

times through the break of a gorge upon a forest in a valley far below.

Toward this Nu bent his steps. There might grow the wood he sought. At last they reached the last steep declivity, a sheer drop of two hundred feet to the leveler slopes whereon the forest grew almost to the base of the cliff.

For a moment the two stood gazing out over the unfamiliar scene—a rather open woodland that seemed to fringe the shoulder of the plateau, dropping from sight a mile or so beyond them into an invisible valley above which hung a soft, warm haze. Far and beyond all this dimly rose the outlines of far-off mountains, their serrated crests seemingly floating upon the haze that obscured their bases.

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"Let us descend," said Nu, and started to lower his legs over the edge of the precipice.

Gron drew back with a little exclamation of terror.

"You will fall!" she cried. "Let us search out an easier way."

Nu looked up and laughed.

"What could be easier than this?" he asked.

Gron peered over the edge. She saw the face of the rocky wall, broken here and there by protruding boulders, and again by narrow ledges, where a harder stratum had better withstood the ravages of the elements.

In occasional spots where lodgment had been afforded lay accumulations of loose rock, ready to trip the unwary foot, and below all a tumbled mass of jagged pieces, waiting to receive the bruised and mangled body of whoever might be so foolhardy as to choose this way to the forest. Nu saw that Gron was but little reassured by her inspection.

"Come!" he said. "There is no danger with me."

Gron looked at him, conscious of an admiration for his courage and prowess—an admiration for an enemy that she would rather not have felt. Yet she did feel the truth of his words: "There is no danger—with me."

She sat down upon the edge of the cliff, letting her legs dangle over the abyss.

Nu reached up and grasped her arm, drawing her down to his side. How he clung there she could not guess; but somehow, as he supported her in the descent, he found hand-holds and stepping-stones that made the path seem a miracle of ease. Long before they reached the bottom Gron ceased to be afraid, and even found herself discovering ledges and outcroppings that made the journey easier for them both.

And when they stood safely amid the clutter of debris at the base she threw a glance of ill-concealed admiration upon her enemy.

Mentally she compared him with Tur and Scarb and the other males of the Boat Builders, nor would the comparison have swelled the manly chests of the latter could they have had knowledge of it.

"Those who follow us will stop here," she said, "nor do I see any break in the cliff as far as my eye can travel," and she looked to the right and left along the rocky escarpment.

"I had forgotten that we might be followed," said Nu; "but when we have found wherewith to fashion a spear and an ax, let them come—Nu, the son of Nu, will welcome them."

From the base of the cliff they crossed the rubble and stepped out into the grassy clearing that reached to the forest's edge. They had crossed but halfway to the wood when they heard the crashing of great bodies ahead of them, and as they paused the head of a bull aurochs appeared among the trees before them.

Another and another came into sight, and as the animals saw the couple they halted, the bulls bellowing, the cows peering wide-eyed across the shaggy backs of their lords.

Here was meat, and only the knife of the woman to bring it down. Nu reached for Gron's weapon.

"Go back to the cliff," he said, "lest

they charge. I will bring down a young she."

Gron was about to turn back as Nu had bid her, and the man was on the point of circling toward the right when there appeared on the other side of the aurochs several men. They were clothed in the skins of the species they accompanied, and were armed with spears and axes.

At sight of Nu and Gron they raised a great shout and dashed forward toward the two.

Nu, unarmed, perceived the futility of accepting battle. Instead he grasped Gron's hand, and with her fled back toward the cliffs. Close upon their heels came the herders, shouting savage cries of carnage and victory.

They had their quarry cornered. The cliff would stop them, and then, with their backs against the wall, the man would be quickly killed and the woman captured.

But these were not Cliff Dwellers—they knew nothing of the agility of Nu.

Had they, they would not have slowed up as they did, nor spread out to right and left for the purpose of preventing a flank escape by the fugitives. Across the rubble ran Nu and Gron, and at the foot of the cliffs where they should have stopped, according to the reasoning of the herders, they did not even hesitate.

Straight up the sheer wall sprang Nu, dragging the woman after him. Now the aurochs herders raised a mighty shout of anger and dismay.

With renewed speed they dashed straight toward the foot of the cliff, but Nu and Gron were beyond the reach of their hands before ever they arrived. Turning for an instant, Nu saw the back-thrown spear-hands.

They were not yet out of reach of the weapons. He reached down with his right hand and picked up a loose bit of rock, hurling it toward the nearest spearman.

The missile struck its target full upon the forehead, crumpling him to an inert mass.

Then Nu scrambled upward again, and before the herders could recover from their surprise he had dragged Gron out of range of the spears.

Squatting upon a narrow ledge, the woman at his side, Nu hurled insulting epithets at their pursuers. These he punctuated with well-timed and equally well-aimed rocks, until the yelling herders were glad to retreat to a safer distance.

The enemy did not even venture the attempt to follow the fugitives.

It was evident that they were no better climbers than Gron. Nu held them in supreme contempt. Had he but a good ax he would descend and annihilate the whole crew.

Gron sitting close beside Nu, was filled with wonder, and something more than wonder, that this enemy should have risked so much to save her, for at the bottom of the cliff Nu had evidently forgotten for the instant that the woman was not of his own breed, able to climb equally as well as he, and had ascended a short distance before he had discovered that Gron was scrambling futilely for a foothold at the bottom.

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Then, in the face of the advancing foe-men, he had descended to her side, risking capture and death in the act, and had hoisted her to a point of safety far up the cliff face.

Tur would never have done so much.

The woman, stealing stealthy glances at the profile of the young giant beside her, felt her sentiments undergoing a strange metamorphosis. Nu was no longer her enemy.

He protected her, and now she looked to him for protection with greater assurance of receiving it than ever she had looked to Tur for the same thing.

She knew that Nu would forage for her—upon him she depended for food as well as protection.

She had never looked for more from her mate. Her mate! She stole another half-shy glance at Nu.

Ah, what a mate he would have been! And why not? They were alone in the

world, separated from their people, doubtless forever. Gron suddenly realized that she hoped that it was forever.

She wondered what was passing in Nu's mind.

Apparently the man was wholly occupied with the joys of insulting the threatening savages beneath him; but yet his thoughts were busy with plans for escape. And why?

Solely because he yearned for his own land and his father's people?

Far from it. Nu might have been happy upon this island forever had there been another there in place of Gron. He thought of Nat-ul—no other woman occupied his mind, and his plans for escape were solely a means for returning to the mainland and again taking up his search for the daughter of Tha.

For an hour the herders remained in the clearing near the foot of the cliff; then, evidently tiring of the fruitless sport, they collected their scattered herd and disappeared in the wood toward the direction from which they had come.

A half hour later Nu ventured down.

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He had discovered a cave in the face of the cliff, and there he left Gron, telling her that he would fetch food to her, since in case of pursuit he could escape more easily alone than when burdened with her.

After a short absence he returned with both food and drink, the latter carried in the bladder that always hung from his gee-string. He had seen nothing of the herders and naught of the hardwood or the materials for spear and ax heads that he had desired.

"There is an easier way, however," he confided to the woman as they squatted at the mouth of the cave and ate. "The drivers of aurochs bore spears and axes and knives. It will be easier to follow them and take theirs than to make weapons of my own."

"Stay here Gron, in safety, and Nu will follow the strangers, returning shortly with weapons and the flesh of the fattest of the she aurochs."

"Then we will return to the coast, fearless of enemies, find the boat, and go back to Nu's country. There you will be well received, for Nu, my father, is chief, and when he learns that you have saved my life he will treat you well."

So Nu quickly dropped down to the foot of the cliff, crossed the clearing, and a moment later disappeared from the eyes of Gron into the shadows of the wood.

For a while he could make neither head nor tail of the tangled spoor of the herd, but at last he found a point where the herders evidently had collected their charges and driven them in a more or less compact formation toward the opposite side of the forest.

Nu went warily, keeping every sense alert against surprise by savage beast or man. Every living thing that he might encounter could be nothing other than an enemy. He stopped often, listening and sniffing the air.

Twice he was compelled to take to the trees upon the approach of wandering beasts of prey; but when they had passed on Nu descended and resumed his trailing.

The trampled path of the herd led to the farther edge of the forest, and there Nu saw unfolded below him as beautiful a scene as had ever broken upon his vision.

The western sun hung over a broad valley that stretched below him, for the wood ended upon the brow of a gentle slope that dropped downward to a blue lake sparkling in the midst of green meadows a couple of miles away.

Upon the surface of the lake, apparently floating, were a score or more strange structures.

That they were man-built Nu was certain, though he never had seen nor dreamed of their like. To himself he thought of them as caves, just as he had mentally described the shelters of the Boat Builders, for to Nu any human habitation was a cave; and that they were the dwellings of men he had no doubt, since

he could see human figures passing back and forth along the narrow causeways that connected the thatched structures with the shore of the lake.

Across these bridges they were driving aurochs, too, evidently to pen them safely for the night against the prowlers of the forest and the plain.

Until darkness settled Nu watched with unflagging interest the activities of the floating village. Then, in the comparative safety of the darkness, he crept down close to the water's edge.

He took advantage of every tree and bush, of every rock and hollow that intervened between himself and the enemy, to shelter and hide his advance. At last he lay concealed in a heavy growth of reeds upon the bank of the lake.

By separating them before his eyes, he could obtain an excellent view of the village without himself being discovered.

The moon had risen, brilliantly flooding the unusual scene. Now Nu saw that the dwellings did not really float upon the surface.

He discovered the ends of piles that disappeared beneath the surface of the water. The habitations stood upon these. He saw men and women and little children gathered upon the open platforms that encircled many of the structures, and upon the narrow bridges that spanned the water between the dwellings and the shore.

Fires burned before many of the huts, blazing upon little hearths of clay that protected the planking beneath them from combustion. Nu could smell the savory aroma of cooking fish, and his mouth watered as he saw the teeth of the Lake Dwellers close upon juicy aurochs-steaks, while others opened shellfish and devoured their contents raw, throwing the shells into the water below them.

But, hungry though he was for meat, the objects of his particular desire were the long spear, the heavy ax, and the sharp knife of the hairy giant standing guard upon the nearest causeway.

Upon him Nu's eyes rested the oftenest. He saw the villagers, the evening meal consumed and the scraps tossed into the water beneath their dwellings, engaged in noisy gossip about their fires.

Children romped and tumbled perilously close to the edges of the platforms.

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Youths and maidens strolled to the darker corners of the village and, leaning over the low rails above the water, conversed in whispers. Loud-voiced warriors recounted for the thousandth time details of past valorous deeds. The younger mothers, in little circles, gossiped with much nodding of heads, the while they fondled their babes.

The old women, toothless and white-haired, but still erect and agile in token of the rigid primitive laws which governed survival of the fit alone, busied themselves with the care of the older children and various phases of the simple household economy which devolved upon them.

The evening drew on into darkness.

The children had been posted off to their skin-covered, grass pallets. For another half hour the elders remained about the fires; then, by twos and threes, they also sought the interiors of the huts and sleep.

Quiet settled upon the village, and still Nu, hidden in the reeds beside the lake, watched the nearest guardsman. Now and then the fellow would leave his post to replenish a watch fire that blazed close to the shore end of his causeway.

Past this no ordinary beast of prey would dare venture, nor could any do so without detection, for its light illumined brightly the end of the narrow bridge.

(To be continued next week)

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Try the Lake

"If you won't marry me, I will hang myself."

"Oh, please don't; papa's awful strict about people hanging around the house."