them eagerly watching to see what I intended to do. They commanded a certain thrill of admiration, for they were impressively muscular, alert and active. I could almost fancy them soldiers, some day, disciplined, efficient and worthy of trust.

As the sun began to warm the earth, the invaders below commenced to move about more freely. Although they brandished their clubs toward us and seemed to swarm all through that portion of the jungle, there was no indication that the creatures intended to make an immediate attack. I was soon convinced that they were there in great numbers. What their plan would be I found myself unable to surmise, but it was plain the fellows were being held in check for some extraordinary measure. I had been obliged to admit before that these Blacks exhibited certain marks of superiority over my Reds, in points of aggressiveness and stratagem, but this game of waiting and deliberate planning surpassed anything they had performed since I first made their honoured acquaintance.

As far as anything could be deduced from the position now occupied by the besiegers, I concluded they meant to surge up the slope, at this point of advantage, where the grade was easy and unobstructed. I own I should have felt relieved had the savages commenced the war at once. There was something ominous about this deliberation which I in nowise relished. While I was attempting to put myself in their place, for the purpose of thinking what I would do, knowing what they did of the reception they were likely to meet upon storming the 'summit, I heard distant yelling in the jungle. This drew nearer, after which the sounds receded again in the distance.

What might this incident portend? I inquired of myself, but I could think of no satisfactory answer. In our larder we had a limited supply of fruit and no meat fit to cook. I divided everything as equitably as possible, but none of us had enough for a hearty breakfast. Old Fatty, who observed me putting aside a portion of my share, put away the whole of his, like a faithful dog who refuses to eat while his master is in any way afflicted.

During our meal, and while I was concerning myself with the question of how we should manage to supply the camp with more provisions, I noted a distant tumble of mist, arising from the lowlands, like a cloud of smoke from heavy artillery. This grew and spread with great rapidity. I comprehended at once that a fog would soon envelope all the world. At first I thought this solved the problem of the Blacks' new game of war. I believed they had waited for this to occur, with a knowledge that it came reliably often, intending to swoop upon us under its cover and strike us down before we could realise the meaning of the charge. A moment later, however, I knew they would never dare attack in even semi-darkness. The fog was not a thing which a Link would think of employing.

Suddenly I had an idea that fog was exactly a thing of which man would take advantage. I would utilise this one to the fullest extent. Watching its progress now in excitement, for fear it might be too local to include our hill, I was aware of a repetition of the yelling in chorus, which I had noted before, out in the forest. I could think of no reason why a portion of the besieging army should thus be off in the jungle, making such a racket, but the fellows about me began to manifest the greatest alarm. The sounds again drew nearer and nearer; the fog rolled in, apparently on the heels of this party in the jungle. It seemed almost like a race between the mist and this battalion of the invading force.

I heard the yelling creatures swerve off to the right. Their very position was revealed by the rising of a large flock of parrots, all of which made a considerable noise as they flashed brilliantly in the sunlight a moment and swept down again, a hundred yards from where they rose. Just as I began to have an indefinite anxiety about the game being played below us, the fog enveloped that portion of the jungle where the foe were conducting their

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mysterious operations. I fancied a wail of disappointment finished their chorus of cries, after which the fog seemed to blot out all sound as well as all the panorama below our position.

Silently the great pall spread and travelled, till I saw it climbing the slope between ourselves and the camp of the Blacks.

Now we'll fix 'em, I cried to my warriors. They have played their game and now we'll play the joker.

Going to the magazine I hurriedly uncovered all my bombs and took out all but the smallest three, together with a quantity of fuse. This latter had become so dry that I felt the greatest confidence in the dryness of all the powder. Bidding my most intelligent and obedient fellows take these up with care, I lifted the two largest myself and led the way through the gate and started down and around the hill, toward the entrenchment of the Blacks.

At once my fighters halted, afraid of the fog and more afraid of the enemy in waiting. I stormed and coaxed and threatened before I could get them to follow, but Fatty came and then another, after which the others felt ashamed to remain behind. Thus I got the small force a little more than half way down the slope, where I directed them to deposit the bombs on the ground and to dig a long, narrow trench across the path up which I believed the Blacks intended to come when at last they made their assault upon the summit.

In the bottom of this ditch, which was made two feet deep in a time amazingly brief, I arranged my bombs, about a foot apart, hurriedly attaching a fuse to each, making the matches as nearly of a length as possible. The mines extended for so considerable a distance that I determined to lay two series of main fuses. This I did by bringing together the matches of all the bombs on the right, in one bunch, and all on the left in another. At these junctions I cut each fuse off to insure freshness and to guarantee ignition of the powder, after which I weighted them down with rocks, placed the end of the main fuse in contact with them and sprinkled powder plentifully about to unite them all in one train. A similar arrangement being completed for the second group, I had the whole mine covered carefully, with rocks and earth, when I trailed my main matches up the hill, had them weighted down and brought the ends together several rods below our wall.

The Links were willing enough to return inside our gate. I had them remove a few of the stones from the wall at a point just opposite my fuses, and then we conveyed some embers from the fire with which to kindle a special blaze wherefrom I intended to snatch a lighted brand when the moment should arrive for touching off the match.

All being in readiness I should have been gratified to see the fog roll away and the enemy starting up the hill in a solid phalanx. We stood on guard as an extra precaution, in case the Blacks should summon a courage sufficient to attack us under cover of the mist, but the world was silent and the objects about us were ghostly in the vaporous shrouds. The hours wore on and the fog continued thick and warm. We had all been hungry before the mist arose; we were now growing restless and desperate to satisfy our cravings.

To add to my own discomforts I began to worry about the fuse absorbing dampness. Should it be ruined by the fog the mines would be useless. What might happen then was beyond conjecture, for we should have no large bombs to use, and the small ones left in the magazine could not be provided with fuse. In the midst of my troubles, little Tike came stumbling against my leg. He fell down at my feet, but was up at once and gazing in my face with his odd little smile playing lightly on his lips. I took him on my arm and going to my shelter gave him all he would take of the fruits. Fatty, on seeing this, fetched his hidden store and rolled about in ecstasy when he had placed it before me. I ate a piece of his hoarded fruit to please the old fellow, after which I endeavoured, vainly, to get him to eat what remained.

He was ravenously hungry, so much so that he could not keep his eyes from the tempting mangoes and papaw, nor keep his tongue from lapping at his chops, yet he still refused to eat when I signified that I should take no more. He concealed the hoard again, returning to his place with his stomach empty.

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Only once, since my advent among the Links, had a fog remained all day to obscure the hills and forest, but this one threatened to perform a similar feat. From time to time it lifted for a moment from a local area, only to descend again more quickly than before. I began to believe that perhaps it might be possible for a party of us to deploy on a foraging tour and visit the grove of fruit-bearing trees. Unfortunately the Blacks had made their camp in the most accessible orchard, which gave them a great advantage. However, I knew of several cocoanut palms, a little removed from the enemy's position, which I thought I could find, even in the dark. I decided to make an attempt to reach this grove.

It was well along in the afternoon by this, and the fog still hung heavily on the country. As before, I had considerable trouble in getting a force of fellows to back me in the enterprise. But the hungriest became the bravest and therefore with ten stout fellows, all armed, I left the wall behind and went cautiously down the hill.

Very soon I found that everything appeared so altered in the mist that piloting my party was not at all an easy matter. I disliked exceedingly the prospect of finding myself in the enemy's lines, but having started, I was too proud, or too stubborn, to do such a sensible thing as retreat and own myself baffled. We therefore proceeded uncertainly along, near the edge of the trees, getting deeper and deeper, it seemed, into the maze of fog and unfamiliar objects. The mist down here was much more dense than that which floated about the camp above.

As we prowled stealthily ahead, looking aloft at the shadowy trees, the curtain of vapour was rended about us, abruptly, leaving us bare as it were and completely revealed. On the second a cry of alarm broke from a Black, not fifteen yards away, and a chorus of yells made answer, as a score of the demons rushed out from the cover of trees, to give us battle.

My nimble fellows vanished like shadows, bounding swiftly up the slope and into the kindly bank of fog, before the Blacks could so much as count their heels. I also started to dash away toward the camp, but tripped over a rolling stone and fell down heavily, my ankle sprained and pain shooting all through my leg and body. Scrambling on hands and knees in desperate haste, I made toward the fog, conscious that three or four of the Blacks were dashing toward me. I breathed a great sigh of relief and thankfulness to see the mist close in upon the place.

Turning instantly, when this veiling pall was about me, I moved at the top of my speed toward the trees and undergrowth of vines. I heard the cry of triumph which burst from the lips of the creatures who thoroughly expected to leap upon me, and I heard even the quick, light tread of their feet as they ran, but the turn had deceived them and diving into the tangle of leaves and creepers, pushing my bow and dragging my aching foot, I lay at full length, to pant, for a brief time, when I crawled laboriously off in the direction which I believed to be opposite the camp of the foe.

My pursuers raced about at random on the slope, chattering in disgust and amazement, but they were soon confused by the fog. They searched about for several minutes, one of them coming almost upon me, as I lay beneath the vines, but at last all returned to their savage companions. I could now guess the direction of the camp they had formed by the sounds they made in retiring. This direction seemed entirely contrary to what I had mentally determined to be right. However, I crawled away from the vicinity which I now knew bordered on their position, and turned to go toward the hill.

Doubtless the pain in my ankle distracted my attention, but at any rate when I had crept a distance which I thought should have been sufficient to place me out of the forest and on the slope, there was no hill visible and the jungle seemed equally deep on every side. Thinking I had probably made a mistake of a point or more, by my mental compass, I started off again, in a slightly different direction.

This soon became hopeless. I realised that the fog had confused me a trifle, but it seemed too absurd that I should not find the clearing and then be able to go to the top of the hill. In fifteen minutes I had become so muddled that I

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dared not move another yard. It appears ridiculous, but I was lost.

Jungle, I had found before this, was quite sufficiently difficult to traverse toward a given point in the brightest light, but enveloped in a fog it became the most bewildering and maddening maze. To make matters worse, the day was nearly spent, my ankle pained me exceedingly and my dread of snakes became a factor which contributed much to my nervous excitement. I leaned against a tree, finally, convinced of the inexpediency of blundering about in a hit-or-miss effort to rectify my first mistake. If I got any deeper in the tangle, I thought, I might not be able to find myself, even by the full light of day.

To stand there in that inhabited place of horrors, knowing that the sun was departing in its race toward the western horizon, feeling anxious and uncourageous, aching from my foot to my thigh, and angry with myself for being such a fool, this was about as comfortless a thing as I had ever undergone. I was sure the fog would lift from the hill while it still surrounded me; I was certain the Blacks would swarm up the slope, storm the place, murder half my Links and drive the others pell-mell to the woods; and I was not at all convinced that I should ever issue forth from that jungle alive.

I listened, expectantly, but not a sound could I catch, either of prowling brutes, nor of attack on our village; the silence was particularly oppressive. Darker and darker grew the forest. I knew at last the sun had set on an ocean of fog. Perhaps the attack had been rendered impossible, for that day at least, but wherein my condition was bettered by this descent of night was more than I could discover. My thoughts were hardly more cheerful when I pictured the breaking of dawn, the hill-top clear and distinct in the light, and the blood-hungry enemy sweeping the summit of every vestige of our work and genius.

One hour, two, perhaps three elapsed a time that seemed a century. I had remained all the while at the foot of that tree, without attempting to move about. I was doomed to remain there, helpless and impotent, it seemed, for any time which might prove agreeable to the gods of fortune. My thoughts had wandered afield, so that doubtless I had forgotten to listen to anything but my own meditation. It is certain that I was conscious for several moments, in an automatic manner, of a dull, monotonous sound, before it reached my notice. At last I seemed abruptly to recognise that a thud and thud was penetrating the silence. Then I started so quickly toward the direction whence this disturbance arose that I all but fell, unsupported as I was by the injured foot. But I pulled myself together and feeling my way, hastened forward as rapidly as possible, crazed with a new delight. I had recognised the sound.

It was Fatty, beating on the drum to affright the Blacks.

CHAPTER XXXII. THE BAMBOO BOMBS

IN MY haste to reach the clearing before that electrifying tom-tom melody should cease, I took no account of the distance between the edge of the wood and the place where I had halted. It was not so far as I had feared, however, though it was further than I had any business to have been away from home.

Upon coming to the slope, I got upon my hands and knees to crawl, for my ankle required rest. The fires were burning brightly in our village, but the mist was still weaving thickly about the summit.

When I turned up again among my fellows, like the penny which cannot be lost, they were nearly knocked dumb with astonishment. Hungry, disgusted and weary, I limped off to bed as soon as I had indicated the need of sentries throughout the night. Such a war as this made me snort with contempt.

Sometime during the night the fog disappeared, as mysteriously as it had come. I had rested badly, having been kept awake by the pain in my foot, so that I arose before morning and sat by the fire. There, after bathing the ankle in water from the spring of brine, I bound it up with strips of squirrel skin, fastened on with cord made of

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divided creepers. This treatment gave me much relief. The only luck I had in the accident was that the sprain was not so serious as my facial contortions (when alone) might have indicated to a keen observer.

The morning broke clear as glass; one could feel that the day meant to be hot before it finished. In our settlement we were all somewhat cross, from lack of food, myself in particular, because this game of starving us out seemed so nonsensical, and also because my relief expedition had fizzled out to such a miserable end. I began to be anxious to try results with our cunning besiegers. If they delayed the fight for the day again, I meant to carry the issue into their own headquarters, for we had to eat!

Thinking I might enrage them to the point of starting the battle, I carried the gold-nugget club from my shelter and planted it, nugget end uppermost, on our ramparts, directly in line with their camp and the mine of bombs below. Then I induced old Fatty to beat the drum, while I got up on top of the wall and paraded, somewhat after the top-loftical style of the American Indians, beating my breast with my fist, shouting derisively and pointing with maniacal glee to the gleaming club which we had taken, as a token of victory worthily won.

This bit of vanity produced an immediate effect, for a score of the fellows down in the trees appeared from the cover, sufficiently furious to suit the most exacting mind. They screamed shrilly to express their wrath, they beat the unoffending earth with their clubs, and they danced about as if the soil were hot. Nevertheless they advanced hardly as much as a stone-toss up the slope, being evidently under some powerful restraint. I executed the most aggravating evolutions, limping about on the wall, but to no apparent purpose. What was the game which the creatures played with such assurance that they could wait with this remarkable patience? I was angry to think they would not attack; I was annoyed to be obliged to admit that their warfare threatened to be subtle and effective. I hated to be starved into retreat, which would certainly be disastrous, or into a charge, down hill, against an ambush, which charge would doubtless prove to be an insupportable calamity.

Come up, you cowards! I bawled in a sneering tone of voice. Lay on, you black McDuffers we can wipe you off the map!

My only answer was an echo of the cries I had heard the morning before, away in the jungle. This puzzled me again; it made me impatient. My Links had surged about me, wrought to a fine frenzy of excitement, eager to eat up the whole nation of Blacks as splendid a pack of starving wolves as one could find. They also heard the cries, where the enemy appeared to be scouring through the forest, and I noted that many grew silent and worried. They reminded me of animals which have an instinct that warns them against the dangers which a human being cannot see nor feel.

The chief stood a little away, aloof from the others, leaning as ever on his club. What a brilliant, corruscating spot was made by the great, deadly crystal which he wielded so terribly in the fight! His mate, the indignant albino, stood beside him, eyeing myself with scorn and hatred. Her round, pink eyes were as nervous as quicksilver; her whole demeanour expressed the jealousy she nourished against me for pushing aside the chief, and the undisguised desire she felt to avenge herself for my former repudiation of her serene regard.

I gave her only a glance, and to the chief a nod of recognition. Below me little Tike was looking up in my face; near him old Fatty was standing, his quick, bright eyes upon me, his arms akimbo and the battered old skull on his head pushed aside, revealing hairless spots where, by rubbing, it had worn the growth off his leather-covered pate.

Animals or primitive men what are you all?" I muttered, and I shook my head and gave it up.

Again came the concerted cries from the jungle. They were nearer; there seemed to be a great commotion, not far from the edge of the trees, and this appeared to increase with every second. I saw several of my fellows begin to edge away, as if to make a run to a place of safety from a foe most dread. All the Links were making uneasy

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sounds, comparable only to the whimpering of a frightened dog.

Here come back here. Brace up, you fellows! I cried to stop the incipient panic. Pigs coming pigs to shoot pigs to kill!

I raised my bow and notched an arrow on the string. I jumped down and stirred up the fire which must furnish me a brand for the fuses. Then again I got on the wall and shouted our defiance to all the jungle-world about us. Old Fatty began to beat the drum like a fury.

My warriors were inflamed; they crowded forward to see what was happening below. By this the cries of the enemy had become shrieks as of madness. We saw fifty of the Blacks burst quickly from cover, run to right and left and dash back in the woods, as if to flank an approaching cavalcade. To my amazement I saw among the fellows the traitor Grin miserable coward! The Links observed him, too, and they chattered their rage and their Link maledictions on his head.

Once more I got down, this time to arm myself with a glowing brand from the flames. With this I shook out our only banner a banner of smoke. Suddenly the screen of trees, vines and creepers, seemed to bulge toward us, then to break. Two massive dark chunks of the jungle appeared to be bursting through. Then I saw what they were and realised what the cries had meant, what the plan of the Blacks had been from the first and what a diabolical and clever scheme it was.

Two trumpeting elephants, goaded and maddened, smashed ponderously out of the jungle and headed up the hill surrounded and driven toward us by hundreds of the yelling, dancing devils, with Grin in their midst, all of them incredibly nimble, daring and wrought up to force their irresistible allies over and through us.

The Links behind me, terrified beyond all control, were too stricken with panic to know what to do. They fell headlong over and upon each other; they ran in every direction. Females and children cried out in fear; chief, fighters, all were seized in the maelstrom of fright, and all went dashing away. Already we were as good as routed. Flight to the jungle would mean separation, death of all who were lost and murder of all who were overtaken by the terrible Blacks.

Confused for a moment, I attempted to call them back, to restore the order. This was worse than useless.

The elephants came unwillingly up the hill; the din of voices and trumpeting was appalling to hear. I jumped from my place, unconscious of my wounded foot and dashed down the hill as if to meet this oncoming tumult of death alone racing toward my fuses. I had dropped my bow. My only weapon was the smoking brand of fire.

Shrieks from the Reds, who could not but see me, and screams of delight from the enemy, greeted the sight of a single crazy man, running down to the jaws of this living Juggernaut from the wilds.

I reached my goal, I fell to my knees and fumbled the matches. The monstrous battalion was nearly half way up to the trench of bombs. My fuses failed to ignite. In desperation I broke off the ends and bore them down upon my living coal. My thumb was burned, but I felt nothing. A fierce hiss from the powder electrified my every fibre. I leaped to my feet and darted part way back to the wall.

Man, came the cry of a sweet small voice.

Turning, I saw that my little Tike had followed me down the slope to the fuses. There he sat beside them and the serpents of igniting powder were racing down to the mines, and the thundering horde of foes was racing upward, toward the little chap and me. Insanely I ran with all my might to rescue my only loyal Link the baby who sat in the sunlight.

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How far away he was! What a time it seemed to take me to reach him! The elephants how near and awful they looked! I could see their white–showing eyes. The monsters began to gallop upward, mad to wreak vengeance on something, for that goading behind their backs. The yells became a din. Already the brutes must be past my trench. It would fail it would kill little Tike and myself anything but the terrible creatures pounding the earth as they came upon us!

I snatched the little fellow up and ran desperately away. Would nothing ever happen? I felt the ankle had gone at the critical moment. I rolled and saw the dread spectacle crowding up and up the sun–lit hill.

Then the earth was rent wide open great castles of earth and elephants rose toppling in the air, along with a glare of red–and–yellow flames and a mighty volcano of smoke. The world belched forth a detonation like the crack of doom.

Another and yet another fearful fan of fire leaped exultantly upward, hurling Blacks and fragments of Blacks, and soil and rock that blew through the bellies of the elephants and shot away in every direction toward the tranquil sky.

I was deaf with the mighty roar and concussion. From the air the debris came raining down. The smoke seemed a fountain of enveloping fog. Shrieks now of terror and dreadful pain stabbed through the confusion. Then a rock whirred down so close to my head that it–puffed me with its cushion of air. I heard a sound and looked for little Tike, whom I had permitted to slip to the ground as I fell.

He was there beside me, his steady, wistful eyes looking up in my face, his poor little legs fairly crushed into the earth, beneath that fragment of adamant, torn from its bed and hurled upon him.

I was over him instantly heaving away the hunk of stone. But I did not attempt to lift the little mangled body. I saw he was numbed by the shock; I knew he was dying. He lay there and smiled, as I bent above his tiny form. He made no motion with hand or head, but when I placed my finger in his wee palm, he closed his baby–like grip upon it and gave me the fondest look I have ever beheld.

The Blacks could have swooped upon me, the earth could have quivered with agony and death, but I should have known nothing of it all, nor have cared. All the pangs of wrenched affection darted through my breast. I was smitten dumb to see that human look of love, gratitude and hope. The homely little face became transfigured with a look of inward beauty; the promise of a dawning, evolving human being was there, glowing like the life in a spark. The wistful eyes burned with that singular light which makes us hope for things supernal.

On my finger the tiny grip fluttered. I felt myself breaking down like a woman.

The little chap's lip quivered a second; his fleeting breath came forth lightly.

Man, he whispered in the stillness, and smiling, closed his tired little eyes forever.

CHAPTER XXXIII. KING AT LAST

THERE WAS a cloud over my heart; there was a pall of smoke and fumes drawing slowly off from the scene of devastation. It seemed as if the chasm in the hill–side were a ghastly wound of colossal proportions, for not only was the earth torn raggedly, but blood was about, and the slope was strewn with mangled remains.

I felt no exultation; I was ill at the sight, and weak and quite subdued. It was a pitiful, dreadful picture, with the two elephants like mounds of butchery, looming large in the middle distance, while down below were numerous

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wounded creatures creeping away toward the jungle. And the dying made sounds of moaning.

Not far from where I had fallen, lay part of a long, red arm Grin's. The bombs had flung it nearly to the camp he had sought to betray. He must have been among the foremost of the Links who drove the elephants up the hill. I conjured back my vision of the charging force, at the second when the explosion created its havoc. I remembered the huge wild animals most distinctly, their trunks uplifted, their feet in awkward, active motion, while to right and left and almost on their heels, the Blacks surged up in their dance of death. I knew then that the destruction among them must have been tremendous, for the whole length of the trench had been covered thickly by their numbers, and the lateral force of the bursting mines, especially down the hill, had evidently swept the slope for rods.

I shook my head as I realised the narrowness of my own escape.

I believe I was saved only by a sort of half shoulder of the hill and the fact that I fell and was flat on my side when the explosion occurred.

In my brain a panorama of all the tragedy ran, time after time. It seemed unbelievable that the Blacks had been able to drive the elephants. I shall never cease to wonder at this remarkable performance, for everything I know of the jungle's greatest brute leads me always to suppose they would turn upon their pigmy tormentors and drive them away in confusion, no matter how great their numbers. But more incredible than even this was the sudden blotting out of all that mad stampede. I felt like the last man left on earth.

It was quite impossible for me to go down that dread slope as yet. I sat on the ground, dejected, weak from hunger and the strain of all the excitement. I rested my chin in my hand and gazed off abstractedly toward the endless sea of green. I lost all interest in the world about me, for all my memories and all my dreams had conveyed me afar from that island of singular fates. At length I was aroused from my reverie by Fatty, who came furtively down from the village and crawled in front of my feet, to gaze in my face, with his comical, quizzical expression of deep anxiety spread thickly on his homely phiz.

Hullo, said I, did you come back at last to twist the enemy's tail?"

Then I saw an amazing line of heads above the wall, where dozens of our fellows were peering down upon the scene and upon myself. On their faces I noted every conceivable look of awe and horror. That I sat there, seemingly calm after all of that day's fatal work, impressed them a thousand fold more than as if I had strutted and boasted of the deed. Perhaps my face betrayed a certain look of grimness, which events had compelled in my thoughts; howbeit the creatures were stricken with an overpowering dread of my presence.

The hill-shaking explosion had been infinitely more terrific than my first little celebration with a single bomb, and this had given them all a fright, the memory of which could never be eradicated from their minds. But if this had rendered them respectful toward me as the actuating spirit of it all, the sight of the slope simply drowned them in fathomless awe. The mightiest creatures of the jungle, torn apart like things of paper, the hill split open and altered, a yelling army scattered and blown to atoms this sum of deeds appalled them so thoroughly that the strongest might have died of shock had I jabbed him in the ribs with my thumb.

Fatty, on seeing that I lived, began to grovel on his face and to push his head against the soil where my feet had rested, as if he were quite unfit to abide on the surface of my earth and would therefore worm and bore his way down and out of sight without further ado.

One after another, then, the trembling fellows came crawling down the hill, many on their stomachs, to adore my tracks, to wriggle about my feet and otherwise to endeavour to calm me down and humble themselves in my exalted shadow. Even the chief came toward me on hands and knees, dragging his club and afraid to lift his head.

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His downfall was complete; there were none more thoroughly overwhelmed than he. On the ground before me the fellow laid his great crystal weapon at once his sceptre and his sword and he, too, adored the turf where my feet had trod. The women, with the albino among them, and even the children, got on the ground, prostrate, abject and afraid.

Ahem, really, fellow citizens, said I with a grin, your attentions quite overcome me. Pray excuse my unseemly emotion and blushes.

I had conducted a large experiment with some success, yet I felt that my efforts had been far from superhuman, and not even carried out with wholly unselfish motives. I felt in fact that the whole present proposition bordered on the lines of comic opera, for I knew that by the token of the chief's submission I stood there at last, the King of the Missing Links!

CHAPTER XXXIV. A MOMENT OF REST

WE HELD a mighty funeral-carnival. The heat made it necessary to rush this matter as much as possible. My Links took no little of the meat of the slaughtered elephants, but as soon as all were fed again I set them to work deepening the cavern which the mines had excavated in the hill.

With creepers for ropes and with rollers to render the task more easy, we dragged the huge carcasses into the graves by sheer force of numbers. Collecting the Blacks was a most unpleasant labour, but it had to be done thoroughly, and it was, although my subjects had never before performed such an office for enemies of any description. Oddly enough we were quite unable to discover the body of Grin.

In the pits I had several great fires ignited, to cremate as much as possible of the flesh, after which the earth was thrown in and heaped up until I was sure that the shallowest portion of the grave was covered with at least ten feet of soil.

I could have rested with a very good grace after all this business of war, but I remembered my former plans and the bear-skin waiting to be tanned, in the boat. I feared the pelt might be ruined already, and therefore I took the earliest opportunity of visiting my lake possessions. When I came in sight of the boat, I had reason to be glad that I had moored her away from the bank, for I found abundant evidence that the Blacks had been there, undoubtedly intent on doing mischief. Fortunately for me their dread of the water had proved greater than their desire to destroy the boat, and their ingenuity had shown itself deficient when they faced the problem of getting the craft ashore without wetting their precious feet. But they had thrown every available rock at the innocent craft, together with all the loose pieces of burnt clay.

Thanks to the covering of clay and leaves, which permitted a slight circulation of air, while it kept out investigative insects, the skin was in excellent condition. Indeed I am inclined to believe the delay had been actually beneficial in the curing process. The thing was pliable and as sweet as a hide could possibly be which, by the way, is not extravagant praise. I had rowed away, out of sight of my loyal subjects, before uncovering my treasure. Floating on the calm surface of the lake I worked at the pelt most arduously. Nearly the whole of that day I was rubbing it, scrubbing the parts together and otherwise keeping it soft, while the sun and the air dried out the moisture which made it heavy and green.

When I was finally ready to call it finished, the hide was much like a soft, thick robe, such as is commonly employed for a rug, a condition which I knew would be permanent, although in a spot or two the thing might be inclined to stiffen. I packed it again in leaves merely to hide it from sight and proceeded back to our beach, where I anchored the boat as before.

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Inasmuch as I felt that my actual duties were now performed, I determined to rest for a space and enjoy the peace which we had compelled so abruptly. I therefore lay about the camp the following morning, doing absolutely nothing to earn my salt. Now and again I caught myself feeling or looking about. There was no little Tike. When I dozed I fancied I heard his voice, but on starting awake found nothing beside me but faithful old Fatty, who always poked his forehead on the ground as soon as he saw me looking upon him. Someway the camp seemed not itself. I got no enjoyment from my streak of laziness, and I got but little rest. It did me good to carve a bit of a board, or section of bamboo, with the inscription:

"LITTLE MAN"

This I planted in the mound of rocks where the tiny chap was buried.

The settlement, I thought, would never be the same to me again, especially now that I was king. My Links were far too conscious of my regal attributes; there was less of the feeling of fellowship than we had enjoyed before. I had failed to appreciate our previous social equality, but now that all were rendered so timid and humbled in my presence, I was bored and somewhat annoyed. The crystal club I kept in my shelter, beside the one of the gleaming nugget. Though he seemed, now and again, to eye me somewhat sullenly and to gaze on the weapon with a hungry expression of countenance, the ex-chief made himself an excellent new bludgeon, with a rock at the end, which was twice the weight of any other similarly employed in the place.

The fellow accepted a bow and a lot of arrows readily enough. We hunted as before, employing these excellent weapons. Some of the creatures had learned by this time to shoot with great force and precision. One sent an arrow entirely through the belly of a hog, on one of our many excursions to the jungle.

In a leisurely manner I provided myself with cord and sundry requisites for masquerading as a bear. Before my rest was two days old I was weary of it and restless to be again actively engaged. Once more the malady of dislike for all the Links and their camp had broken out within me, wherefore I desired to hasten matters in regard to my unknown friend, on whose rescue I was fully determined.

I began to wonder why I had delayed this important matter for a moment. *I* was eager to see this man, grasp his hand and hear him speak the language so long denied my ears. Why, if he were half a man, we two could accomplish anything everything! Why had I not hastened to reach him and to get him away while the Blacks were still demoralised by the recent extermination of more than half their number? I would dally no longer; I would act at once.

In order to proceed with intelligence I had need to formulate my plan. What should I do? Do? I would simply row my boat to Outlet river, dress myself in the bear-skin suit and waddle into the settlement to make my observations. This sounded simple enough, but reason told me I should blunder no little as a bear and appear none too real in the role. I must practice, I thought as my first sane conclusion, but my second was still more rational I would work the trick in semi-darkness only, when my features would be rendered somewhat indefinite by the shadows. Should I go there in the early morning, or should I try the game in the twilight of evening? In the morning, I meditated, the light increases rapidly, and my man might be asleep; daylight could readily overtake me while I was crawling about to get my bearings. Clearly the evening would be the better time.

Well, then, the sooner the business began the sooner I should know what was what. I decided to be present in the camp of the Blacks that very day, when the sun should have disappeared behind the hills.

CHAPTER XXXV. A FELLOW HUMAN

GREATLY RELIEVED to have something to do something which might be about to furnish a turning point in

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all this unnatural existence of mine in the wilds, I set off for the boat at an early hour of the afternoon. Once started on the expedition, I was in a fever of haste to be about it and to try my new conclusions with fortune.

The skull of the bear had been boiled free of everything suggesting meat. When a mile away, down the lake I replaced this heavy thing in the skin and sewed the hide roughly about it to give the head a natural appearance. Then along the edges where I had been obliged to cut the pelt to get it off, I made a series of holes, into which I laced the cords, provided for the purpose, intending to draw them tight when the costume was properly adjusted about me.

Having nothing more to prepare, I rowed leisurely for two hours, when I went ashore, near the mouth of the outlet, and tried my disguise.

This business discouraged me greatly. I was able to get the neck portion fastened about my head, in such a manner that I could see easily, and the body of the skin about my chest and waist, but my arms and legs were too long for the paws and legs of the bear, while the body part was longer than my trunk. Altogether I was about the most extraordinary looking freak to be found in the jungle, when I had done my utmost to make the costume fit.

I should quite have appreciated the use of several mirrors at this stage of my make-up, in order to see if sundry portions were on straight, but was denied this pleasure, having failed to provide myself with various articles of the toilet. It was only by crawling and lolling about on the ground, on knees and elbows that I was enabled to convince myself that I looked the slightest bit like the creature whose part I had essayed to perform.

I have never felt more warm in my life than I did in that skin. The day was hot, the hide was heavy, and I had laboured hard to get it on. The perspiration threatened to make the pelt insupportable. But now that I had myself fastened inside it, I dreaded the task of taking it off and putting it on again later. As an outcome of much agitated mental debate, I decided to be a bear until my work as a spy was concluded. I therefore sat me down, in the shade, near my boat, and waited for sunset.

The sun becomes very deliberate, I found, when it catches a man in a tight, hot place. It seemed as if the fiery ball intended to hang in the western sky for several centuries, for my particular delectation. At last it got weary of the game and

departed.

A bear can perform several feats with comfort and ease to himself and with grace, perhaps, but rowing a boat is not among the number. I grew hotter, in several ways, directly. I think I wished fervently that my unknown friend, the prisoner, had never committed the indiscretion of being captured by the Blacks. It being necessary to proceed with caution, my torture was much prolonged. At length, however, I noted a snug retreat in which my boat could remain, undetected, and which I hoped would be readily accessible from the camp I was searching in the jungle.

Already the shadows had begun to be deep, so that I walked erect, in what I thought to be the right direction, moving with the greatest care, and alert every second for the smallest sound. I had made my way for a considerable distance in this manner, without being able to detect any disturbance in the forest, when presently a low rumble, as of something rolling over stones, beneath a muffling canopy, broke on the air. This sound increased. It seemed to come from a source not far away, and yet it was most uncertain and elusive. I was quite at a loss to determine whence it proceeded. Growing stronger it made a great ado of grumbling, reaching a sort of climax in less than a minute, after which it slowly subsided and was gone.

Standing where I was, I listened attentively, for the noise had puzzled me much. Then through the silence came another sound, which anyone could have understood, anywhere on earth. It was a moan. A second later I heard the rustle of leaves and saw a prowling form one of the ebon Links.

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Falling upon my hands and knees, noiselessly, I waited for the fellow to pass from sight and hearing, after which I crawled laboriously forward, nearing the sound where something was voicing its pain. My heart was beating so tumultuously that I felt obliged to halt frequently, in order to calm myself as much as the perilous situation would permit. Moving thus and keeping constantly in the cover of the vines and grasses, I glanced about me keenly.

When I came upon the clearing in which the Blacks abided, it happened so abruptly that I started, to find myself so near. Lying out full length, I endeavoured to quiet the thumping of my heart and to moisten my mouth, which had become dry and gluey. Then I looked about, through the friendly screen of creepers.

The shadows lay thick enough for all purposes, yet there was light enough to reveal several incongruous things. First I noted a dozen or more of the black Links, some of them moving about, some squatting on the ground, monkey-fashion, eating mangoes and melons, one lying flat on his back in the agony of death. He it was that moaned; he had received his mortal wounds in the great explosion. I saw that his arm was gone, and then I knew him Grin.

At the back of the clearing was a wall of rock. In front of this stood a natural pillar of stone, and fastened up at the top was something which for a time presented the greatest mystery. It looked like portions of a skeleton, disconnected, but it gleamed, even in the twilight. I studied it closely for the thing compelled my undivided attention. Then I saw the skull and knew it had all been, upon a time, the frame work of a living creature, but astonishing fact of all things weird it was plated all over with something precisely resembling gold!

I forgot the Links; I forgot my mission to their village. That skeleton centered my every thought. I studied it, patched it together mentally, and attempted to picture it properly straightened out. This process convinced me at once that the arms were shorter than those of any Link, while the skull was finely formed on the human pattern. I observed that the whole thing, if properly articulated would be taller than I. The Links, I told myself, cared nothing for the bones of their kind, and less for those of their foes. It must be it had to be the skeleton of a man!

But the gold or whatever it was, the plating, how came it on the skull and on those ribs, those bones of the arms and thighs and all the rest? Why was it here? Immediately my brain jumped to the preposterous conclusion that my friend, the man I had come to save, had been killed since my former visit, his skeleton plated with something and strung up here on the rock to please some strange whims of these incomprehensible creatures. I knew, a second later, that this was absurd. My mental process as quickly formed a saner theory. This man had lived among the Blacks before; they had learned of him which accounted for many things, like their superiority over my Reds, they had killed him, later, and by some singular accident this appearance of plating had come to pass on the bones.

In the midst of my conjectures, that weird, low rumble commenced again, nearer at hand, but still in some locality invisible from where I was. Crouching, while its mighty tones increased, several Blacks glanced upward at the skeleton and then put their heads upon the ground in adoration before the pillar of stone.

I nearly cried out as I suddenly grasped at a wonderful thought. That rumbling it was certainly a sound I had heard before that day it certainly must be that marvellous cauldron of gold, where the geyser shot upward and boiled in its cavern. The plated skeleton had received its plating there; the nugget of gold at the end of the club which a Black had wielded in war, had come from there; the cavern which I and old Fatty had seen, on the day we fled in the subterranean passage, was there; and these creatures owned it and evidently knew of an opening leading to its wondrous interior from the outside world!

What was I about to discover? What was here, in and about this remarkable camp? Would I see it all? would I get a chance to investigate the wonderful cave? Could I rob that cauldron of its treasure? I was wild with excitement. I wished that I had an overwhelming army behind me a force sufficient to drive these creatures anywhere, away in the jungle. I looked about, as if to see my army. Great Scott! I had utterly forgotten how alone I was! The

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wretches might discover me, know me and beat me to jelly in a second. My breath came hard; I remembered my business in a manner painfully vivid.

I must go ahead, for obviously there was nothing here for me, nothing of that partner I had come to steal. He must be off, where a pair of Blacks were walking as I looked. Still keeping in the cover, I edged about the clearing and pushed ahead. A tangled isthmus of greenery divided the small open space from another which was considerably larger. In a brief time I came in sight of this and beheld another remarkable sight.

At the foot of a towering cliff of rocks, surrounded by fruit trees on the left, the river down in front, and the isthmus of trees and vines in which I was lying on the right, was a fine flat space, commodious, strategically situated and now alive with black Missing Links. Our explosion had killed the fighters by the score, but the females and children were exceedingly numerous, while of males there were still almost as many as we had in all our tribe.

That once the creatures had been directed by a man was plain, for here were a score of dugouts, such as we possessed, but the roofs were gone from many, while those of the others showed every sign of neglect and the rapid deterioration into which it seemed as if the creatures must fall, and let everything fall, when abandoned to themselves. Of any weapons which they might have possessed in the age of that man, there was not the slightest sign. Looking carefully about, I saw but one shelter on which the roof appeared to be intact. This one was near the base of the cliff, on the left-hand side of the clearing, from me; that is to say, the same side on which I was now concealed.

The light was growing dim. I peered about, in a vain endeavour to see my man. How I wished I might raise my voice and cry out a greeting a something which would tell this other human being of my nearness! It is unbelievable how strong was the impulse to commit this indiscretion. I curbed the desire, however, and waited to see if anything would happen.

Here and there, on the campus, the evening fires of the Links were being kindled, from a mother fire smouldering in a natural hollow beneath the wall of rock. I could see what I thought were the ruins of a more convenient fireplace, near the central fire. It looked as if that former man had provided a means for a better culinary output, but that the creatures had soon gone back to their own original methods, when he was dead. Then I thought that things were peculiar, for why were there no material evidences of the presence of the man I had come to seek, about the camp? What was the matter with this unseen individual? He must be weak indeed to do absolutely nothing!

I remembered his spouting of poetry, and I fear my estimation of a man who would give himself over to such effeminate employment as that was of precious little account. Poetry indeed! He was evidently a lady's man for his voice had sounded soft and here was proof that he either could not, or was not willing to, manufacture the very first thing, either for cooking, living or fighting. Perhaps such a fellow was hardly worth the risk; perhaps I should be wise to retreat, in good order, and let him work out his own salvation.

My attention was caught, as I scanned the place in this critical frame of mind, by a nutter of something, near the only decent shelter.

Upon my word, I muttered in huge contempt, I believe the fellow has got out his washing on a line!

About that moment a bird in the tree above me made a sound like a boy whistling. This was my cue. If any man were anywhere about, he would hear a whistle and the Links would have no suspicion. I piped up on the opening bar of Yankee Doodle. This I repeated time after time. It appeared as if the scheme would turn out worthless, as it produced no apparent effect. Growing more bold, I started to whistle my lay a trifle louder, but I chopped it off short in the middle, for I beheld a figure emerge from the decent dug-out and start slowly toward me, walking

and performing some singular weaving motions with the arms.

The dusk had gathered over the scene, yet I saw that this was a white human being!

CHAPTER XXXVI. SURPRISE AND SUSPENSE

I HELD my breath, I shivered with sudden excitement.

The figure, slight, beautifully erect, clothed in a skirt-like garment of skins, came nearer and nearer. I was so thoroughly intent on seeing why the arms were moved in those singular gestures that I clean forgot to scan the face.

The stranger came closer, followed now by scores of the Blacks, who adored and worshipped in the tracks which were left by the feet. I could see the heavy coils of some ornament about the neck and over the slender shoulders of this human. Suddenly I knew what the hands were doing; suddenly the most astounding intelligence broke on my brain.

The figure was that of a woman, young, beautiful, clad like Diana, and the coils about her maidenly form were those of a monster serpent, the head of which she held in her hand while with the other she gently unwound the wrappings of the tail.

I whistled again, more softly, my excitement growing at every second.

On she came, uncertainly, down along the edge of that open cage in the jungle, her head held finely in a listening poise, her face white, set and smileless. She moved like a goddess in a dream. In her eyes burned a half-wild light of anxiety; on her lips there was a tense look of suppressed emotion. Her beautiful arms seemed marble-white, as they moved in those snake-soothing gestures; her whole deportment was that of one who questions, yearns eagerly for a sign on which to build a hope, but dares not believe that a cruel fate could possibly relent.

She was almost opposite where I was lying. I knew I should speak to her do something instantly, before the moment should be gone, but my tongue now cleaved fast to its sheath in my mouth, my teeth clenched hard together and my muscles were all but paralysed at that fateful moment.

She was just before me passing me by in reach of the slightest sound.

Who is it? she said aloud, in a voice that trembled.

It's me a man, I whispered with ungrammatical suddenness, Don't stop you'll betray me Come to-night!

Half prepared as she was, she still started violently. She loosened her hold on the head of the snake. The horrible thing wrapped itself about her arm and tightened all its coils. Hastily clutching the serpent by the neck again, she twisted and choked it into submission. Her eyes were ablaze with fear and a wild, unbelieving hope! How luminous they were, even in the meagre light! What a wondering, beseeching face she revealed, as she turned for a second in her instinctive effort to see where I was!

As she had mastered the snake, so she mastered the womanly instinct to cry out and dash to the spot where I lay. I saw her weave slightly, as she recovered her poise, after which she resumed her singular march toward the river.

The Blacks came to where she had paused, adoring the trail so near me that I could hear them breathing. What hideous brutes they were, now that I had seen a beautiful human being! They passed, and I longed to leap upon

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their backs and strike them all to death.

All about that clearing the goddess-like prisoner led the creatures who had made her captive. She was almost lost to sight in the darkness which was now enveloping the wood. She was only the faint suggestion of a form when at last I saw her pass again inside her shelter.

I loosened a thousand tense muscles the second she disappeared, and lay limber and all unstrung on the earth. I had not been seen by any Links. It had perhaps been foolish and a waste of time to kill the bear and adopt his hide after all. But it had given me the courage to come and great Heavens! what a find I had made!

A woman! among these monsters! No wonder there were no new houses, no ovens, no weapons of war of her making. I had been profoundly stupid. I should have been able to guess it was not a man that soft, clear voice, the absence of mannish contrivances, and then that suggestive little line of her washing these should have been enough to tell me the story. A woman a helpless, beautiful woman and I had almost thought of giving up the effort to rescue this friend! this fellow human!

Gee whizz! said I to myself, for the thing was tremendous.

Then I wondered what would happen next. Would she come return to the place where she had heard my voice? Would she wait till all the Links were safely asleep and then place her trust in a stranger? At what time were these black beasts likely to retire? Would they wake and catch her in the act? Could we find my boat in the dark? But everything else was as nothing compared to the question, which I repeated over and over, would she come?

I believed she would. I intended to wait, whatever might occur, and to wait until morning, if she did not sooner appear. A thousand times I wished we were already in my boat and away on the lake.

All these days gone to waste for a bear-skin, I muttered, and all the time it was easy to sneak into their place under their very noses.

I was glad now, however, of the warmth of the skin, for the ground was moist. In the clearing the night had descended like a curtain, but five or six fires somewhat illumined the place. The scene presented was strange. About the centres of ruddy light were groups of these weird, semi-human creatures, standing and squatting, eating like so many apes. Their long, thin arms made their appearance most grotesque, silhouetted as they were against the light. Here and there the red glow lighted up a negro-gorilla countenance, flat-nosed, big-jawed and large-eared, till it seemed like a region where the imps of darkness breed. And back of all this, the play of the flames threw monster shadows, on the background of trees and creepers, till it all had a strange appearance of life, as if incredible snakes and incongruous animals weaved an endless woof of mystery into the warp of night.

An hour passed and I had hardly moved. By groups the creatures slunk away to their huddling places. The groans of many wounded, unnoted before in the chatter, arose to chorus with the distant sounds of the jungle. Regularly, like a marker of time, came the rumble and grumble from the cauldron of gold.

Around the largest fire, a grim old warrior hovered for an interminable time, after all the others had departed. I had no patience with his pretence of cogitating over all the problems of the universe; I wished him safely abed and snoring. He pothered about for an age, and finally stretched himself near the embers and went to sleep.

I waited and waited, expecting every moment to be rewarded by a vision of the prisoner, gliding toward me. The moon arose above the trees behind me and made the place altogether too bright for any good. To allay my impatience I watched the matchless orb sailing above the jungle. Turning at last from the brilliant picture, my heart leaped wildly. The goddess was almost there!

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Slipping quickly, but noiselessly forth, I emerged from the vines on hands and knees and started to arise.

The girl gave a scream and fled like a startled doe.

Don't be scared, I half shouted, guardedly, it's only a skin, but my assurance was then too late.

On the instant the Blacks bounded up, alert and alarmed. Club in hand, the grim old fighter near the fire came running toward me. The shadows were with us, by great good fortune. The girl, moreover, had the presence of mind to disappear in the trees and emerge further up toward her shelter.

Realising that now or never I must act my part, I fell on all fours like a plummet. Browsing about unconcernedly, I moved a little in the grass at the edge of the growth, and then, having made myself sure that I had been seen by the Links who came dashing excitedly up, I slowly rooted back into the thicket and disappeared.

It worked like magic. Chattering a lot of drivel which was plainly eulogistic of all the bear family and congratulatory to all the black Links in existence who had thus been honoured in the night the savages kow-towed on the ground and otherwise wrote themselves down as unmitigated asses for a longer period by far than they need have done for my satisfaction. Indeed it began to look as if they had taken a notion to spend the remainder of the night in adoration of the ground I had condescended to spurn with my hands and knees. When at last I heard them go, I crept silently back to the edge of the growth and watched them stir up the fire and blunder off to bed.

Confound the skin! I muttered to myself. Why didn't I tell her what a beastly old bear I am?"

Such a time now went by that I began to fear the girl had missed my hurried explanation, in her natural fright, when she ran. However, it did not seem possible she would give up so easily and be afraid to come. Yet I knew it all depended upon her condition of mind. She had doubtless become more than usually timid while subjected to all that she must have undergone here among the Links, all alone, and no human being could entirely eliminate a feeling of dread for the jungle in the dark.

Trusting that in all the medley of night-sounds, a whistle would not awaken the Links, I set up my piping on the bar of our Yankee acquaintance again, repeating it, as before, as often as I deemed it prudent. More of the endless waiting, in my far from enviable position, ensued. If the moon got another half hour in which to sail before the prisoner came, she would drive every friendly shadow squarely back to the forest.

I watched till my neck was stiff and my body cramped, If the goddess doesn't hurry, I muttered, the game will be up for the night. Still she lingered in her shelter. I began to grow cross; I vowed she must be crimping her hair and putting on a new pair of gloves.

Suddenly she appeared again, coming out of the trees, not far away. This time I whistled, ever so softly. She paused, came silently on a rod, and halted as before. Another little whistle brought her almost before me.

Now please don't yell again, I whispered ungallantly. Slip into the woods as quietly as you can we've got to hurry. ¹

Who is it? she stopped to answer, below her breath, as I rose to my feet.

It's just John Nevers, a common, ordinary man American. If we're going to get away, I wish you wouldn't fool around another minute.

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I saw that she stood undecided a second, with that evil-looking snake about her shoulders; its eyes gleamed like beads in a ray of moonlight which touched on its hateful head. For that brief space of time I felt such a disgust for the serpent and such a growing impatience, that I had a half impulse to trudge away alone. But she moved toward me; the light which had fallen on the head of the snake silvered her pale, beautiful face. The appeal which was there in her eyes, the trust which was born on the moment, and the helplessness of a maiden, all combined to shame me and to make me her champion against the terrors of all the world.

Come through here, I whispered, bending back a branch, and she stepped toward me, confident and strong in the hope newly kindled in her breast.

The branch slipped from my fingers and swished noisily back. I heard a snort; the light-sleeping old devil of a Link was up on his feet in a second. He ran toward us again, this time unaccompanied by any of the others. We stood there as silent as statues. My knife was out, for I had instantly determined to slay this watch-dog of the tribe, if he came a foot into the brush.

He merely whined about, uneasily, a time, and then returned to his post. Without waiting to let him lose himself in sleep, I led and cleared the way, moving as slowly as a frozen tortoise, for a considerable time, while the goddess followed, as silently as my shadow.

Past the clearing, where the gilded skeleton hung in the moonlight we glided. Here I saw the stiffened form of Grin, lying stark on the earth. The deep, mysterious rumble of the gold-cauldron began anew.

Now hurry, while this racket drowns out all the noise we can make, I whispered.

We made no mean bit of progress while the noise continued, after which I felt there was no more need of particular care. The jungle thickets were fearfully dark, as soon as we got away from the clearings, and I was obliged to forge ahead as best I could, guided only by my sense of direction.

Half an hour went by and although we should have been at the river, where the boat was on the bank, there was no immediate prospect of our coming to the proper place. In the midst of my efforts, mental and physical, to extricate myself and the girl from the maze, a peculiar shriek went up in the distance behind us. I paused, inquiringly.

Oh that is the voice of the horrid old woman, said the goddess anxiously. I think she has found I have gone.¹¹

The deuce! said I. She has alarmed the whole works, the old villain!

Judging by the noise which was raised one would have thought she had awakened the whole world. I was certain every Link in the camp was up and dancing about that clearing in the wildest confusion.

Come ahead, said I, calmly enough, they are all afraid of the woods at night; they will never catch us now unless the morning overtakes us before we reach the river.

I knew she shuddered, but like a brave, good girl she made no fuss. As for the racket, it furnished me with a bearing, as it were. Knowing where their settlement was, I knew the approximate direction in which the boat should be found. Indeed before we had travelled another fifty yards I caught a gleam of reflected moonlight from Outlet river and knew my way directly.

It's lucky that beastly old woman didn't make her discovery sooner, said I.

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Yes, replied the trembling voice of the goddess, that was why I kept you waiting so long; she wouldn't go to sleep.

Um, was all I muttered. I was thinking about that crimping of her hair, poor girl, and the putting on of tight, new gloves.

We reached the boat, to my intense relief. Please get in and make yourself as comfortable as possible, said I, and ripping off the bear-skin, I flung it down to make her a seat.

Out into the limpid stream I shoved my clumsy but beloved craft, and manning the oars I swung her about, headed her toward the lake and made the liquid silver shiver from the prow.

The moonlight fell on the sweet, womanly face. The goddess looked at me dumbly almost with the divine expression I had seen on the face of little Tike. Her eyes were eloquent of gratitude, relief and things too great to be expressed. Slowly her head came forward on her breast, away from which she held that ugly serpent, and she sobbed and sobbed like a child.

Ah what a night it was! I felt a throb of triumph all through my veins. Rowing steadily and stoutly I said nothing, but let her have her cry. At last she looked upon my face again.

Where are we going? she faltered.

Home, said I, to the camp on top of the hill.

Home? she echoed softly. To your people, do you mean?"

Yep, I agreed. For a while, at least. But they're not exactly my people. They're a lot of Missing Links.

Oh what? Missing Links? You don't mean things like the horrible creatures we have just escaped?"

Same species, I assured her cheerfully, but mine are red.

Oh oh, she moaned with a shudder, but I'd rather not! Oh I hate them so; they are all so horrid; they frighten me terribly, and I know they will act exactly like the others

No they won't, I interrupted, with a grin, they'll get off the earth, if I say the word, for they know that I am the King!

CHAPTER XXXVII. THE GODDESS

THE PULL WAS a long one, even in the cool of the night. I knew my way, by the stars, if necessary, but the moonlight made my steering easy.

For half an hour the goddess was silent, sighing now and again, and crying a bit, as if deliverance had broken down some barrier to all her emotions, letting floods of pent up feelings free at once.

It doesn't seem possible, she told me finally.

What doesn't? said I, though I knew very well what she meant.

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This boat, she answered, and you a man in this terrible place. It doesn't seem really true that I have escaped from those awful creatures; I didn't believe I should ever get away. Oh, how did you do it?"

Perhaps you'd better tell me first how you got there, I made answer. How long have you been in the place?"

I don't know, she faltered. It must be months and months. I lost all account, but it seems like an age. I didn't seem to care about the dates, there have been such lots of awful things to think of all the while. What month is it now?"

Lord bless you, that's more than I know, I admitted shamelessly. I couldn't keep track; things have been too hot. I should say, though, it's probably getting along toward summer.

Although she was deeply concerned with herself and all the troubles which for long she had endured, she realised that I too had been lost in this land of jungle. She made me tell my story first. I boiled it down to the bones, being anxious to hear how it was she came to be there. This she told me, brokenly, before we landed from the boat.

She was a cosmopolitan sort of a girl, born and raised in Australia, educated partially in England and partially in Massachusetts. Her father was an Englishman, a scientist, her mother American, of fine old Puritan stock. This mother had died in Sydney. The father and daughter having spent much of their time together, had grown to be great companions. She had long been interested in all his work, in which she had learned to be of great assistance. Thus it came about that when he determined to visit certain of the smaller Banyac Islands, for the purpose of collecting flora and fauna for preservation, she accompanied him as a matter of course. From a private steam yacht, placed at the professor's disposal, and also from the coast settlements, the two had made daily excursions, in a ship's yawl in which they could make a careful survey of all the shore.

Engaged in their work, one warm afternoon, they had moored the yawl among a lot of weed-covered rocks. This had been accomplished by securing the painter to one of the oars and wedging this oar down between a pair of boulders. The tide was ebbing when they landed.

In a short time her father had secured a medium-sized anaconda, which having recently fed, was dull and half asleep. This serpent he had given to his daughter, who carried it back to the boat and nailed it in a box provided for any such emergency. Feeling slightly fatigued and unenthusiastic she had then sat down in the yawl, raised her sun-shade and taken out a book to read.

She described the soporific effect of the heat and the lapping of the water about the boat, which had begun soon to affect her senses when she had settled down to rest. Before she knew it she had gone fast asleep. She believed that finally the tide had risen and floated the oar from between the rocks. Then doubtless a breeze had sprung up and the boat had been drifted away.

Anyway I know I must have slept for hours. she said, but when I did wake up oh dear! The sky was black, and I couldn't see any island, or anything but water, and a terrible storm was coming, and the darkness was all about me, and then well, it was simply the awfulest wind in the world that commenced to blow!

The storm which she now described had probably been a regular monsoon. It lasted for hours, she said, and the yawl was driven wildly about on the angry sea. Like many a yawl, this craft had been broad of beam and it was therefore as seaworthy as a life-belt. It had ridden like a duck throughout the night.

When at last the light returned, the girl had found herself stranded in a singular place. Not a sign could she see of the ocean, but the yawl had been driven inland on what had appeared to be a great lagoon. This water-way, the edges of which were bordered thickly with a dense, jungle-like growth, had become as calm as a mill-pond.

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While she still sat in the boat she had suddenly discovered a score of horrid black brutes descending upon the place. She had found the task of pushing off to be quite beyond her strength, in addition to which she had been so bewildered as not to know in the least where she had arrived. The creatures the Black Missing Links had appeared of threatening aspect, yet she had soon been made to realise that they were delighted to see her among them and that all regarded herself as a prize belonging to the tribe.

With her snake, of which they had immediately manifested a fear, she had followed where these monsters led, although unwillingly. They had given her food, but they had appeared to have no thought or consideration of her weakened condition, nor even of the fact that she was a woman and therefore not as strong as themselves. In consequence of this, she had been obliged to march through the jungle till nearly ready to drop from sheer weariness of body. Her clothing had been torn to tatters on the brush; her shoes had been all but ruined, and her flesh had been scratched and bruised.

That is all there is to tell,' she concluded. It has been a horrid, desperate existence ever since. The monsters have never been cruel, but I have been burned in the sun, and I have shivered in the rain and chill of night. I have been trembling at the thought of some terrible death, and then praying that I might really die and end all the wretched horror. I couldn't tell where I was, you say you don't even know yourself, and day and night I have been in a condition of dread bordering on insanity. It has all been so terribly hopeless so loathsome. Oh how I have suffered! And that horrible old woman has watched me like a hawk, and I couldn't have escaped if I had tried, and I didn't know where to get a boat, and I couldn't make anything not even clothes, and the horrid female creatures stole nearly all I had left, and I didn't even have a needle, or a piece of soap, or a toothbrush!

Perhaps I could make you a comb, I suggested, to drive away her dreadful thoughts, if possible, but she appeared not to hear.

Poor Papa, she resumed, I don't know what he ever thought, or where he is, or anything about anything.''

Oh well, said I, we'll soon be getting away from here now, and perhaps the trip will turn out pretty well after all. You'll probably be at home in a month, forgetting all about this expedition to the land of Missing Links.

She shook her head, the wild look in her eyes came back. That is too good a dream to come true, she said. It doesn't seem as if we can ever get away, but oh, Mr. Nevers I do hope you will never let them get me back, oh if only you will take me away if only you will! and again she broke down and sobbed, as if it had been a thousand times too much to bear.

I'll do it or bust! I assured her with much enthusiasm. I couldn't say more than that if I tried. We'll come out all right, don't you worry.

CHAPTER XXXVIII. A PROSPECT OF WEALTH

NONE OF my Links fell dead at the sight of the goddess and myself, when at last we were home, but that was merely because they were too uncivilised to have any nerves. The poor creatures contracted headache over the wonder of it all, however, for it utterly surpassed their powers of speculation.

I think they were much more frightened of the captive snake than they had been at my explosions. For this I blamed them not at all, having been rendered somewhat creepy by the beastly reptile myself. It was much too weird a pet. I was not so indelicate as to mention my feelings on the subject to the goddess, but I did hope the abominable thing would die, or get away.

Poor old Fatty was dizzy with concern. For two whole days he could not have told whether he was afoot or

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horseback. He was even suspicious of myself. All the child-like creatures seemed to regard me with added awe, as if it were hopeless to attempt to solve the problem of the magic by which I produced the snake-charming woman. They regarded the boat and the lake with more suspicion than before. A strangeness grew upon them; they stood away in groups, speaking a monosyllable now and again; they stirred uneasily about, whenever the girl appeared.

Yet remarkably soon the females of the tribe began to note, with curiosity, the costume worn by this stranger. Madame Albino assumed sundry airs with small delay. She also attempted to clothe her precious self with various skins; she eyed the interloper with comical disdain; she likewise looked at me with unmistakable reproach in those pink, nervous optics of hers, as if she meant to say that she might have forgiven me before, but after this never!

As for the girl herself, she was not exactly the same, when seen in the daylight. She still had glorious eyes and her soft chestnut hair would have been lovely, had it been combed or stabbed full of hardware to build it up in a psyche knot, but her nose was somewhat freckled, she was burned a lively red, as to face, neck, shoulders, arms and ankles, and her great anxiety had made her a trifle thin. Yet she was beautiful, I still maintain, for her features were fine, her poise splendid and her hands and feet exquisitely moulded. What was more, her countenance was lighted from within, by a charm as rare as it is divine; she was lovely in her nature; she was womanly and women, true women, are beautiful forever! I nodded mentally and determined to continue to call her the goddess.

It being essential that we take some needed rest, before embarking for worlds unknown, I made my shelter as comfortable as facilities would permit, and abdicated in favour of the snake and the girl. However, my subjects dug me a new palace in short order. This I occupied in my customary regal state. I was obliged to construct a wicker bungalow for his snakeship, for it seemed the goddess grew weary of holding the monster at times, and yet wished to restrain him from his natural desire to mingle with the creepers. Also I furnished the beast with gastronomic delicacies of the season. He had a preference for squirrels, not even the skins of which were left for me.

I made some quiet preparations for the reception of our friends the Blacks, should they come in search of their former captive, but these consisted only of restringing the bows and furbishing up the feathers on our arrows. I knew the fighting force of the feudal foe to be reduced and in no wise able to cope with ours, wherefore I deemed extraordinary measures unnecessary. As a matter of fact, no Blacks appeared, which led me to doubt if they even guessed that the goddess could be harboured in our village.

Having recovered all my energies shortly, I thought the girl would be ready and anxious to leave without further delay. In consequence I began to lay in a stock of sun-dried meat, weapons and other things needful for the cruise to the ocean. It soon became evident, however, that the poor young woman had suffered so severe a depression of vital forces, in the long-continued strain of worry and physical anguish, that immediate departure was quite out of the question.

We had long, hopeful talks together, while I manufactured small trifles for her greater comfort, or brought her foods to cook at a small stone-and-clay stove which I managed to construct; and she often related the history of her days of trouble. She had been too deeply alarmed all the time to give much attention to studying her captors; however, she thought from what I told her that they must have a similar language to that employed by the Reds, and many similar habits. Their attitude toward herself had led her to believe that they actually had a great reverence for human beings.

Of the man who had evidently once been among them she knew but little. She had seen the skeleton, but had only been able to make the merest guesses as to how it came to be in such a place and in such a remarkable condition. She had also seen a linen collar, preserved by having fallen into a chink which kept it protected from the

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elements, and this indicated, she thought, that the man had been a clergyman. That he had produced certain effects upon the creatures, the results of which would endure, she had no doubt. Though they had no other weapons than their clubs, they appeared to be more fearless than my fellows. Any fishing operations which they might once have conducted, guided by the man, were now discontinued, she was sure, for she had never seen a fish in the camp. The dug-outs were in ruins, as I had thought, though some of the creatures employed them still for sleeping purposes. She did not believe they utilised any caves. Without telling her of my own theories of the gold cauldron, I questioned her sufficiently to convince myself that she knew nothing of its existence in the place. About the fights and hunting expeditions of the tribe, she possessed only the most general information. She had not been able to ascertain what manner of enemies they encountered, but once had seen a wounded fellow striving to pull out of his leg a piece of wood which she now knew must have been an arrow. Also she had been aware that some tremendous calamity had befallen the fighters on their last crusade, for barely half the force had returned to camp, and of these many were shockingly wounded. Fully twenty, she said, had died and been buried since the day of the trouble. Beyond these few facts, the goddess told me very little which differed from the tale of the daily routine of my own loyal subjects.

In the boat, my bear-skin was concealed by a cover of leaves as before. I was thinking, one morning, of the various things I should take, when the moment for leaving should finally arrive, when the two great clubs mine by right of conquest thrust themselves upon my notice. The one which was made of the nugget appealed to my human spirit of acquisitiveness with great potency. Indeed the thing awakened a train of thought which bordered somewhat on the wild and not-too-wholesome. I found myself coveting my neighbour's cauldron of gold.

Heretofore I had given the geyser cavern, where the precious metal was being deposited, not the slightest consideration. I had known of only one way to approach the place, namely, by the long passage, the end of which I might not be able to find, and which at best could only lead me to a point high above the place of treasure. I knew, also, that snakes abided in the passage and that getting gold up to the point where Fatty and I had been that day and then out through the tortuous tunnel was simply impossible, as a task. Even the nugget on the club after the first inevitable thrill which I could not help feeling, to see it and know its worth, had been no more to me than any rock, for what could it purchase in such a land as this?

But now how things had altered! Not only did I feel the greatest confidence in my ability to pilot my boat away from that open prison, to a land where gold would be the open sesame to the whole world, but I knew of an opening or thought I did to the cave where the precious metal was lying ready to be had for the taking. It was a magic thought an intoxicating dream. The precious deposit belonged to no one, for who were the Missing Links? I should do no injury to anyone by taking all I needed. And why should I not have some remuneration for all this exile, labour and suffering?

Why, said I, and half seriously at that, a king simply has to be rich!

The task seemed easy, as I dreamed of proceeding to the spot, taking what I wanted and then escaping with it as I had with the goddess. The idea expanded rapidly; it began to make me feverish. As usual, when I gave myself over to anything new, I forgot everything else about me.

Even the goddess and her snake became of secondary importance; escape itself was indefinitely postponed. The premier question was, When shall I do it? I answered aloud:

Why to-day to-night! What's the use of waiting?"

Then it became imperative that I should formulate a plan. The bear-skin was the fundamental basis which gave me the courage to think of attempting the task. I knew how to manage in regard to that, as well as I knew how nicely it would work, if only the light were not too searching. What more might the work require? Obviously I

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should need a sack, in which to carry off the plunder; and I ought to have a pick or a sledgehammer, or something in the way of a tool with which to detach the solid chunks of metal. For the sack, I decided to sew together some of the skins which were lying on the floor of my shelter. For tools I would carry a couple of the stoutest clubs to be had in the camp. In addition to these requisites, I could think of nothing I should need, except my weapons.

I lost no time in setting about the preparations for this financial venture. It seemed a pity to rob the goddess and her snake of the rugs on which they reclined at various times, in my dug-out, but there was nothing else to do. All the tribe-fellows' clubs having proved themselves to be serviceable, I had no difficulty in selecting two which I deemed worthy of the great occasion.

Old Fatty had resumed his faithful attendance on my every movement and therefore he followed me down to the boat, carrying both of the clubs and the skins. He stood on the bank and watched me embark, more crazy than ever to go along, but still too frightened to trust himself afloat on the lake. I had no wish to have company. Bidding him be good, I pushed away and started on the expedition.

By the time I had finished the work of fastening the skins together, the afternoon was half gone. There was nothing to do, in the way of work which would occupy my time, and I felt no desire to get into the bear-skin prematurely, as I had done before, so that I was finally obliged to pull in my oars and drift idly on the water. This was a sleepy occupation. I nodded drowsily for half an hour, at the end of which time I fell fast asleep.

The sun was just disappearing when at last I awoke. Disgusted with myself, for having thus overdone the time-wasting business, I rowed rapidly for Outlet river, to which I came duly. Standing up in the boat I arrayed myself in my costume; then I worked slowly down the river, as before, and beached the boat in the spot where I had landed on the last successful venture.

Already the dusk made the forest gloomy, but as this was precisely what I wanted, I struck off without delay, picking a path cautiously through the growth. The neighbourhood seemed remarkably still, but finally the rumble from the cauldron disturbed the quiet and gave me a guide by which I corrected my course.

Laden as I was, with the necessary things for the labour, I should have presented a most *amazing* aspect, had any of the Blacks discovered my presence. I thought of that, and knew that even if I got down in the normal position of a bear, the juxtaposition of my bag and the clubs might easily arouse the most dangerous suspicions in the brain of any Link beholding them and me. However, nothing happened.

Why this is going to be a picnic, I muttered. I couldn't ask for anything nicer.

Indeed fortune seemed to be smiling upon me, for I came immediately upon a continuation of the cliff of rock, which backed the camp of the Blacks, and was soon confronted by a jagged heap of stone and quartz, at the top of which appeared a dark, irregular cave. Before I could clamber up the pile to this opening, the mighty roar came belching forth. I knew I stood on the threshold of the cavern of wealth and wonder.

CHAPTER XXXIX. STEALING THE ENEMY'S FIRE

NO SOONER had the demonstration ceased than I hastened up the rock-heap to the cave. I found the mouth of the place somewhat choked and hard to enter, but I forced my way over massed-in boulders to a vestibule of the great treasure-house itself. Then suddenly my hopes were blighted and failure loomed before me. It was as dark as tar and I had clean forgotten to fetch a torch!

But how could I have fetched a torch? my brain demanded. I had no civilised matches; I could not have carried a brand all day, for the sake of having it now, and if I had, the smoke might have attracted the attention of the

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Blacks. Had they caught a bear with a torch in his hand they would unquestionably have desired an explanation. I thought of my knife, which was steel, and the flints on my arrows. Could I not produce a spark, ignite some tinder and then make some faggots take fire? Yes, I could, but the arrows were all in the boat and I had about as much tinder handy as a fellow could carry in his eye.

In desperation I groped ahead for a rod and nearly broke my neck, by jolting down an unseen step in the floor. It was useless to tackle the cavern in this inky blackness; I might easily get boiled to death by the fountain of scalding water. In bitter regret, I reproached myself for having come away from camp without consulting the goddess and without maturing my plans. But any ass should have known the place would be dark! I acknowledged that I was a fool, and that after all this bother I should have to give it up. Even if I did come again next day, it would be no easy matter to fetch a torch, and I might try a hundred times and not have the luck I had this evening in avoiding those villains, the Blacks.

More than ready to swear at my folly, mad as a hornet to think of abandoning all the gold, which was right there, almost within reach of my hands, I pinched myself viciously and groped my way out to the heap of rocks at the entrance.

Already a star was shining in the heavens. What good were stars, I would have liked to know. It was fire I wanted fire at the end of a stick. A crazy idea of hunting for something highly inflammable, on which to try my flint and steel, tried to get started in my brain. I rejected the notion with scorn. I might as well begin a search for glow-worms or incandescent electric globes.

Those fools of Links have got plenty of fire, I grumbled, spitefully. For about two cents I'd kick them all out of their camp and take all the torches I could carry.

This bit of pleasantry somewhat restored my humour. I started up from where I was sitting on the rocks, abruptly, possessed of a great idea. Why not make the trick worth the winning; why not steal their fire to light myself in robbing their cave?

In my haste to clamber down from the pile, I fell forward and struck my hand smartly on something which felt like a collected lot of wood. I was ready to kick this thing, for bruising my fingers, when I comprehended that wood was exactly what I required. Grasping one of the branches I lifted a whole bundle of sticks, all dry, cut neatly of an equal length, and tied about with some sort of cord. Instantly I thought of the gilded skeleton the man who had lived in this place. I believed he had come to the cavern often, and that doubtless these faggots had been gathered by himself for torches.

This discovery gave me new enthusiasm. I was calmer, also, and I therefore resolved to proceed carefully, do nothing rash, and to wait until the time was propitious before attempting to steal my fire. Nevertheless I was determined not to give up the game until flatly beaten. Much luck in the past had made me bolder than I was when I arrived in the country.

During the half hour following, I crept through the woods, toward the spot where I had waited for the goddess. I thought it would bring me bad luck to try any other location. My clubs and the sack, I had left at the cauldron, along with my bundle of wood. Thus I had nothing to impede my progress; but the skin in which I was clothed hampered every motion.

Throughout the jungle, various sounds had commenced, for the darkness was rapidly becoming that of full-fledged night. Through the trees, when I approached their clearing, I caught the gleam of the fires about which the Links were cooking their dinner.

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Knife in hand, I edged and pushed through the creepers and vines until I dared go no further. From where I was, I could see very much the same sort of groups about the fires which had made the picture weird on the former occasion. But I was actually more excited and eager over the present enterprise than I had been before, when a fellow-being was in the game. Doubtless this arose from the greater risk I expected to take.

Impatient as I was, the Links seemed to require an interminable time to get ready for bed. I selected one and then another of the fires as the one from which I would filch a brand, but was finally obliged to wait and see which would be the most favourable to my task. I desired to select the one furthest from the sleeping places, and yet not too far from my cover. The one first abandoned by the Links would have answered well. I watched it narrowly and kept an eye on the Blacks, who were still lingering about. Long before the fellows had all retired, the fire became hopeless, so few were the embers left aglow. I was obliged to fix upon another.

I waited all of two hours, by the end of which time the Links were all safely asleep, save that watchful old fiend whose acquaintance I had made on my former visit. When at length he laid himself down for the night, his position was such that my intended deed had been rendered far more difficult than I had expected. It became necessary for me to make a long detour, for I deemed it wise that I should be able to make a bee-line for cover the second I procured my bit of fire.

In crawling and walking carefully about the tangle, I consumed a lot of time. My position then was such that by creeping bear-like from the vines and going straight for my original hiding place, I would pass the remains of a fire, in which only one or two blazing pieces of wood remained. Again I drew my knife. With a thumping heart, high up in my neck, I began this desperate experiment.

A night-bird hooted before I had gone three paces. That alert old wretch, the sentinel Black, stirred about and turned sleepily over. For several minutes I remained motionless; then again I moved cautiously forward. Although I expected the worst possible calamities to happen every moment, and thought my own breathing would betray my presence, I neared the fire without arousing the lightest sleeper. Approaching the burned-out heap, I selected the brand I would take, before I was there. In consequence of this, I lost no time, but passed silently on, when I had the precious ember in my possession. Transferring it quickly to my left hand, in order to conceal its glowing end from any eyes which might by chance be open, I dragged it on the ground beside me, and headed for the shelter, which to reach would mean success.

A half chuckle escaped me, at the thought of the Links' stupidity and my own adroitness, for the vines were now but a dozen feet away. Yet I was horribly nervous, not daring to look behind me and fearing that anything might be happening, now that my back was turned upon the sleeping foe. I reached the cover in triumph, however, and even crawled to a small open spot, when suddenly something gave me a vigorous push with its foot.

Instantly then that monstrous old watch Link, recognised me, raised his club and poised to fetch it down with a blow that should scatter my brains. I saw him, knew he had caught me, realised that more silently than I he had followed the singular bear that would steal a brand of fire, and quick as a gun-spring I shot up against him, butted him hard in the ribs and we closed, in a duel to the death.

My only thought was Choke him off! I knew that a single yell would bring an army of foes upon me; I knew he had made no sound before because of his commendable desire to determine my nature while I was still unaware of his presence. Now I swiftly determined that not a sound should he make, unless he did it over my dead body. I was thrice as vicious as he, I verily believe, as I threw myself in against his body and fastened my clutch on his throat. I was fierce as only a frightened and desperate man can be; I was strong as three of my kind, in that moment of terrible need.

His arms had been raised with the club; the weapon had even been descending as I thumped him violently backward. Down came the great rock, but the force of the blow was gone, and the aim was so ruined that he

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struck us both on the leg. He dropped the thing as useless, for he could not have raised it again had he tried. But with his long, iron-like arms he fought like a fiend, to shove me off, to gouge out my ribs and to grip my throat as I was gripping his, with all but two of my fingers. The two fingers gripped the handle of my knife.

The length of his arms was for once against him. I was as close up as flesh can freeze to flesh. His head was thrust far back; already his breathing muscles were swelling and labouring beneath my thumbs. We struggled about in the darkness hither and thither, wrestling, flinging, treading on roots and branches and exerting the utmost of our strength to win the battle.

The monster's muscles were something prodigious; his activity was simply incredible. I have choked a man to submission in thirty seconds, but it seemed as if I could never weaken this brute nor reduce him to a state wherein I could use my knife. He fought me with his feet, scratched me and kicked my shins. He got his bone-and-wire arms against my stomach at last and clutched me and pushed me till I thought I should shriek with pain. Had I not been protected by the bear-skin, I think he would have killed me, in spite of the tremendous advantage I had gained at the outset. All this time the only sound was what I made in breathing and what we made with our scuffling about. It was an ominously silent duel.

Over we toppled, tripped by a creeper, and rolled on the ground among the vines. He had me under, like a cat with a squirrel, but I felt him beginning to quiver all over. My grip had not been broken for a moment, but now it nearly gave way; a weakness was stealing over me, for he was crushing my ribs where I had received the blow with the nugget club. This was the particular time when the bear-skin helped me out.

Something smarted my leg then the brand of fire. I had struck against it. This made me furious. A gush of hot, new strength welled up in my veins and along all my sinews. My finger-ends dug in about his wind-pipe deeper and deeper. I heaved him over; his arms were becoming like lead; his motions were powerless; all the force seemed slipping from his body. Knowing my time had come, I gave the knife in my hand a sudden turn and push against the jugular vein, swelling beneath my pressure, and felt him shudder in death in a moment.

Until I was sure he would move no more, nor raise a sound, I remained astride his chest. The stillness then was awful. Not a sound could I hear but that of my own laboured breathing and the trickle and drip of this creature's blood. I admit the dread of it all made me tremble. It seemed such a ghastly end to my innocent escapade.

But having plunged so deeply into the business, for the sake of a bit of fire, I did not intend to leave the work unfinished because of this unavoidable incident. Therefore I caught up the glowing branch, which had nearly been smothered out as we rolled it in the grass, and blowing upon it to liven it up, I stole away from that gory arena.

CHAPTER XL. COVETED GOLD

STILL BREATHING hard, from the effects of the duel, I reached the heap of stone, outside the cavern and hunted up my bundle of wood. I sat down on a rock to get my torches lighted. This was not an easy matter, for although my brand was a species of wood which retained fire remarkably long, I was obliged to gather many small dry twigs and bits of dead creeper, to which I added hair from the skins, before I could make a blaze. Once having accomplished this feat, however, I found that the torch-faggots burned with all the fierceness of pitch.

Acknowledging that the skeleton-man had succeeded in finding a wood which surpassed for torches anything that I had yet discovered, I threw my bag and clubs inside the cave and climbed in after, with all the light I needed.

So far, the getting of treasure had not proved to be the picnic I had previously been led to suppose was about to be enjoyed. Holding my torch above my head and carrying both the clubs beneath my other arm, I now went along in this wonder-house, waxing momentarily more and more excited by the prospect of seeing what was

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there.

The passage was narrow and low, it was likewise crooked, and the floor was rough and uneven. On the walls there was not the slightest indication of anything precious. I have never seen stone more dull. This made me doubt if I had come to the cauldron of gold, after all. The trend of the tunnel was downward. Presently I came to a jump off four feet high. The bottom of this secondary gallery sloped rapidly downward. Then I emerged from the tunnel-like hall, into a larger chamber. The first thing I saw was water, in a crevice. I jumped then like a scared cat, for a drop of the liquid fell plump on my nose from the ceiling, where steam had condensed.

A second after this I got a brilliant gleam of reflected light, from an object on the floor, a rod away. It was gold. To right and left flashed similar reflections. I hastened onward, and then halted, dizzy with amazement, for below me, in a great basin was ebon water that moved, and about it were nodules and drippings of gold, and stuffed into crevices was gold on gold. I leaped a ditch, above which the mist was rising, hot and damp. Beyond this, down in the very cauldron itself, which was inaccessible and awe-inspiring, I beheld those stalagmites of solid metal, those building nuggets and the seething abyss of water and natural acid which before I had seen from above.

The ascending steam curtained off the mouth of the cave above which I knew to be over this eerie place, but I was far too eager for what was about me, to spend my time in looking upward. It was not a place of dazzling beauty; on the contrary it was dull, dripping and misty, but here, there, in unexpected places I caught that inimitable glitter. Having seen one piece of the forming gold-hunks, it seemed as if I were qualified to see a score. The heat of the place was tremendous, the air humid and hard to breathe.

So deep was the boiling water that I could see nothing of what was below, yet I knew from seeing the shallows, golden on the bottom, that the basin was doubtless plated throughout with the beautiful metal. I was wild with enthusiasm; I wanted to knock off tons of nuggets; I began to wonder if I could take it all. Quickly clambering over jagged piles, I stepped on a boulder that stood above an apron of rock all seamed with cracks in which the gold had been stuffed till the places were full.

While I was standing there, the rumble of the mighty giant commenced to resound in the cavern. Alarmed at the thought that the water might surge up and engulf me where I stood, I started to flee to a safer retreat. My heel got caught in a crevice. The harder I tugged, the tighter it became wedged. Stooping I got my fingers in behind it and slid it forward and out. The second it cleared, my thumb struck an object full of something that felt like nails. Glancing once at the place, I was astonished to see the heel of a boot, not unlike my own.

I leaped away to safety and the marvellous geyser burst upward. The roaring noises thundered upon the air of the place with deafening reverberations; the steam rolled away in tremendous volumes. Spray and drops of the boiling liquid that splashed, fell all about, some on my hand, burning me badly. The basin was all a-surge with its seething brew; the waters gushed hungrily up, swirling about, filling the cracks and tossing in extreme agitation.

Down came the massive column of the fountain, as if the source had been cut off in an instant. A tidal wave of the boiling stuff swelled up to the brink of the cauldron, inundating the golden nodules, stalagmites and the radiating fissures.

I knew, then, as much as a man could ever know, who had not been present, how that other man had lost his life, and how it came that his skeleton was gilded. That heel told the story. He had probably caught his foot just as I had done, but he had not been able to get away. He had doubtless fallen headlong into the basin of boiling liquid, where his life must have been forfeited instantly. Then time after time the water had risen about him, until all the flesh had been boiled away from the bones, and then the process of plating with gold had commenced on the skeleton. Poor wretch. It had then been left, I thought, for one of the braver spirits among the Links to rescue all that remained and carry it forth from the dread cavern. I felt somewhat chilly to think how near I had been to the same dreadful fate.

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The demonstration having ceased, the water subsided, the rocks and nuggets dripped, and the steam arose, hotter than before. My zeal for exploring the place had oozed away. It seemed to me that discretion counselled me to complete my work and depart.

I'll only stop for a few hundred pounds, I told myself with a feeling of virtuous moderation. A man should never be a pig.

The first thing to do was to strip off my bearskin, in which I was now perspiring like a porpoise. Then I selected a fine, large nodule of gold, from the vicinity of which I could easily escape when the geyser began to spout, and this I began, to, batter with one of the clubs. I had conceived an idea that I would bend these formations over and break them off with comparative ease. I was in for a large disappointment.

Not only were the gold masses bended over at the expense of great energy and perseverance, but they refused to break after quite a number of such bendings. That first one having been once so bent, refused to be knocked back in the opposite direction. Also the geyser took its turn very soon and in the end I humbly abandoned nodule number one and tackled one which was smaller.

It was at least an hour before my labours were awarded with any real success whatsoever. But at last I had a chunk of metal of something like five pounds weight. Mopping my head, puffing and losing my temper, I picked on the smaller pieces now with great sagacity. I pounded and pried, grunted and wrenched, waited for the geyser to have its say and then went at it again, till I lost all reckoning of time. After several failures, however, I got the knack of this mining business better, and what with smashing rocks away to facilitate the work and contenting myself with modest chunks, I got loose and heaped up something over a hundred weight of treasure, according to my estimate by guessing.

That's enough for any man of sense, I finally assured myself. I'd be ashamed to take any more.

Lighting a new torch, from the one I had planted in a chink, I went out toward the entrance and secured my bag. To my amazement I discovered that the day had broken. I had worked for hours that sped like minutes. Somewhat concerned about any Links, who might be stirring, I hastened back, threw my hoard into the skin pouch and staggered with it to the jump-off, where I boosted it up hurriedly. On emerging from the mouth of the cave, I was obliged to rest, so weary had I become from my long-sustained labours. However, I dared not pause, at so late an hour, and therefore I shouldered my load again and started away, leaving bear-skin, torches and clubs behind. My only idea now was to reach the boat in haste.

In spite of my stubbornness, I could walk not more than fifty yards at a time with my burden, before putting it down to give myself a blow. It was such a dead weight, and I had used up my whole reserve of force. Breathing my great relief, to find myself out at last, within one more carry of the boat, I set the sack down in a thicket and leaned against a tree to rest my muscles. As I turned about to resume the load, a startling yell suddenly penetrated the forest.

Jump about as quickly as I could, I was not in time to avoid a furious onslaught. A hideous female Link, as black as rubber and apparently as old as the jungle, launched herself upon me and bit me on the shoulder so severely that I cried out in pain and struck her with my knife before I could stop to remember that a male should spare a female creature. The steel went deep in her side. She wrenched with her jaws where she was biting as she fell away, and injured a cord in my neck, which made me all but collapse with sudden nausea and weakness.

Before I could shake her off, after pulling out the knife, the forest echoed with the yells of countless demons rushing toward me from the direction of the cave. Undone, incapable of showing fight with my dagger, against so large and fierce a mob, I tore myself free from the clutch of the female and ran as hard as possible toward the river.

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That terrible female, stabbed only through the fleshy muscles under her arm, made a dive for my feet and hauled me down. I slashed off two of her fingers with a vicious lunge, and darted away again at the top of my speed.

By this time many of the demons were hot on my trail, crying out in fearful monosyllables, tearing through the brush, and attempting to head me off. The foremost fellow threw his club and the handle of it struck me on the leg. I snatched it up, well knowing the creature would catch me before I could go another twenty strides, and leaping behind a tree I waited half a moment. He rushed to the spot, headlong and reckless. Down came his own weapon, and he fell like a dead bull. But the motion of striking nearly killed me, so fearful was the wrench where the female had bitten the sinew.

Once more I ran dizzily away, at the head of that screaming horde of Links. Club after club was hurled to fetch me down, but all went wide. I was beating them all I knew it I should reach the boat, for none were aware of its presence. It was hardly more than a rod away.

Stumbling and pitching, ready to fall down in my agony, I dived through a hedge of vines and was thrown headlong within reach of the prow I knew so well. Up and shoving at the boat in a twinkling, I heard the vines being ripped apart behind me. Having held on to the club till I fell here, I turned and pounced upon it and swung it back in time to crash it fairly in the pit of the black devil's stomach, as he hurtled upon me.

Dropping it instantly, I shoved off the boat with all the strength I had, and leaped in, as three or four more of the fiends came dashing madly down to the river's edge. This time when they threw their clubs I was struck fairly on the fleshy portion of the back and knocked on my face across the seat. Hurt by the blow, but strong in my instinct for self-preservation, I got out the oars in jig-time and drove the good old craft up the stream and away from the murderous brutes on the bank, like a madman. Rowing almost straight for the further side, I distanced all the clubs speedily. When they realised the utter futility of pursuit, the enraged creatures merely yelled their maledictions as I went.

CHAPTER XLI. FAREWELL TO THE CAMP

THE STRENGTH which had risen in my desperation, even against the shock to my system which had been given by the bite of the female monster, departed before I was out of the river. I trembled from head to foot; I was ill all over and nearly as limp as a string.

How serious the bite might be I had no means of ascertaining. To my hand, when I felt of the place, there seemed to be only a raw, smarting wound, on the top of a great hot swelling. I felt sure that no thews had been actually severed by the terrible teeth, for had any been, I should not have been able to row the boat nor to use my arm in any manner whatsoever. Nevertheless I knew I was wounded badly, and I all but cried with the pain it cost me to move the craft.

Until I had reached the lake, the fear of the Blacks made me work, despite my physical anguish. When I knew I was comparatively safe, I sank forward and, I confess, fainted like a girl.

It was probably as much as an hour before I recovered my senses fully. For the last fifteen minutes or so of this time I was semi-conscious, but incapable of motion, while my brain merely whirled in a vortex with that female Link, the boat and the nuggets of gold. When at last I again acquired the power of moving, I filled my hand with water from the lake repeatedly and dashed it on my face and on my bitten shoulder. But I could not row; I needed further rest.

My head was beginning to ache. My brain insisted on revolving the story of my greed for gold. Again I fought the battle of silence with the watch-dog of the tribe; again I worked like a gnome in that steaming, hot cauldron;

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again I staggered away with my plunder. Then I saw that female Link, who, searching in the thicket, must have found the body of the watch-dog, lying in his gore. He might have been her mate. Crazed, she followed on the trail that led from the spot, with the tribe at her heels. She reached the cauldron and then got again on the tracks I was making to the river. At that I screamed and thought I was crazy myself.

Aroused by this repeated nightmare, I struggled with the oars again. It seemed as if I could not budge the boat; this made me work like a fury. The heat of the sun grew intolerable; I could feel it baking the blood in my head; it was all on the side of the Blacks. The lake was a sheen of blinding light and heat; it mocked me and held me back. Again and again came the lurid panorama of events. I could see through everything, jungle, thicket and bag made of skin see those pieces of gold mine! mine! shining like the blazing sun, hot and baking. All that gold on the ground was mine, but it mocked me and cooked my brain with its heat and steam.

I lost all reckoning; I rowed to escape the nightmare and the lake that held me back. The sun got up in mid-heaven, and still I was on that shimmering water. I knew nothing, absolutely, of what I did, except that I rowed to get away from that female Link, who seemed to bite me times without number, and always in that same burning spot. I must have fainted half a dozen times; I rowed toward home between these spells by instinct only. The distance which I could ordinarily compass in a little more than an hour, required no less than seven hours, this fateful day. When I think of the heat, the weight of the boat and my physical condition, I wonder I did not die, and drift to the shore.

As it was, I have not the slightest recollection of having reached the bank. I thought that for years and years I strove to get away from that last terrible encounter. When at length my brain was clear and I opened my eyes, in the slow, weak manner of one who has all but passed to the further side of the dark river, I saw a beautiful, worried face above my own the face of the goddess.

Thank God! she whispered fervently, when she saw that I was mad no longer, and the poor girl cried as she bathed my head and bade me go to sleep.

I had nearly pegged out, and that is the truth. When I was strong enough to hear my own story, I learned of things which will never cease to fill me with wonder, and with many emotions too soft to parade. It was good old Fatty who had seen me coming; and he it was that finally carried me bodily up the hill. Then for a nurse I had never lacked for a moment. The goddess and Fatty, he her slave, she my guardian angel, had done the all that could be done, with the poor facilities at hand, for a man in such desperate straits that he raves night and day for a week. But the goddess really saved me, when all is said, for she knew the properties of certain tropical plants and with the crushed leaves of one she drew the poison from the bite, reduced the swelling and made it possible for proper healing to commence. I had done the worst possible thing, in rowing home through the heat and with such a wound, but if I had not done exactly what I did, and when I did, my doctor and nurse would never have had the opportunity of proving their skill.

They were strange days that followed strange for me, who had never been down on my back with illness before since childhood, for the fever left me thin, weak, and feeling so helpless that I had no desire to move as much as one of my feet. My first poignant thought was about the Blacks, and the danger of their swooping down upon us again. When I knew that for a week there had been no sign of any foe, I thought they had probably undergone too great a fright on the last occasion to require any more for some considerable time.

For another week I lay like a baby, in the shelter, eating fruits and bits of meat which the goddess prepared as best she could. How I yearned to see her face, whenever she left me for a moment! Then came the time when I began to mend, and desired to have back my strength and my title of king.

When I stood up and wobbled about on my pins one day, I made a discovery which did much to hasten a return to my old condition. The crystal club, presented to me by the ex-chief, in token of my exalted station and regal

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attainments, had been stolen. I learned that the ex-chief had dared to carry this sceptre of power into the jungle; I learned from Fatty that the jealous Madame Albino had been the one to rob me of my trophy. She feared the goddess who in truth was more of a queen of the tribe than I had even been a king, but the creature had not feared a man who was crazy and likely to die.

So wroth did I wax over this outrage to my dignity that I became unmanageable at once. Thin as a rail, but able to stagger about, next day, I dug up one of my lesser bombs from the magazine, and waving it wildly above my head, marched up to the guilty ex-chief, while he had the club underneath him, as he sat on the ground, and scared him half to death. He knew the bomb, no trouble about that. I therefore took the crystal club away from him, rudely, and slapped his face. He fell down instantly and began to adore my tracks in the proper spirit of humiliation, followed without delay by all the tribe. Madame Albino fled to the woods, though what manner of personal violence the lady expected I have never been able to guess. This fine, large bluff, of a man as white as paper and thin as a hair-pin, had a most salutary effect. It made all the fellows love me more than before, even the chief, for all were much like dogs in disposition, and a dog is the better for it when he learns that man is the master. I was more of a monarch every day.

Yet I was slow in regaining my old weight, for the heat was increasing steadily, and my system had been much depressed by the fever. In consequence of this, I did more at playing than at work. With my fellows I practiced archery in the cooler parts of the days, coaxing back the strength to my arms, body and legs, but I made my excursions to the jungle brief.

During this period of convalescence, the goddess reassumed the company of her snake. But the dear girl followed me about with her gaze, which I frequently felt drawing my own. When I would glance toward her, I always saw her glorious eyes filled with longing and sympathy and a tenderness which went straight to my heart. But she would blush and look away, nearly always at the hideous snake.

With my returning strength came the recurrent desire to depart from the place forever. Also, in spite of all I could do, the thought of my gold lying in the thicket, the treasure for which I had laboured so hard would persist in returning. I tried to banish the dream of avarice, but it is a fearsome clutch which riches maintain on the imagination of poor, weak man. I felt quite convinced that great as my longing was for the world outside, that of the goddess was ten-fold greater. Of this I spoke, one day, when my restored condition gave promise that I should not fail for lack of strength in what I might undertake. Into the eyes of that faithful girl came a burning light, which would have made the heart of any man bound with feeling. She spoke, however, with her usual control.

I should like to leave this place, she said, but I prefer to wait until you are strong and masterful, as you were when I saw you first.

At this it was on my tongue to speak of the future, and of certain hopes which had grown in my thoughts, of a home to be and of happiness, but I curbed this desire as being untimely while she depended so entirely upon myself for deliverance.

Having dwelt no little on the prospect of the future in this camp, in which unless we escaped I could see my own skeleton hung up on a stump, and with no fine plating of gold upon it, either, I had small desire to remain in the land another day. Strangely enough, however, I had no sooner begun to make our preparations for leaving, than memory dragged in every happy day I had spent with my Links, every thrill of triumph in my puny successes, every faithful or affectionate deed which these simple, half-animal creatures had ever performed toward myself. I own I was foolishly attached to a number of the poor forest-children, who watched me always with such a dumb look of regard, and wonder as to what I was.

It is not a boast to say that I had wrought an inerradicable effect upon these less than merely primitive people. In turn they had been my willing slaves, my companions my everything of life. I thought of Little Tike, and blessed

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his memory for the days of real enjoyment he had given me when I was mending from a serious injury once before. But after all there was that gilded skeleton to think about and to dread. What profit was it to a skeleton that sundry Missing Links still adored the ground before it? I preferred to be a man of meat, unadored for the rest of my life, rather than to be a gold-plated pile of bones, worshipped madly throughout the centuries to come.

Thus, taking matters quietly, I made myself and the boat ready for the long, uncertain cruise. I was quite aware that we might be leaving a place of comparative safety, for waters and lands of which the dangers might be innumerable and the chances for escape absolutely nill; I agreed, mentally, that we might be making a terrible mistake which we would recognise when too late for any retreat, but these were the risks we were obliged to assume. I believed I could win, in this game with fates unknown, and virtually I wagered both our lives on the outcome of the play.

One of my chief concerns, in stocking the boat, was that of providing water. As long as we floated on the river we should have this in plenty, but if we did reach the sea, matters might be altered. The best I could do was to take my tortoise shell, to hold a fair supply. It was an easy matter to provision ourselves with meat, for strips which I cut from various kinds of game, dried in the sun in a manner most satisfactory, furnishing a palatable supply, which, with salt, was not at all bad to chew upon by the hour.

For weapons I depended on the bow and arrows, a club and a number of good flint hatchets, in addition to four small bombs, with complement of fuse. In order to provide an ever-ready brand of fire for these, should occasion to use them arise, I selected a goodly quantity of the wood which retained the glow so long, after which I lined all the bow-end of the boat with clay, so that I could build my blaze on the bottom and yet do no harm to the hull by burning. I meant to carry my fire along, for I had experienced all the picnics I wanted for the lack of this useful thing. Among sundry other materials, I provided myself with several coils of good, stout line, made by braiding together the small, pliable creepers. At this work the goddess assisted splendidly.

All the skins which had formed my gold bag, had been left behind, in my flight from the Blacks, of course, but my Links having learned the process of curing pelts in the brine, had worked up some very good pieces. On these I levied a tax the only one I imposed during my reign thereby fitting the craft out in some degree of comfort, for the goddess had dressed herself in all the hides I had left in my shelter. This seemed to be the concluding ceremony, except that I made sure my oars and pole-pins were staunch, and I cut a long slender pole, to be used for any purpose which might develop later on.

My decision was made to leave in the late afternoon, in order to pass the camp of the Blacks after night had rendered them cowards. At the very thought of their village, that bag of gold clamoured for another fling at fortune. I was a poor man, in my own country, howsoever wealthy I might consider myself in Linkland; the temptation was great. But I shook my head decisively. I had an undoubted right to risk my own neck, but I had not the slightest right to risk the personal safety of a helpless woman. No, I must shut my eyes to the glitter, and pass the treasure by like a man!

Although I had made frequent excursions in my boat, many of which had required preparation, the Links seemed to comprehend that on this occasion the matter was one of much more importance, and gravity for all concerned. When all was ready and the hour drawing near, I attempted to convey to the assembled tribe my intention of going, with the goddess, so far that I should never return. That they understood, I am positive; the poor fellows were greatly affected. They regretted the arrival of that day as plainly as if they had said so in a most solemn chorus. Even the albino female, weak, inconsequent creature that she was, and like a woman, would have forgiven everything and promised to be good all the rest of her days, to have changed my decision. She wept on the ground, sincerely. I felt saddened myself; I admit it freely. These rude creatures had all seemed like my very own; they were more than faithful animals, and yet they commanded a strange sympathy, being less than men.

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When ready to go, I carried the great rock-crystal club to the ex-chief and placed it again in his hand, as he stood there and wondered.

Take it back, I said, as if he could understand every word, you are man enough to wield it well. Boys, I added to the others, don't go backward again; stick to the bows, and make new ones for yourselves, to shoot the pigs. Try to be good, manly fellows. And I hope you won't entirely forget me, when I'm gone.

Turning quickly away, I shouldered the gold-nugget club and started for the boat, to which the goddess also repaired. Old Fatty was whining, as he followed at my heels, and after him trooped every creature in the tribe, till all stood together on the shore.

In the boat was everything we needed, so far as I could plan and provide, including a lot of the freshest fruit to be obtained. The goddess took her seat in the stern. Seized with an impulse, I turned to my loyal fellows and held out my hand to the chief. He was wholly at a loss to know what I meant, yet so natural is the gesture that he placed his hand in mine without even knowing that this shake was the symbol of friendship, greeting and farewell. The others followed his example, in wonder, and with awkward motions, so that I bade good-bye to all the men.

Fatty, who was eyeing the boat and whining and giving little jumps of indecision, knew not what to do. I stepped in the craft and pushed her gently off.

Come on then, Fatty, I said to my good, old fellow, and bounding through the tepid water, he did actually leap into the boat and sit there, shivering with awe and delight.

Good-bye, old camp; good-bye, my friends, I said, as we drifted slowly away. God keep you, poor children of the jungle.

The chief and all the others got down on the ground, along the bank, and paid me such a tribute of genuine esteem as I shall never know again. This was their long farewell; this was their voluntary expression of love and regret. At that moment, more than any other in my life, I was a king.

CHAPTER XLII. GOLDEN GLEAMS

AS LONG as we could see them, the Links continued to watch the boat departing. Even the goddess, who had conceived such a hatred and fear of the Blacks, felt that these simpler fellows were not wholly savage and bad; she even waved them good-bye till we passed around the point, after which we were quiet for several minutes.

Old Fatty was thoroughly frightened. He crouched down and trembled, raising his head timidly from time to time to look about, but always ducked it back under his arm as if he thought that to shut out the sight was to eliminate the imaginary danger. I pitied him, but felt a greater affection for the old fellow than ever before, to think he preferred to undergo this torture, rather than to remain behind when I had gone. It was a wonderful compliment, and so I shall always think. But I hoped his fears would soon depart, for I was sorry to see him distressed.

When I turned from the last view of our friends, to smile at the goddess, I noticed for the first time that she was minus the anaconda.

Why we've forgotten your darling, beastly old snake, said I. If it makes a lot of difference, why of course

I left it purposely, she interrupted, rosy red.

The deuce! I exclaimed. I thought the critter was your pet the one thing on earth

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My pet! Oh, the horrible, crawling thing! She shuddered at the memory, to my great, but secret delight. I hated the nasty thing I loathed it! she expostulated fervently. I hope I'll never see another snake again!

This was a huge surprise. Gee whizz! said I.

Gee wizz! echoed Fatty, and he ducked his head back with a snap.

But er why, then, I resumed, why did you lug it around?"

I took it as my only protection, she replied with dignity. I had to be protected from the outrageous brutes!

"That's so, I admitted, abashed. I might have thought of that. Of course just as plain as day . . . You're right I'm a donkey . . . Yes . . . But but why have you thrown him away, now?"

Because, she murmured, looking at me timidly, while she blushed again, because I don't need him any more.

Well bless my soul! said I, and that was all.

Sending the boat along steadily, for the sun had set and darkness would soon be coming, I thought of many things. My gaze rested on Fatty, who was now beginning to look about him a trifle more boldly. What should I do with the old fellow, provided we all got safely out of the country and once more mingled with men? How astonished he would be at the sights of steamers, railroad trains, cities, and the hurrying crowds of people! I could fancy his comical face, as he looked in my eyes, like a bewildered dog. Would it ever be possible to put him in clothes and have him about me? I knew he could learn many useful things, and even much of my speech, but whether a Missing Link could really be kept, as a servant, or friend, was a question requiring no little amount of thought. Of one thing I was certain, I would never under any circumstances permit him to become a freak, nor even an object of people's idle curiosity. Poor old, faithful Fatty.

By the time we arrived at Outlet river I felt that the darkness was sufficient to make it possible and safe for me to run the gauntlet past the camp of the Blacks. Cautiously I rowed the boat, bidding the goddess say nothing till we should be past the clearing.

I could see that she had become pale and frightened, as we neared the place in which for long she had been a prisoner, but also there was ample evidence of her courage. Without a sound, we glided by the bank where twice I had beached the boat, and my heart beat with excitement as I thought of the gold, lying so short a carry away.

Get it take it! prompted a thought in my brain, it will only take a moment and then you will be rich! But I conquered; I crushed out the tempting voice and rowed slowly on.

Proceeding across the river, to the side opposite the clearing of our foe, I watched for the camp, eagerly. We came sooner than I had expected to a point from which we could see the place. I looked, but was struck dumb with surprise. Not a fire did I see. I rested on the oars and listened; there was not a sound of the chattering Blacks. Daring to approach a trifle nearer, so great is human curiosity, I was still unable to discover a single sign of inhabitants on the flat where I had formerly seen them by the hundred.

I'm a fish, said I, if they haven't deserted the camp!

They had gone, for a fact. There was not a Link of them left. They had fled, for what reason I could not even conjecture; and where they were was a question which I did not care to propound. It seemed to me that this lifted a great burden of worry from my shoulders. But as soon, as I had made myself sure of the truth, my thoughts went flashing back to the bag of gold. If the Links were gone, I should run no risk in recovering the treasure. So potent

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did this idea become, that I immediately turned the boat back up the stream and began to row with vigour.

The goddess asked me at once where I was going. When I told her she seemed deeply to regret my resolution, but she sat there, grimly, and made no comment. Brave girl, I knew she was terribly agitated, but a girl could not be expected to do or to know any better. I admired her pluck in restraining her natural impulse to protest and coax and make a fuss.

In the briefest time, the prow was grating on the bank. Fatty leaped out, wild with delight to find himself again on solid earth.

We'll only be gone a minute, I told the goddess, and led the way up through the brush and the darkness.

To tell the truth I was more than half afraid that something might happen, myself. Jungle noises had commenced and the place seemed to breathe of my flight, struggles and pains of the time before. Stumbling about, as silently as possible, I began to search for the treasure.

I had pictured myself walking straight to where the gold was lying, but I now began to realise that to re-discover the particular thicket where I had dropped it would be a matter involving considerable luck. A fruitless time elapsed while I plunged about. Fatty was of no assistance, for he knew nothing of what I was seeking.

Presently the same old grumble and roar, from the mighty cauldron, commenced to roll outward on the air. I knew at once I was off the track, at least twenty yards. Changing my base rapidly, I began the search anew. But it seemed utterly hopeless. A doubt came over me; was the bag still there? Might not the Blacks have found it and carried it away? It seemed as if this must be so. I was worried about the goddess; if anything should happen to her, how terrible it would be!

On the point of giving up the gold, and persuading myself that I did not care anyway, I turned to leave, and stumbled heavily over some obstacle and into a tangle of creepers.

Here it is, all the time! I grumbled.

My excitement rose to fever pitch in a second. The bag, exactly as I had dropped it down, was under my very hand. Lifting it out of the embracing tendrils, I got it boosted up on my shoulder in a hurry. Then back we plunged, through the growth.

If I live to be a thousand, I shall never see a face so expressive of dread and fright as was that of the poor, trembling girl in the boat, when at last we came to where she was waiting. I believe that hers had been a more cruel ordeal to endure than had been my own on the former occasion. I had not even thought to whistle a bit, by way of assurance that all was well. She had to cry, dear little woman, when the strain was over and the boat once more headed down the stream.

I spurned the gold with my foot, as it lay in the boat, and hated myself for a miserly, greedy fool, yet in spite of myself I felt a tremendous elation inside, to think of having all this wealth, after all. It seemed too good for me to contain myself over. I wanted to roar out in laughter, to sing, and to shout a mad defiance to all the Blacks in kingdom.

Fatty had entered the boat again, with more alacrity than before, desiring any fate with us rather than to be left alone in an unknown jungle after dark. He made himself small in the bottom of the boat, and we glided past the deserted camp of our defeated foe.

CHAPTER XLIII. SURROUNDED BY THE BLACKS

IT WAS A strange sensation to skim along that river through the dark, irregular walls of trees, for the sounds of the jungle came to us clearly and these were all we could hear. At times we could see but a short distance ahead; at many a bend it appeared as if the great silent water-way ended abruptly. Then again it would open out and curve away, lighted only by its own reflections of the stars.

So much did this outlet wind that I lost all account of directions, but I knew we were traversing miles to accomplish but little direct advance. Our talking amounted to nothing. My mood was not for conversation, white I am sure the goddess dreaded to speak a word. From time to time some water creature splashed its way among the grasses, next the bank. No matter how often this sound was repeated, it made me start and breathe heavily till we were past the place.

The hours sped by, bringing no material change that could be noted. The night was exceedingly dark, owing in part to the density of the forest so near on either side. Pausing at length in my rowing, I observed that we drifted more rapidly than I had thought the current to be moving. Having become a trifle soft, while on my back, I found that my arms had grown tired already from the work. Fatty had succumbed to his habit of sleeping, acquired by going to bed at dark. His fears, however, had kept him awake much later than usual. He was curled down in the hold, where he twitched his feet and made little noises, like a dog that dreams.

I whispered to the goddess that she had better try to follow Fatty's example, but I was quite unable to ascertain whether she slept or not, so still had she been for an hour. Deeming it wise to conserve my strength for the daylight rowing, I now permitted the boat to float down the river at its own speed, merely keeping her out toward the centre of the stream by steering with one or the other of the oars. She swung about, broadside on, but as this enabled me to watch ahead easily, I made no effort to keep her pointed directly down the current.

Drifting thus, I kept the lonely vigil, hour after hour. I think I have never felt more depressed than I finally became in that heart of the wilderness. Not that anything threatened, nor that the sounds about me were more than usually weird, but simply because there seemed to be no end in promise; there appeared to be no progress toward anything different from that interminable jungle, in which the river seemed merely to wind without purpose. I felt as if the stream were like a figure 8, on which we could float forever and never get out of the maze. I knew better than this, but everything contributed to make me hopeless. Sleepy and weary, dully aching in the muscles and bones made weak by the fever, I almost thought the whole business a failure and the life, for which I had fought so persistently, a mockery unworthy of the effort.

On and on, winding and curving, drifted the boat with its extraordinary cargo. Now and again I stirred the embers of fire, which were dully glowing in my furnace-like receptacle of clay. In this place these 'burning sticks' appeared like the eyes of some crouching animal. I gave up all idea of ever seeing dawn. Nodding, jerking myself awake, bathing my heavy lids with water, steering my crooked course on this stream of mystery, I passed the time without a single relieving incident to break the deadening monotony of sound, motion and thought.

Even when the first yellow streaks of morning did make slits in the clouds, above the horizon of trees, it seemed as if the process of day-breaking ceased and that the actuator had forgotten the method. About this time, a rain commenced to fall, light, but wet and not desired. Fatty and the goddess awoke. I stumbled over the faithful Link to arrange a protection for the fire, which might otherwise have been extinguished. Then in my eagerness to get back to the oars and head us off from the bank, toward which we were gliding, I forgot to cover the bombs.

Grateful for the diversion, as well as for the company of my two companions, I picked up my spirits rapidly, becoming actually cheerful. This humour seemed to accelerate the coming of morning amazingly. The river reflected the pale streaks of light, the trees began to emerge in detail from the walls of gloom, and the dismal

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sounds, of hooting and howling things, were abated. Before we knew it, day was upon us, our winding course became a ceaseless invitation to hasten on and round the next succeeding curve, and we were drifting with a doubled speed.

Though the rain continued to fall, it was not annoying. I ate a bit of fruit and manned the oars, soon having us going at an encouraging speed. When the sun peered over the edge of the world, I felt like a boy. I let out a shout and a roar to relieve the pressure of over exhilaration. The echoes chased through the jungle madly.

Glancing ahead I now discovered that the river narrowed down abruptly between rude stairways of rock. On either side were shelves of the adamant, not more than a foot above the tide; the whole gateway was barely more than six feet in width. As might have been expected the current was fairly being sucked through this chasm, which explained the extra speed of the current where we were.

Seeing nothing in or about the place which should make it difficult of navigation, I merely kept the boat headed for the centre of the pass and let her shoot along with the powerful sweep of waters. The place was not long, nor were the rocks high nor difficult of access from the banks below. I remember to have thought how easily a man could cross the river at this peculiar place by simply jumping.

The boat was tossed on the turbulent surface, as we darted through, but below was another broad, smooth expanse, and the ever-inevitable curve of the river. This latter we reached soon. I was then somewhat surprised to observe two things: First, that for several hundred feet the stream was nearly straight, and second that it narrowed again below us, between banks a yard in height on which the growth was dense and which were so close together that several slender creepers hung like the cables of a projected suspension bridge across the stream, from branch to branch. I thought the wind must have blown the first slight tendrils over and that later they had grown to their present size. I also noted that again the placid river became rapids, which tossed and foamed in their agitated plunge between these banks.

Absorbed in what I saw and watching my course narrowly, I gave no heed to anything else. Therefore I started with galvanic quickness at a sudden scream from the goddess. In answer, a chorus of yells, triumphant, and diabolical enough to curdle the blood in one's veins, went up instantly. Then the jungle below us appeared literally to swarm with terrible forms.

The black Links, dancing like maniacs, screaming and racing toward the rapids to intercept us, were surging from every possible space between the trees, on the left-hand side of the river. They dashed ahead, fully comprehending the situation and their own advantage. I thought I could beat them to the rapids, but they were there by the score before we could approach within a stone's throw of its top, a fierce and terrible array, armed with their clubs with which they could not have missed us by throwing.

To have attempted to run through the narrows would merely have been to court a sudden death. I backwatered quickly and held the boat from drifting. Fatty was whining; the goddess was white as paper. I thought of the rapids above us, against the current of which I could not have pulled the boat to save our souls. I looked about and noted the densely wooded banks, which made escape in that direction impossible, even if we could have landed on the side opposite the foe in the vain hope that they could not get across as easily as we.

We were trapped!

The wild brutes, insane to get the goddess again in their clutches, mad to tear Fatty in shreds, and crazy to beat me to a pulp, as their arch-nemesis, simply writhed in eager anticipation of bagging us all, in spite of all we could do.

It was maddening; it all but drove me out of my senses. I knew that to wait for night would mean that when they were goaded sufficiently by their own impatience, the monsters would reach us, even if they had to swim, in

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addition to which I should certainly not dare to run the rapids after dark. Escape was utterly impossible, turn where I might.

The greed for gold had done the trick! The time I had wasted to get it would have saved us. Had I not delayed, we should have passed this place before the light had become strong enough to reveal our presence.

The demons never ceased for a moment to yell. That they knew we were caught I could not doubt. Not only did the males all congregate to smash us to atoms if we should attempt to shoot the rapids, but the females also appeared like magic from the jungle and lined up along the bank, a cruel looking mob with fingers that itched to tear poor Fatty and me to strings of meat. I was alarmed, desperate, and enraged by turns. Keeping off the boat and attempting to see a way out, I suddenly thought of my bombs.

Immediately I conceived a plan by which I meant to scatter the fiends in utter dismay. Dropping the boat down toward them I stopped it just outside the range of their clubs and headed it back up the stream. Before it had ceased to go forward, under the impulse of a powerful stroke, I shipped the oars, grabbed up a bomb and darted over Fatty to the fire. Snatching up an ember, I applied it to the fuse, meaning to throw the deadly explosive into their midst and dart through the rapids in the instantaneous confusion which would follow.

But the rain had dampened the powder! The fuse would not ignite! The trick was worse than a failure!

With a curse on my lips, I sprang back to the oars and spun the boat about, barely in time to save it from shooting the narrows broadside on. A dozen clubs, whizzing and hurtling end over end, splashed the water about us, as I drove the boat back to a safe position. In despair I examined all the bombs, only to find them as useless and harmless as so many hunks of cork. All my elaborate work to provide myself with these weapons and with the fire to make them of use, had been wholly undone in a moment of thoughtless neglect. I might have protected these instruments of death, but I had failed at the critical moment.

The weight of this calamity nearly overcame me. It seemed as if the bombs had been our only hope, and that now we were certainly doomed. The raging Blacks yelled more horribly than ever; they were more assured of their prey. Nothing more ferocious can be imagined than this mass of fiends, many of them foaming at the mouth, all excitedly moving from place to place, and all showing fangs of teeth, as they watched us with the nervous, near-together eyes which I knew so well.

I was rendered so thoroughly unfit by the failure of my bombs, that I gave up trying to think of any other way of outwitting the monsters. The rain re-commenced. With a bitter sniff of scorn at myself for the action, I covered the bamboo explosives with a skin, to prevent them from getting any wetter. As if powder could be any wetter when it has become too damp to ignite!

Oh what shall we do? what shall we do? moaned the goddess.

I tried to answer cheerfully, but having no sensible reply was denied even this negative pleasure. I tried to think, in order to make some rejoinder.

There is only one scheme and that is nearly hopeless, I told her at last. If I can make them believe we are about to land on the opposite side, up above, perhaps they might abandon their present position and then we could make a dash for it and beat them past that narrow channel.

She made no comment, but in her eyes there was such an imploring light that I deemed no effort too great to make. Somewhat inspired by the plan concocted on the spur of a moment, I strung my bow and laid an arrow near and immediately turning the prow up stream began to row away from the waiting Blacks, toward the furthest bank we could see.

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At first they were undecided, or else they refused to believe we were leaving. But their wits were keen only within narrow limits. Taking the bait, in a moment, they seemed suddenly to remember the rock–passage, over which they doubtless knew they could jump. By the score they chased up the bank, swinging along in the trees with astonishing agility and gaining on us every moment.

I was purposely rowing slowly, but with great show of exertion. As far as I could determine, from that distance, every demon in the tribe came chasing up the river, to be in at the death. Dozens of them remained visible, marking the position of the main body as it moved up the bank, but the great majority were soon hidden in the tangle of verdure, through which they weaved like so many animated black shuttles, playing in and out through the warp of green.

Steering now for the bank which was just below the upper rapids, and appearing to row with all possible haste, I had the extreme satisfaction of seeing our mad pursuers swarming toward the rocks where the stream could be leaped at a bound. So eagerly did they push and crowd, when they came to the place, that some, who paused undecided at the brink, were shoved headlong into the angry current. But no sooner was I sure that the ruse had succeeded than I swung the boat, as if she had been on a pivot, and sent her shooting down the stream with might and main.

Shrieks of rage and dismay burst from a hundred throats as the baffled demons suddenly comprehended my game. With all their speed, and in a frenzy of fury, they came running and climbing and swinging back. But this time I had the double advantage of a shorter, straighter route and the force of all the current to sweep me along. I rowed like an engine; the race was a race for life or death. Every muscle was strained, every volt of the superhuman dynamic, developed by the peril of our position, surged upward to drive us onward, toward that narrow gate of safety.

We neared it; we were far ahead of the mob; I saw victory smiling in the sun–lit jungle beyond. Like a hideous black comet, then, athwart my line of vision, a Link suddenly swung across the river, on one of the creepers that spanned the space between the banks. He reached the branches on the Opposite side. Instantly another one followed. I groaned, for evidently they had been left there to guard the pass. Another and yet another swung across. They quickly formed a monkey–bridge and hung suspended above the water like a sagging hammock not from the creepers, which would have broken, but each from the arms of his neighbour. In less than half a minute their line was complete. We were still driving toward them.

Oh, the horrible old woman! cried the girl, in affright.

I realised then that more than half the creatures in the bridge were females; and out across them came swinging that she–devil who had caught me with the gold, and whose fingers I had severed, and whose ribs I had skinned the harpy who had watched the goddess like a hawk.

She meant to lean down over the ones in the bridge and clutch the girl, as we shot beneath their bodies. Then others quickly joined her who intended to snatch for Fatty and myself. It was diabolically clever. If ever they reached us with those powerful arms, they could hold us against a team of pulling horses.

To turn now meant to abandon all hope; the Links who were tearing after us behind, once fooled could be hoaxed no more; and all would be more than ever infuriated and likely to swamp the boat. It looked like a swift and awful death.

In a heat of uncontrollable rage myself, I stood up, as we swept toward the rapids, and grabbing my bow, strung an arrow in desperate haste and drew for a shot, which fury made vicious and fierce. I had become so angered that I seemed to care nothing for what could happen. The arrow sprang away like a streak of light. Just at that second the line of Links slipped down a foot. In the brief time before the shaft could arrive, my heart sank with dread the

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slip of the target had ruined my shot.

But like the angered messenger of hate which it was, the arrow struck where it had not been aimed in the forearm of a Link who supported the weight of all the line. It stabbed clean through, tearing the muscles savagely as it plowed. Down swung the whole living bridge of demons, with the shrieking old woman in the melee, for that supporting arm let go as if it had been slashed in twain.

Instantly the dropping fiends struck the stream where the current boiled like a mill-race. Splashing, battling, screaming in fright, the intertwined monsters went swiftly down, every one trying to climb out on his neighbour, all of them fighting, rolling like rags of waste and gurgling as they attempted still to yell, with mouths full of water.

The boat by this time had been caught in the tow of the torrent. We swung down into the foam and tossing waves and drifted into the mass of brutes as they fought and drowned in the irresistible flood. Two of them flung an arm across our gunwale. Yelling as madly as themselves, we beat them off with the clubs, Fatty fighting like a fury. The hideous old female clutched in desperation and fastened her deadly grip on the wrist of the goddess. What a scream of malice and triumph she gave! I jumped across the seat and struck her arm a blow that smashed the bone and flesh to a quivering pulp on the edge of the boat. About her neck was flung the arm of a drowning beast at her side; and down they went together.

Yells upon yells now arose from the other Blacks, who had come to the narrows. We were slowly revolving in a whirlpool. The creatures could still have dashed to positions above us and sunk the boat with their clubs. I shot out the oars and drove the craft quickly ahead. A monster came boiling to the surface; I slashed him hard with my right-hand sweep and he sank like a rock. One, a rod away was swimming with the inborn skill and instinct of all wild animals, but the others had fought one another, fatally, in that vortex of swirling water, and only this one got back to the bank.

Through the seething foam to where the turbulent river grew calmer, we sped away, and at last these implacable demons were far behind.

CHAPTER XLIV. VALE, FAITHFUL FATTY

HAD THE Blacks known the country and human ways of cunning, they could still have cut across the neck of a loop in the river, and so have overtaken the boat, but this was beyond their sagacity. *I* feared they might have forestalled us thus, so that when we came along to where they should have been, in such an event, *I* was alert for trouble and hugged the further side of the stream. Of course we passed the place unmolested.

The sun was shining brightly now, as if in promise of fairer things to come. We had been too horrified to speak, but at last we breathed our relief, and shuddered as we reviewed the fearful hour which, thank God, was now of the past. Then we ate of our food, for all were faint from hunger, and I stirred up and fed the fire, and laid out the bombs to dry in the tropical heat. Also I moored the boat from the branch of an overhanging tree, by means of the rope I had taken along. I needed rest as much as food.

There in the shade we floated quietly for more than an hour, during which time I slept like a worn-out child, in a wretched position, but yet dreamlessly and without the slightest inconvenience. I awoke much refreshed. The goddess would have permitted me to slumber as long as I listed, nevertheless she was anxious to be going ahead, seeing which I cut us loose, and again we were hurrying down toward the sea.

It was a long and somewhat tedious day. We shot more rapids, a number of which threatened various dangers, and we rowed through a broad, shallow lagoon that was almost a lake and in which there were alligators galore. Of

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these the goddess had a natural horror, only exceeded by that of poor Fatty. However, the saurians were quite as alarmed as we, having never before seen the like of our floating terror, which the boat with extended oars seemed to represent, so that we cleared this place without delay and without a battle.

Along the banks of the river, which presented itself in multitudinous aspects, we beheld troops of monkeys and apes, vast flocks of parrots and other noisy birds, which made the trees seem to quiver with life. Tortoises were frequently started from a sun-bath, when they plunged into the stream with clumsy haste. There were toads in great variety and of snakes an ample representation. Of these latter reptiles some were swimming in the water, while others lay upon the banks and others again hung suspended from the trees, masquerading, it appeared to me, in imitation of creepers. The insects were exceedingly pestiferous, especially where the river became wide, sluggish and grown with rank grasses.

The changing panorama of jungle, hills, grassy clearings and rocky ravines, was one of unquestionable beauty, yet I felt no joy in observing it stretch and unfold so endlessly before us. I waxed impatient to be out of the maze. In spite of all I could do, I was conscious always of the ominous stillness about us, and of a sub-stratum of fear in myself, as I dwelt upon the thought of things which might occur. I have said before, and I repeat frankly, I am not a courageous man. The constant succession of events and the omnipresence of menace to life and limb had wrought sad havoc with my nerves. When I fought, it was nearly always because I felt so frightened and nervous that I had to do something desperate to relieve my feelings. At other times anger had made me reckless.

We had passed a number of tributary streams, so that the river was now of much greater volume. Thinking of this, I was deeply puzzled, at noon, to find that not only had the current ceased to assist me forward, but that on the contrary it seemed abruptly to have reversed. Attributing this illusion to my weakened condition of brain and muscles, worked harder than before to drive the boat along. There was no sense in blaming myself, however, for soon the up current became actually visible, as well as strong. Then I was suddenly made glad, and knew I had been once more a dunce.

The tide from the great sea itself was rising and driving everything up, against the flow of the river. This glorious news I imparted at once to the goddess. How she rejoiced! But even then, her feelings were most expressed by her lustrous eyes, for she found it difficult to speak of escape, and I think she dared not hope, for fear a jealous fate would hear her wish and proceed to shatter every possibility of deliverance from this wide-open prison.

It being a useless expenditure of energy to pull against this tide, I secured the boat to a vine-covered log, which protruded above the water, and let her swing as she would. We refreshed ourselves again with the fruits and a bit of the jerked meat. Already many of the mangoes and papaws were becoming soft, in the heat. Instructing the goddess to wake me the moment the tide should turn, I snatched another nap.

Before long we were slipping so swiftly downward on the ebb of the current that I was quite content to steer the boat and let it make its own pace. Thus we skimmed rapidly along until late in the day, the smell of the life-giving sea wafting to our nostrils, till it filled us with joy unspeakable. Building my plan as we rode on the bosom of the river, I decided to make the camp in the stream, or on the bank, within the mouth of the outlet, rather than to venture on the ocean with night descending. After a needed period of rest, we could explore the coast of the land for a village, in the morning.

The sky had become a trifle clouded before we resumed the drifting, after my slumber; this condition now increased. Having been taught my lesson before, I did not intend to be caught again. I spoke to the goddess, asking her to steer us a bit, but the poor girl had fallen asleep from exhaustion. Letting the craft take her course, I stretched a protection over the fire and then turned about and performed a similar service for the bombs, which had been dried thoroughly.

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While I was fairly in the midst of this important business, Fatty gave a sudden cry of alarm. The next instant the boat struck upon the end of a spit of land which projected out into the stream. I was thrown on my knees; the craft swung with her bow as a pivot on the sand.

Getting erect with the thought that no harm was done and that to push off was only the work of a second, I was amazed to see a troop of creatures darting toward us my old enemies the hideous ourang-outangs!

The goddess was jolted awake; she gasped in terror. Reaching for an oar to push us off I found it caught in the skin that wrapped the bombs. I jerked and wrenched; the delay was fatal. The monsters descended the bank like an avalanche. Hampered as I was with the oar, I became the easiest victim. Before I could drop the sweep to make a fight, the brutes leaped across the beach which was between themselves and the boat. Myself, the girl and Fatty were all but surrounded, hideous murder loomed before us in a second.

Then Fatty, the faithful, the frightened, the loving, hurled himself upon the brutes, defending me from instant capture and death; and the fierce creatures gathered him to them. They tore him, bit him, fell upon him and mangled his body in a manner frightful to see. He was done to death most horribly in less than half a minute.

The boat, relieved of his weight and shoved by the backward push of his foot, as he leaped, swung off in the stream and began to drift away. I sprang to where my bombs were lying, mad for vengeance, and tore one out of the skin. Then scrambling to the fire, I snatched up a flesh-searing coal and touched the fuse. It sputtered in swift anger. I threw the deadly thing with all my force. While yet in the air, only mid-way between those monsters and ourselves, the bomb exploded with terrific violence. I saw a gigantic star of fire; I felt as if the world had burst against my head. Then I fell forward in the boat and was utterly blotted out.

CHAPTER XLV. NO LONGER A KING

THE FORCE of the bomb must have been tremendous. I believe it was hours before I regained consciousness. When at last I did revive, I was dizzy and deafened, the world about me was black, a storm was raging in the heavens and the boat was heaving with a great commotion. Everything was puzzling. Finally I remembered something of what had happened and knew where I was.

Dearest, I said, giving the goddess the name which I had only dared to call her to myself, dearest are you there? and I crawled toward the stern.

Here John, said a faint, sweet voice, and then I found her hand and knew that she too had been long unconscious, after that moment of terrible things.

We were on the sea! Of that I was soon made sure. The wind was driving us the Lord only knew where; the waves were tossing the boat about as if she had been but a thimble afloat; and the spray flung across us and drenched us both repeatedly. This had doubtless fetched us around, the goddess first, for she had been less injured than I by the explosion, having been seated, while I was standing, at the fateful moment. The tide had carried us straight out to the ocean, as we lay helpless in the craft.

We crouched in the bottom of the boat and clung to the seat for an age. The rain came driving down; the force of the gale appeared to increase, and we scudded away into the black abyss which had for its limits the ends of mighty ocean.

We were out of our prison, adrift on the boundless main. When morning came, we raised our heads and searched that wilderness of water in vain. No island no ship nothing was there in sight, save tumbling mountains of water. We were lost in that trackless jungle of billows.

THE CRYSTAL SCEPTRE

Of the day and the night of physical and mental anguish that followed, I have no desire to think. Two souls made one by sufferings long endured, we sought and found our only consolation in the words of hope and affection, which each could give to each.

What water remained, or had been collected from the downpour, in the shell of the tortoise, got slopped out soon in the boat. It mingled with the salt water, shipped from time to time, and swashing about, ruined the meat and fruits, put out the fire and soaked the skins. Then the sun and the scorching air played their tricks at parching and burning us up. How useless and vain seemed the sack of gold, lying there in the wash!

I cut and broke the pole I had taken along, and lashing the shorter piece across the boat, to the oar-lock pins, made the other stand upright, with a bit of skin flapping idly, for a signal of distress.

Toward the evening of the second day we sighted a steamer. As we were low to the water and they were high, this boat was comparatively near before we saw her loom above the horizon. She made us out, at last, and we breathed our thanks, to see her put about and bear down toward the good old boat which had served so nobly.

Then it was that a surge of feeling welled up within me, thoughts of my long exile, the friendly Links who had saved my life, and of poor old Fatty, who had sacrificed himself like a hero at the end poor old Fatty, my loving and beloved friend.

What *is* it, John? said the goddess tenderly.

Oh nothing, I faltered, swallowing hard at the lump in my throttle, I I was just thinking that now that now I'm no longer King of the Missing Links; I'm just an ordinary man.