

# SWEETHEART PRIMEVAL

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Illustrated by Dorothy Dulin.



HERE were forty of them, mighty men, mightily muscled. In their strong hands they grasped their formidable spears and heavy axes. In their loin cloths rested their

stone knives for the moment when they closed in hand-to-hand combat with their foes.

In their savage brains was but a single idea—to kill, to kill, to kill!

To the outer rim of fires they came, and yet the excited populace within had not discovered them. Then a girl, remembering tardily her duties at the fires, turned to throw more brush upon the blaze and saw them—saw a score of handsome, savage faces just beyond the flames.

With a scream of terror and warning she turned and scurried among the villagers. For an instant the hubbub was stilled, only to break out anew at the girl's frightened cry of: "Warriors! Warriors!"

Then Nu and his men were among them.

The warriors of the Boat Builders ran forward to meet the attackers. The women and children fled to the opposite side of the inclosure.

Hoarse shouts and battle cries rang out as the Cliff Dwellers hurled themselves upon the Boat Builders.

A shower of long slim spears volleyed from one side, to be answered by the short, stout harpoons of the villagers.

Then the warriors rushed to closer conflict with their axes. Never after the first assault was the outcome of the battle in question; the fiercer tribe of Nu—the hunters of beasts of prey, the warrior people—were the masters at every turn.

Back, back they forced the Boat Builders, until the defenders had been driven across the inclosure upon their women and children.

And now the inner circle of fires was surrendered to the invaders, and as Nat-ul sprang between the warriors of her people to be first to the side of Nu and cut away his bonds, the last of the Boat Builders turned and fled into the outer darkness, along the beach to where their boats were drawn up beyond the tide.

Nu, the chief, leaped through the flames upon the heels of Nat-ul.

In the terrible heat within the two came side by side before the stake. The girl gave a single glance at the bare and smoking pole and at the ground around it before she turned and threw herself into Nu's arms.

Nu, the son of Nu, was not there, nor was his body within the inclosure!

## CHAPTER XI.

### Gron's Revenge.

GRON, suffering and exhausted from the effects of the cruel beating Tur had administered, lay all the following day in her shelter.

Tur did not molest her further. Apparently he had forgotten her—a suggestion which aroused all her primitive savagery and jealousy as no amount of brutal punishment might have done.

All day she lay suffering and hating Tur.

All day she planned new and diabolical schemes for revenge. Close to her breast she hugged her stone knife.

It was well for Tur that he did not chance to venture near her then.

While he had beaten her the knife had remained in her loin cloth; nor had the thought to use it against her mate entered the head of Gron; but now, now that he had deserted her, now that he was doubtless thinking of a new mate her thoughts constantly reverted to the weapon.

It was not until after nightfall that Gron crawled from beneath the hides and thatch of her shelter.

She had not eaten for twenty-four hours, yet she felt no hunger—every other sense and emotion was paralyzed by the poison of jealousy and hate. Gron slunk about the outskirts of the crowd that pressed around the figure at the stake.

Ah, they were about to torture the prisoner!

What pleasure they would derive from that! Gron raised herself on tiptoe to look over the shoulder of a woman. The latter turned and, recognizing her, grinned.

"Tur will enjoy the death agonies of the mate of the woman he is going to take in your stead, Gron," taunted her friend.

Gron made no reply. It was not the way of her period to betray the emotions of the heart. She would rather have died than let this woman know that she suffered.

"That is why he was so angry," continued the tormentor, "when you tried to rob him of this pleasure."

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With the woman's words a sudden inspiration flashed into the mind of Gron. Yes, Tur would be made mad if the prisoner escaped. So would Scarb, the chief who had commanded Tur to beat her and to take another mate.

Gron raised herself again upon her toes and looked long and earnestly at the face of the man bound to the stake. Already the flames of the encircling fires illumined his figure and his every feature—they stood out as distinctly as by sunlight.

The man was very handsome.

There was no man among the tribe of Scarb who could compare with the stranger in physical perfection and beauty. A gleam of pleasure shot through Gron's dark eyes.

If she could only find such another man and run off with him, then indeed would she be revenged upon Tur. If it could be this very man!

Ah, then indeed would Scarb and Tur both be punished! But that, of course, was impossible—the man would be dead in a few hours.

Gron wandered about the village—too filled with her hate to remain long in one place. Like an angry tigress she paced to and fro. Now and again some other woman of the tribe hurled a taunt or a reproach at her.

It would be ever thus. How she hated them—every one of them! As she passed her shelter in her restless rounds she heard the plaintive wailing of her child.

She had almost forgotten him. She hurried within, snatching up the infant from where it lay upon a pile of otter and fox skins.

This was Tur's child—his man-child. Already it commenced to resemble the father. How proud Tur was of it! Gron gasped at the hideous thought that followed remorselessly upon the heels of this recollection.

She held the child at arm's length and tried to scrutinize its features in the dim interior of the hut.

How Tur would suffer if harm befell his first man-child—his only offspring! Gron almost threw the wee bundle of humanity back upon its pile of skins, and leaping to her feet ran from the shelter.

For half an hour she roamed restlessly about the camp.

Her brain was a whirling chaos of conflicting emotions. A dozen times she approached the death fires that were slowly roasting alive the man bound to the stake they encircled.

As yet they had not injured him—but given him a taste of the suffering to come, that was all.

Suddenly she came face to face with Tur.

Involuntarily her hands went out in a

gesture of appeal and supplication. She was directly in Tur's path. The man stopped and looked at her for an instant, then with a sneer that was half snarl he raised his hand and struck her in the face. "Get out of my way, woman!" he growled, and passed on.

A group of women standing near had seen. They laughed boisterously at the discomfiture of their sister. Gron went cold and hot and cold again.

She burned with rage and humiliation. Her long black hair streaming about her face and across her shoulders, she ran to the outskirts of the crowd that was watching the victim who obstinately refused to gratify their appetite for human suffering—Nu would not wince. Already the heat of the flames must have caused him excruciating agony, yet not by the slightest movement of a muscle did he admit knowledge of either the surrounding fires or the savage, eager spectators.

Gron watched him for a moment. And now there sprang to Gron's mind a recurrence of the thought that the taunting female's words had implanted there earlier in the evening.

How could she compass this last stroke of revenge? It seemed practically impossible. The stake was hemmed in upon all sides by the clustering horde of eager tribesmen.

Gron turned and ran to the opposite side of the village, beyond the shelters.

There was no one there. Even the girls tending the fires had deserted their posts to witness the last agonies of the prisoner. Gron seized a leafy branch that lay among the firewood that was to replenish the blaze.

With it she beat out two of the fires, leaving an open avenue into the inclosure through which savage beasts might reasonably be expected to venture. Then she ran back to the crowding ring of watchers.

As she approached them she cried out in apparently incoherent terror. Those nearest her turned, startled by her shrieks. "Zors!" she cried. "The fires have died and four of them have entered the shelters, where they are devouring the babes. On that side," and she pointed to the opposite side of the inclosure.

Instantly the whole tribe rushed toward the ring of huts—first the warriors, then the women and children.

The victim at the stake was deserted. Scarce was every back turned toward the prisoner than Gron leaped through the fiery girdle to his side.

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Nu saw the woman and recognized her. He saw the knife in her hand. She had tried to kill him the previous night, and now she was going to have her way.

Well, it was better than the slow death by fire!

But Gron's knife did not touch Nu. Instead, it cut quickly through the bullock sinews that bound him to the stake. As the last strand parted the woman seized him by the hand.

"Come!" she cried. "Quick, before they return—there are no Zors in the village."

Nu did not pause to question her or her motives.

For a few steps he staggered drunkenly, for the bonds had stopped the circulation in his arms and legs. But Gron, half supporting, half dragging him, pulled him across the fires about the stake, on past the outer circle of the beast-fires toward the Stygian blackness that enveloped the beach toward the sea.

As Nu advanced the blood commenced to circulate once more through the veins from which it had been choked, so that by the time they came to the water he was almost in perfect command of his muscles. Here Gron led him to a dugout.

"Quick!" she urged as the two seized it

to run it through the surf. "They will soon be upon us and then we shall both die!"

Already angry shouts were plainly distinguishable from the village, and the firelight disclosed the tribe running hither and thither about the fires that encircled the stake to which Nu had been secured. The boat was through the surf and out riding the waves beyond.

Gron had clambered in and Nu was taking his place in the opposite end of the craft when a new note arose from the village.

The savage shouting carried a different tone. Now there were battle-cries where before there had been but howls of rage. Even at the distance at which they were Gron and Nu could see that a battle was raging among the shelters of the Boat Builders.

What could it mean?

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"They have fallen upon one another," said Gron. "And while they fight let us hasten to put as great a distance between them and ourselves as we can before the day returns."

But Nu was not so anxious to leave.

He wanted to know more of the cause of the battle. It was not within the bounds of reason that the villagers could have set upon one another with such apparent unanimity and without any seeming provocation, and, too, it appeared to Nu that there were more people in the village now than there had been before he left it.

What did all this mean? Why it meant to the troglodyte that the village had been attacked by enemies, and he wished to wait until he might discover the identity of the invaders.

But Gron did not wish to wait. She seized her paddle and commenced to ply it.

"Wait!" urged Nu, but the woman insisted that they must hasten or be lost.

Even as they argued Gron suddenly leaned forward, pointing toward the beach.

"See!" she whispered. "They have discovered us. We are being pursued."

Nu looked in the direction that she pointed, and, sure enough, dimly through the night he descried two forms racing toward the beach. As he looked he saw them seize upon a boat and start launching it, and then he knew that only in immediate flight lay safety.

He seized his paddle, and in concert with Gron struck out for the open sea.

"We can turn to one side presently and elude them," whispered the woman.

Nu nodded.

"We will turn north toward my country," he said.

Gron did not demur. She might as well go north as south. Her life was spent. There was to be no more happiness for her.

For a while both were silent, paddling out away from shore. Behind them they now and then discerned the darker blotch of the pursuing canoe upon the dark waters of the sea.

"Why did you save me?" asked Nu at length.

"Because I hated Tur," replied the woman.

Nu fell silent, thinking. But he was not thinking of Gron. His mind was filled with speculations as to the fate of Nat-ul.

Whither had she fled when she had escaped from the clutches of the Boat Builders? Could she have reached the tribe in safety? Had she known that it was Nu who had entered the shelter where she lay and rescued her from Tur?

He thought not, for had she known it he was sure that she would have remained and fought with him.

Presently Gron interrupted his reveries. She was pointing over the stern of the boat. There, not fifty yards away, Nu saw the outlines of another craft with two paddlers within.

"Hasten!" whispered Gron. "They are