

Chapter 3

The report of a gun blasted the silence of a dead Devonport with startling abruptness.

It came from the direction of the launch, and in an instant we three were running for the boat as fast as our legs would carry us. As we came in sight of it we saw Delcarte a hundred yards inland from the launch, leaning over something which lay upon the ground. As we called to him he waved his cap, and stooping, lifted a small deer for our inspection.

I was about to congratulate him on his trophy when we were startled by a horrid, half-human, half-bestial scream a little ahead and to the right of us. It seemed to come from a clump of rank and tangled bush not far from where Delcarte stood. It was a horrid, fearsome sound, the like of which never had fallen upon my ears before.

We looked in the direction from which it came. The smile had died from Delcarte's lips. Even at the distance we were from him I saw his face go suddenly white, and he quickly threw his rifle to his shoulder. At the same moment the thing that had given tongue to the cry moved from the concealing brushwood far enough for us, too, to see it.

Both Taylor and Snider gave little gasps of astonishment and dismay.

"What is it, sir?" asked the latter.

The creature stood about the height of a tall man's waist, and was long and gaunt and sinuous, with a tawny coat striped with black, and with white throat and belly. In conformation it was similar to a cat--a huge cat, exaggerated colossal cat, with fiendish eyes and the most devilish cast of countenance, as it wrinkled its bristling snout and bared its great yellow fangs.

It was pacing, or rather, slinking, straight for Delcarte, who had now leveled his rifle upon it.

"What is it, sir?" mumbled Snider again, and then a half-forgotten picture from an old natural history sprang to my mind, and I recognized in the frightful beast the *Felis tigris* of ancient Asia, specimens of which had, in former centuries, been exhibited in the Western Hemisphere.

Snider and Taylor were armed with rifles and revolvers, while I carried only a revolver. Seizing Snider's rifle from his trembling hands, I called to Taylor to follow me, and together we ran forward, shouting, to attract the beast's attention

from Delcarte until we should all be quite close enough to attack with the greatest assurance of success.

I cried to Delcarte not to fire until we reached his side, for I was fearful lest our small caliber, steel-jacketed bullets should, far from killing the beast, tend merely to enrage it still further. But he misunderstood me, thinking that I had ordered him to fire.

With the report of his rifle the tiger stopped short in apparent surprise, then turned and bit savagely at its shoulder for an instant, after which it wheeled again toward Delcarte, issuing the most terrific roars and screams, and launched itself, with incredible speed, toward the brave fellow, who now stood his ground pumping bullets from his automatic rifle as rapidly as the weapon would fire.

Taylor and I also opened up on the creature, and as it was broadside to us it offered a splendid target, though for all the impression we appeared to make upon the great cat we might as well have been launching soap bubbles at it.

Straight as a torpedo it rushed for Delcarte, and, as Taylor and I stumbled on through the tall grass toward our unfortunate comrade, we saw the tiger rear upon him and crush him to the earth.

Not a backward step had the noble Delcarte taken. Two hundred years of peace had not sapped the red blood from his courageous line. He went down beneath that avalanche of bestial savagery still working his gun and with his face toward his antagonist. Even in the instant that I thought him dead I could not help but feel a thrill of pride that he was one of my men, one of my class, a Pan-American gentleman of birth. And that he had demonstrated one of the principal contentions of the army-and-navy adherents--that military training was necessary for the salvation of personal courage in the Pan-American race which for generations had had to face no dangers more grave than those incident to ordinary life in a highly civilized community, safeguarded by every means at the disposal of a perfectly organized and all-powerful government utilizing the best that advanced science could suggest.

As we ran toward Delcarte, both Taylor and I were struck by the fact that the beast upon him appeared not to be mauling him, but lay quiet and motionless upon its prey, and when we were quite close, and the muzzles of our guns were at the animal's head, I saw the explanation of this sudden cessation of hostilities--*Felis tigris* was dead.

One of our bullets, or one of the last that Delcarte fired, had penetrated the heart, and the beast had died even as it sprawled forward crushing Delcarte to the ground.

A moment later, with our assistance, the man had scrambled from beneath the carcass of his would-be slayer, without a scratch to indicate how close to death he had been.

Delcarte's buoyance was entirely unruffled. He came from under the tiger with a broad grin on his handsome face, nor could I perceive that a muscle trembled or that his voice showed the least indication of nervousness or excitement.

With the termination of the adventure, we began to speculate upon the explanation of the presence of this savage brute at large so great a distance from its native habitat. My readings had taught me that it was practically unknown outside of Asia, and that, so late as the twentieth century, at least, there had been no savage beasts outside captivity in England.

As we talked, Snider joined us, and I returned his rifle to him. Taylor and Delcarte picked up the slain deer, and we all started down toward the launch, walking slowly. Delcarte wanted to fetch the tiger's skin, but I had to deny him permission, since we had no means to properly cure it.

Upon the beach, we skinned the deer and cut away as much meat as we thought we could dispose of, and as we were again embarking to continue up the river for fresh water and fuel, we were startled by a series of screams from the bushes a short distance away.

"Another *Felis tigris*," said Taylor.

"Or a dozen of them," supplemented Delcarte, and, even as he spoke, there leaped into sight, one after another, eight of the beasts, full grown--magnificent specimens.

At the sight of us, they came charging down like infuriated demons. I saw that three rifles would be no match for them, and so I gave the word to put out from shore, hoping that the "tiger," as the ancients called him, could not swim.

Sure enough, they all halted at the beach, pacing back and forth, uttering fiendish cries, and glaring at us in the most malevolent manner.

As we motored away, we presently heard the calls of similar animals far inland. They seemed to be answering the cries of their fellows at the water's edge, and from the wide distribution and great volume of the sound we came to the conclusion that enormous numbers of these beasts must roam the adjacent country.

"They have eaten up the inhabitants," murmured Snider, shuddering.

"I imagine you are right," I agreed, "for their extreme boldness and fearlessness in the presence of man would suggest either that man is entirely unknown to them, or that they are extremely familiar with him as their natural and most easily procured prey."

"But where did they come from?" asked Delcarte. "Could they have traveled here from Asia?"

I shook my head. The thing was a puzzle to me. I knew that it was practically beyond reason to imagine that tigers had crossed the mountain ranges and rivers and all the great continent of Europe to travel this far from their native lairs, and entirely impossible that they should have crossed the English Channel at all. Yet here they were, and in great numbers.

We continued up the Tamar several miles, filled our casks, and then landed to cook some of our deer steak, and have the first square meal that had fallen to our lot since the Coldwater deserted us. But scarce had we built our fire and prepared the meat for cooking than Snider, whose eyes had been constantly roving about the landscape from the moment that we left the launch, touched me on the arm and pointed to a clump of bushes which grew a couple of hundred yards away.

Half concealed behind their screening foliage I saw the yellow and black of a big tiger, and, as I looked, the beast stalked majestically toward us. A moment later, he was followed by another and another, and it is needless to state that we beat a hasty retreat to the launch.

The country was apparently infested by these huge Carnivora, for after three other attempts to land and cook our food we were forced to abandon the idea entirely, as each time we were driven off by hunting tigers.

It was also equally impossible to obtain the necessary ingredients for our chemical fuel, and, as we had very little left aboard, we determined to step our folding mast and proceed under sail, hoarding our fuel supply for use in emergencies.

I may say that it was with no regret that we bid adieu to Tigerland, as we rechristened the ancient Devon, and, beating out into the Channel, turned the launch's nose southeast, to round Bolt Head and continue up the coast toward the Strait of Dover and the North Sea.

I was determined to reach London as soon as possible, that we might obtain fresh clothing, meet with cultured people, and learn from the lips of Englishmen the secrets of the two centuries since the East had been divorced from the West.

Our first stopping place was the Isle of Wight. We entered the Solent about ten o'clock one morning, and I must confess that my heart sank as we came close to shore. No lighthouse was visible, though one was plainly indicated upon my map. Upon neither shore was sign of human habitation. We skirted the northern shore of the island in fruitless search for man, and then at last landed upon an eastern point, where Newport should have stood, but where only weeds and great trees and tangled wild wood rioted, and not a single manmade thing was visible to the eye.

Before landing, I had the men substitute soft bullets for the steel-jacketed projectiles with which their belts and magazines were filled. Thus equipped, we felt upon more even terms with the tigers, but there was no sign of the tigers, and I decided that they must be confined to the mainland.

After eating, we set out in search of fuel, leaving Taylor to guard the launch. For some reason I could not trust Snider alone. I knew that he looked with disapproval upon my plan to visit England, and I did not know but what at his first opportunity, he might desert us, taking the launch with him, and attempt to return to Pan-America.

That he would be fool enough to venture it, I did not doubt.

We had gone inland for a mile or more, and were passing through a park-like wood, when we came suddenly upon the first human beings we had seen since we sighted the English coast.

There were a score of men in the party. Hairy, half-naked men they were, resting in the shade of a great tree. At the first sight of us they sprang to their feet with wild yells, seizing long spears that had lain beside them as they rested.

For a matter of fifty yards they ran from us as rapidly as they could, and then they turned and surveyed us for a moment. Evidently emboldened by the scarcity of our numbers, they commenced to advance upon us, brandishing their spears and shouting horribly.

They were short and muscular of build, with long hair and beards tangled and matted with filth. Their heads, however, were shapely, and their eyes, though fierce and warlike, were intelligent.

Appreciation of these physical attributes came later, of course, when I had better opportunity to study the men at close range and under circumstances less fraught with danger and excitement. At the moment I saw, and with unmixed wonder, only a score of wild savages charging down upon us, where I had expected to find a community of civilized and enlightened people.

Each of us was armed with rifle, revolver, and cutlass, but as we stood shoulder to shoulder facing the wild men I was loath to give the command to fire upon them, inflicting death or suffering upon strangers with whom we had no quarrel, and so I attempted to restrain them for the moment that we might parley with them.

To this end I raised my left hand above my head with the palm toward them as the most natural gesture indicative of peaceful intentions which occurred to me. At the same time I called aloud to them that we were friends, though, from their appearance, there was nothing to indicate that they might understand Pan-American, or ancient English, which are of course practically identical.

At my gesture and words they ceased their shouting and came to a halt a few paces from us. Then, in deep tones, one who was in advance of the others and whom I took to be the chief or leader of the party replied in a tongue which while intelligible to us, was so distorted from the English language from which it evidently had sprung, that it was with difficulty that we interpreted it.

"Who are you," he asked, "and from what country?"

I told him that we were from Pan-America, but he only shook his head and asked where that was. He had never heard of it, or of the Atlantic Ocean which I told him separated his country from mine.

"It has been two hundred years," I told him, "since a Pan-American visited England."

"England?" he asked. "What is England?"

"Why this is a part of England!" I exclaimed.

"This is Grubitten," he assured me. "I know nothing about England, and I have lived here all my life."

It was not until long after that the derivation of Grubitten occurred to me. Unquestionably it is a corruption of Great Britain, a name formerly given to the large island comprising England, Scotland and Wales. Subsequently we heard it pronounced Grabrittin and Grubritten.

I then asked the fellow if he could direct us to Ryde or Newport; but again he shook his head, and said that he never had heard of such countries. And when I asked him if there were any cities in this country he did not know what I meant, never having heard the word cities.

I explained my meaning as best I could by stating that by city I referred to a place where many people lived together in houses.

"Oh," he exclaimed, "you mean a camp! Yes, there are two great camps here, East Camp and West Camp. We are from East Camp."

The use of the word camp to describe a collection of habitations naturally suggested war to me, and my next question was as to whether the war was over, and who had been victorious.

"No," he replied to this question. "The war is not yet over. But it soon will be, and it will end, as it always does, with the Westenders running away. We, the Eastenders, are always victorious."

"No," I said, seeing that he referred to the petty tribal wars of his little island, "I mean the Great War, the war with Germany. Is it ended--and who was victorious?"

He shook his head impatiently.

"I never heard," he said, "of any of these strange countries of which you speak."

It seemed incredible, and yet it was true. These people living at the very seat of the Great War knew nothing of it, though but two centuries had passed since, to our knowledge, it had been running in the height of its titanic frightfulness all about them, and to us upon the far side of the Atlantic still was a subject of keen interest.

Here was a lifelong inhabitant of the Isle of Wight who never had heard of either Germany or England! I turned to him quite suddenly with a new question.

"What people live upon the mainland?" I asked, and pointed in the direction of the Hants coast.

"No one lives there," he replied.

"Long ago, it is said, my people dwelt across the waters upon that other land; but the wild beasts devoured them in such numbers that finally they were driven here, paddling across upon logs and driftwood, nor has any dared return since, because of the frightful creatures which dwell in that horrid country."

"Do no other peoples ever come to your country in ships?" I asked.

He never heard the word ship before, and did not know its meaning. But he assured me that until we came he had thought that there were no other peoples

in the world other than the Grubittens, who consist of the Eastenders and the Westenders of the ancient Isle of Wight.

Assured that we were inclined to friendliness, our new acquaintances led us to their village, or, as they call it, camp. There we found a thousand people, perhaps, dwelling in rude shelters, and living upon the fruits of the chase and such sea food as is obtainable close to shore, for they had no boats, nor any knowledge of such things.

Their weapons were most primitive, consisting of rude spears tipped with pieces of metal pounded roughly into shape. They had no literature, no religion, and recognized no law other than the law of might. They produced fire by striking a bit of flint and steel together, but for the most part they ate their food raw. Marriage is unknown among them, and while they have the word, mother, they did not know what I meant by "father." The males fight for the favor of the females. They practice infanticide, and kill the aged and physically unfit.

The family consists of the mother and the children, the men dwelling sometimes in one hut and sometimes in another. Owing to their bloody duels, they are always numerically inferior to the women, so there is shelter for them all.

We spent several hours in the village, where we were objects of the greatest curiosity. The inhabitants examined our clothing and all our belongings, and asked innumerable questions concerning the strange country from which we had come and the manner of our coming.

I questioned many of them concerning past historical events, but they knew nothing beyond the narrow limits of their island and the savage, primitive life they led there. London they had never heard of, and they assured me that I would find no human beings upon the mainland.

Much saddened by what I had seen, I took my departure from them, and the three of us made our way back to the launch, accompanied by about five hundred men, women, girls, and boys.

As we sailed away, after procuring the necessary ingredients of our chemical fuel, the Grubittens lined the shore in silent wonder at the strange sight of our dainty craft dancing over the sparkling waters, and watched us until we were lost to their sight.