

Chapter 3

When I awoke, it was daylight, and I found Ajor squatting before a fine bed of coals roasting a large piece of antelope-meat. Believe me, the sight of the new day and the delicious odor of the cooking meat filled me with renewed happiness and hope that had been all but expunged by the experience of the previous night; and perhaps the slender figure of the bright-faced girl proved also a potent restorative. She looked up and smiled at me, showing those perfect teeth, and dimpling with evident happiness--the most adorable picture that I had ever seen. I recall that it was then I first regretted that she was only a little untutored savage and so far beneath me in the scale of evolution.

Her first act was to beckon me to follow her outside, and there she pointed to the explanation of our rescue from the bear--a huge saber-tooth tiger, its fine coat and its flesh torn to ribbons, lying dead a few paces from our cave, and beside it, equally mangled, and disemboweled, was the carcass of a huge cave-bear. To have had one's life saved by a saber-tooth tiger, and in the twentieth century into the bargain, was an experience that was to say the least unique; but it had happened--I had the proof of it before my eyes.

So enormous are the great carnivora of Caspak that they must feed perpetually to support their giant thews, and the result is that they will eat the meat of any other creature and will attack anything that comes within their ken, no matter how formidable the quarry. From later observation--I mention this as worthy the attention of paleontologists and naturalists--I came to the conclusion that such creatures as the cave-bear, the cave-lion and the saber-tooth tiger, as well as the larger carnivorous reptiles make, ordinarily, two kills a day--one in the morning and one after night. They immediately devour the entire carcass, after which they lie up and sleep for a few hours. Fortunately their numbers are comparatively few; otherwise there would be no other life within Caspak. It is their very voracity that keeps their numbers down to a point which permits other forms of life to persist, for even in the season of love the great males often turn upon their own mates and devour them, while both males and females occasionally devour their young. How the human and semihuman races have managed to survive during all the countless ages that these conditions must have existed here is quite beyond me.

After breakfast Ajor and I set out once more upon our northward journey. We had gone but a little distance when we were attacked by a number of apelike creatures armed with clubs. They seemed a little higher in the scale than the Alus. Ajor told me they were Bo-lu, or clubmen. A revolver-shot killed one and

scattered the others; but several times later during the day we were menaced by them, until we had left their country and entered that of the Sto-lu, or hatchet-men. These people were less hairy and more man-like; nor did they appear so anxious to destroy us. Rather they were curious, and followed us for some distance examining us most closely. They called out to us, and Ajor answered them; but her replies did not seem to satisfy them, for they gradually became threatening, and I think they were preparing to attack us when a small deer that had been hiding in some low brush suddenly broke cover and dashed across our front. We needed meat, for it was near one o'clock and I was getting hungry; so I drew my pistol and with a single shot dropped the creature in its tracks. The effect upon the Bo-lu was electrical. Immediately they abandoned all thoughts of war, and turning, scampered for the forest which fringed our path.

That night we spent beside a little stream in the Sto-lu country. We found a tiny cave in the rock bank, so hidden away that only chance could direct a beast of prey to it, and after we had eaten of the deer-meat and some fruit which Ajor gathered, we crawled into the little hole, and with sticks and stones which I had gathered for the purpose I erected a strong barricade inside the entrance. Nothing could reach us without swimming and wading through the stream, and I felt quite secure from attack. Our quarters were rather cramped. The ceiling was so low that we could not stand up, and the floor so narrow that it was with difficulty that we both wedged into it together; but we were very tired, and so we made the most of it; and so great was the feeling of security that I am sure I fell asleep as soon as I had stretched myself beside Ajor.

During the three days which followed, our progress was exasperatingly slow. I doubt if we made ten miles in the entire three days. The country was hideously savage, so that we were forced to spend hours at a time in hiding from one or another of the great beasts which menaced us continually. There were fewer reptiles; but the quantity of carnivora seemed to have increased, and the reptiles that we did see were perfectly gigantic. I shall never forget one enormous specimen which we came upon browsing upon water-reeds at the edge of the great sea. It stood well over twelve feet high at the rump, its highest point, and with its enormously long tail and neck it was somewhere between seventy-five and a hundred feet in length. Its head was ridiculously small; its body was unarmored, but its great bulk gave it a most formidable appearance. My experience of Caspakian life led me to believe that the gigantic creature would but have to see us to attack us, and so I raised my rifle and at the same time drew away toward some brush which offered concealment; but Ajor only laughed, and picking up a stick, ran toward the great thing, shouting. The little head was raised high upon the long neck as the animal stupidly looked here and there in search of the author of the disturbance. At last its eyes discovered tiny little Ajor,

and then she hurled the stick at the diminutive head. With a cry that sounded not unlike the bleat of a sheep, the colossal creature shuffled into the water and was soon submerged.

As I slowly recalled my collegiate studies and paleontological readings in Bowen's textbooks, I realized that I had looked upon nothing less than a diplodocus of the Upper Jurassic; but how infinitely different was the true, live thing from the crude restorations of Hatcher and Holland! I had had the idea that the diplodocus was a land-animal, but evidently it is partially amphibious. I have seen several since my first encounter, and in each case the creature took to the sea for concealment as soon as it was disturbed. With the exception of its gigantic tail, it has no weapon of defense; but with this appendage it can lash so terrific a blow as to lay low even a giant cave-bear, stunned and broken. It is a stupid, simple, gentle beast--one of the few within Caspak which such a description might even remotely fit.

For three nights we slept in trees, finding no caves or other places of concealment. Here we were free from the attacks of the large land carnivora; but the smaller flying reptiles, the snakes, leopards, and panthers were a constant menace, though by no means as much to be feared as the huge beasts that roamed the surface of the earth.

At the close of the third day Ajour and I were able to converse with considerable fluency, and it was a great relief to both of us, especially to Ajour. She now did nothing but ask questions whenever I would let her, which could not be all the time, as our preservation depended largely upon the rapidity with which I could gain knowledge of the geography and customs of Caspak, and accordingly I had to ask numerous questions myself.

I enjoyed immensely hearing and answering her, so naive were many of her queries and so filled with wonder was she at the things I told her of the world beyond the lofty barriers of Caspak; not once did she seem to doubt me, however marvelous my statements must have seemed; and doubtless they were the cause of marvel to Ajour, who before had never dreamed that any life existed beyond Caspak and the life she knew.

Artless though many of her questions were, they evidenced a keen intellect and a shrewdness which seemed far beyond her years of her experience. Altogether I was finding my little savage a mighty interesting and companionable person, and I often thanked the kind fate that directed the crossing of our paths. From her I learned much of Caspak, but there still remained the mystery that had proved so baffling to Bowen Tyler--the total absence of young among the ape, the semihuman and the human races with which both he and I had come in contact

upon opposite shores of the inland sea. Ajor tried to explain the matter to me, though it was apparent that she could not conceive how so natural a condition should demand explanation. She told me that among the Galus there were a few babies, that she had once been a baby but that most of her people "came up," as he put it, "cor sva jo," or literally, "from the beginning"; and as they all did when they used that phrase, she would wave a broad gesture toward the south.

"For long," she explained, leaning very close to me and whispering the words into my ear while she cast apprehensive glances about and mostly skyward, "for long my mother kept me hidden lest the Wieroo, passing through the air by night, should come and take me away to Oo-oh." And the child shuddered as she voiced the word. I tried to get her to tell me more; but her terror was so real when she spoke of the Wieroo and the land of Oo-oh where they dwell that I at last desisted, though I did learn that the Wieroo carried off only female babes and occasionally women of the Galus who had "come up from the beginning." It was all very mysterious and unfathomable, but I got the idea that the Wieroo were creatures of imagination--the demons or gods of her race, omniscient and omnipresent. This led me to assume that the Galus had a religious sense, and further questioning brought out the fact that such was the case. Ajor spoke in tones of reverence of Luata, the god of heat and life. The word is derived from two others: Lua, meaning sun, and ata, meaning variously eggs, life, young, and reproduction. She told me that they worshiped Luata in several forms, as fire, the sun, eggs and other material objects which suggested heat and reproduction.

I had noticed that whenever I built a fire, Ajor outlined in the air before her with a forefinger an isosceles triangle, and that she did the same in the morning when she first viewed the sun. At first I had not connected her act with anything in particular, but after we learned to converse and she had explained a little of her religious superstitions, I realized that she was making the sign of the triangle as a Roman Catholic makes the sign of the cross. Always the short side of the triangle was uppermost. As she explained all this to me, she pointed to the decorations on her golden armlets, upon the knob of her dagger-hilt and upon the band which encircled her right leg above the knee--always was the design partly made up of isosceles triangles, and when she explained the significance of this particular geometric figure, I at once grasped its appropriateness.

We were now in the country of the Band-lu, the spearmen of Caspak. Bowen had remarked in his narrative that these people were analogous to the so-called Cro-Magnon race of the Upper Paleolithic, and I was therefore very anxious to see them. Nor was I to be disappointed; I saw them, all right! We had left the Sto-lu country and literally fought our way through cordons of wild beasts for two days when we decided to make camp a little earlier than usual, owing to the fact that

we had reached a line of cliffs running east and west in which were numerous likely cave-lodgings. We were both very tired, and the sight of these caverns, several of which could be easily barricaded, decided us to halt until the following morning. It took but a few minutes' exploration to discover one particular cavern high up the face of the cliff which seemed ideal for our purpose. It opened upon a narrow ledge where we could build our cook-fire; the opening was so small that we had to lie flat and wriggle through it to gain ingress, while the interior was high-ceiled and spacious. I lighted a faggot and looked about; but as far as I could see, the chamber ran back into the cliff.

Laying aside my rifle, pistol and heavy ammunition-belt, I left Ajor in the cave while I went down to gather firewood. We already had meat and fruits which we had gathered just before reaching the cliffs, and my canteen was filled with fresh water. Therefore, all we required was fuel, and as I always saved Ajor's strength when I could, I would not permit her to accompany me. The poor girl was very tired; but she would have gone with me until she dropped, I know, so loyal was she. She was the best comrade in the world, and sometimes I regretted and sometimes I was glad that she was not of my own caste, for had she been, I should unquestionably have fallen in love with her. As it was, we traveled together like two boys, with huge respect for each other but no softer sentiment.

There was little timber close to the base of the cliffs, and so I was forced to enter the wood some two hundred yards distant. I realize now how foolhardy was my act in such a land as Caspak, teeming with danger and with death; but there is a certain amount of fool in every man; and whatever proportion of it I own must have been in the ascendant that day, for the truth of the matter is that I went down into those woods absolutely defenseless; and I paid the price, as people usually do for their indiscretions. As I searched around in the brush for likely pieces of firewood, my head bowed and my eyes upon the ground, I suddenly felt a great weight hurl itself upon me. I struggled to my knees and seized my assailant, a huge, naked man--naked except for a breechcloth of snakeskin, the head hanging down to the knees. The fellow was armed with a stone-shod spear, a stone knife and a hatchet. In his black hair were several gay-colored feathers. As we struggled to and fro, I was slowly gaining advantage of him, when a score of his fellows came running up and overpowered me.

They bound my hands behind me with long rawhide thongs and then surveyed me critically. I found them fine-looking specimens of manhood, for the most part. There were some among them who bore a resemblance to the Sto-lu and were hairy; but the majority had massive heads and not unlovely features. There was little about them to suggest the ape, as in the Sto-lu, Bo-lu and Alus. I expected

them to kill me at once, but they did not. Instead they questioned me; but it was evident that they did not believe my story, for they scoffed and laughed.

"The Galus have turned you out," they cried. "If you go back to them, you will die. If you remain here, you will die. We shall kill you; but first we shall have a dance and you shall dance with us--the dance of death."

It sounded quite reassuring! But I knew that I was not to be killed immediately, and so I took heart. They led me toward the cliffs, and as we approached them, I glanced up and was sure that I saw Ajor's bright eyes peering down upon us from our lofty cave; but she gave no sign if she saw me; and we passed on, rounded the end of the cliffs and proceeded along the opposite face of them until we came to a section literally honeycombed with caves. All about, upon the ground and swarming the ledges before the entrances, were hundreds of members of the tribe. There were many women but no babes or children, though I noticed that the females had better developed breasts than any that I had seen among the hatchet-men, the club-men, the Alus or the apes. In fact, among the lower orders of Caspakian man the female breast is but a rudimentary organ, barely suggested in the apes and Alus, and only a little more defined in the Bo-lu and Sto-lu, though always increasingly so until it is found about half developed in the females of the spear-men; yet never was there an indication that the females had suckled young; nor were there any young among them. Some of the Band-lu women were quite comely. The figures of all, both men and women, were symmetrical though heavy, and though there were some who verged strongly upon the Sto-lu type, there were others who were positively handsome and whose bodies were quite hairless. The Alus are all bearded, but among the Bo-lu the beard disappears in the women. The Sto-lu men show a sparse beard, the Band-lu none; and there is little hair upon the bodies of their women.

The members of the tribe showed great interest in me, especially in my clothing, the like of which, of course, they never had seen. They pulled and hauled upon me, and some of them struck me; but for the most part they were not inclined to brutality. It was only the hairier ones, who most closely resembled the Sto-lu, who maltreated me. At last my captors led me into a great cave in the mouth of which a fire was burning. The floor was littered with filth, including the bones of many animals, and the atmosphere reeked with the stench of human bodies and putrefying flesh. Here they fed me, releasing my arms, and I ate of half-cooked aurochs steak and a stew which may have been made of snakes, for many of the long, round pieces of meat suggested them most nauseatingly.

The meal completed, they led me well within the cavern, which they lighted with torches stuck in various crevices in the light of which I saw, to my astonishment, that the walls were covered with paintings and etchings. There were aurochs, red

deer, saber-tooth tiger, cave-bear, hyaenadon and many other examples of the fauna of Caspak done in colors, usually of four shades of brown, or scratched upon the surface of the rock. Often they were super-imposed upon each other until it required careful examination to trace out the various outlines. But they all showed a rather remarkable aptitude for delineation which further fortified Bowen's comparisons between these people and the extinct Cro-Magnons whose ancient art is still preserved in the caverns of Niaux and Le Portel. The Band-lu, however, did not have the bow and arrow, and in this respect they differ from their extinct progenitors, or descendants, of Western Europe.

Should any of my friends chance to read the story of my adventures upon Caprona, I hope they will not be bored by these diversions, and if they are, I can only say that I am writing my memoirs for my own edification and therefore setting down those things which interested me particularly at the time. I have no desire that the general public should ever have access to these pages; but it is possible that my friends may, and also certain savants who are interested; and to them, while I do not apologize for my philosophizing, I humbly explain that they are witnessing the groupings of a finite mind after the infinite, the search for explanations of the inexplicable.

In a far recess of the cavern my captors bade me halt. Again my hands were secured, and this time my feet as well. During the operation they questioned me, and I was mighty glad that the marked similarity between the various tribal tongues of Caspak enabled us to understand each other perfectly, even though they were unable to believe or even to comprehend the truth of my origin and the circumstances of my advent in Caspak; and finally they left me saying that they would come for me before the dance of death upon the morrow. Before they departed with their torches, I saw that I had not been conducted to the farthest extremity of the cavern, for a dark and gloomy corridor led beyond my prison room into the heart of the cliff.

I could not but marvel at the immensity of this great underground grotto. Already I had traversed several hundred yards of it, from many points of which other corridors diverged. The whole cliff must be honeycombed with apartments and passages of which this community occupied but a comparatively small part, so that the possibility of the more remote passages being the lair of savage beasts that have other means of ingress and egress than that used by the Band-lu filled me with dire forebodings.

I believe that I am not ordinarily hysterically apprehensive; yet I must confess that under the conditions with which I was confronted, I felt my nerves to be somewhat shaken. On the morrow I was to die some sort of nameless death for the diversion of a savage horde, but the morrow held fewer terrors for me than

the present, and I submit to any fair-minded man if it is not a terrifying thing to lie bound hand and foot in the Stygian blackness of an immense cave peopled by unknown dangers in a land overrun by hideous beasts and reptiles of the greatest ferocity. At any moment, perhaps at this very moment, some silent-footed beast of prey might catch my scent where it laired in some contiguous passage, and might creep stealthily upon me. I craned my neck about, and stared through the inky darkness for the twin spots of blazing hate which I knew would herald the coming of my executioner. So real were the imaginings of my overwrought brain that I broke into a cold sweat in absolute conviction that some beast was close before me; yet the hours dragged, and no sound broke the grave-like stillness of the cavern.

During that period of eternity many events of my life passed before my mental vision, a vast parade of friends and occurrences which would be blotted out forever on the morrow. I cursed myself for the foolish act which had taken me from the search-party that so depended upon me, and I wondered what progress, if any, they had made. Were they still beyond the barrier cliffs, awaiting my return? Or had they found a way into Caspak? I felt that the latter would be the truth, for the party was not made up of men easily turned from a purpose. Quite probable it was that they were already searching for me; but that they would ever find a trace of me I doubted. Long since, had I come to the conclusion that it was beyond human prowess to circle the shores of the inland sea of Caspak in the face of the myriad menaces which lurked in every shadow by day and by night. Long since, had I given up any hope of reaching the point where I had made my entry into the country, and so I was now equally convinced that our entire expedition had been worse than futile before ever it was conceived, since Bowen J. Tyler and his wife could not by any possibility have survived during all these long months; no more could Bradley and his party of seamen be yet in existence. If the superior force and equipment of my party enabled them to circle the north end of the sea, they might some day come upon the broken wreck of my plane hanging in the great tree to the south; but long before that, my bones would be added to the litter upon the floor of this mighty cavern.

And through all my thoughts, real and fanciful, moved the image of a perfect girl, clear-eyed and strong and straight and beautiful, with the carriage of a queen and the supple, undulating grace of a leopard. Though I loved my friends, their fate seemed of less importance to me than the fate of this little barbarian stranger for whom, I had convinced myself many a time, I felt no greater sentiment than passing friendship for a fellow-wayfarer in this land of horrors. Yet I so worried and fretted about her and her future that at last I quite forgot my own predicament, though I still struggled intermittently with bonds in vain endeavor to free myself; as much, however, that I might hasten to her protection as that I

might escape the fate which had been planned for me. And while I was thus engaged and had for the moment forgotten my apprehensions concerning prowling beasts, I was startled into tense silence by a distinct and unmistakable sound coming from the dark corridor farther toward the heart of the cliff--the sound of padded feet moving stealthily in my direction.

I believe that never before in all my life, even amidst the terrors of childhood nights, have I suffered such a sensation of extreme horror as I did that moment in which I realized that I must lie bound and helpless while some horrid beast of prey crept upon me to devour me in that utter darkness of the Bandlu pits of Caspak. I reeked with cold sweat, and my flesh crawled--I could feel it crawl. If ever I came nearer to abject cowardice, I do not recall the instance; and yet it was not that I was afraid to die, for I had long since given myself up as lost--a few days of Caspak must impress anyone with the utter nothingness of life. The waters, the land, the air teem with it, and always it is being devoured by some other form of life. Life is the cheapest thing in Caspak, as it is the cheapest thing on earth and, doubtless, the cheapest cosmic production. No, I was not afraid to die; in fact, I prayed for death, that I might be relieved of the frightfulness of the interval of life which remained to me--the waiting, the awful waiting, for that fearsome beast to reach me and to strike.

Presently it was so close that I could hear its breathing, and then it touched me and leaped quickly back as though it had come upon me unexpectedly. For long moments no sound broke the sepulchral silence of the cave. Then I heard a movement on the part of the creature near me, and again it touched me, and I felt something like a hairless hand pass over my face and down until it touched the collar of my flannel shirt. And then, subdued, but filled with pent emotion, a voice cried: "Tom!"

I think I nearly fainted, so great was the reaction. "Ayor!" I managed to say. "Ayor, my girl, can it be you?"

"Oh, Tom!" she cried again in a trembly little voice and flung herself upon me, sobbing softly. I had not known that Ayor could cry.

As she cut away my bonds, she told me that from the entrance to our cave she had seen the Band-lu coming out of the forest with me, and she had followed until they took me into the cave, which she had seen was upon the opposite side of the cliff in which ours was located; and then, knowing that she could do nothing for me until after the Band-lu slept, she had hastened to return to our cave. With difficulty she had reached it, after having been stalked by a cave-lion and almost seized. I trembled at the risk she had run.

It had been her intention to wait until after midnight, when most of the carnivora would have made their kills, and then attempt to reach the cave in which I was imprisoned and rescue me. She explained that with my rifle and pistol--both of which she assured me she could use, having watched me so many times--she planned upon frightening the Band-lu and forcing them to give me up. Brave little girl! She would have risked her life willingly to save me. But some time after she reached our cave she heard voices from the far recesses within, and immediately concluded that we had but found another entrance to the caves which the Band-lu occupied upon the other face of the cliff. Then she had set out through those winding passages and in total darkness had groped her way, guided solely by a marvelous sense of direction, to where I lay. She had had to proceed with utmost caution lest she fall into some abyss in the darkness and in truth she had thrice come upon sheer drops and had been forced to take the most frightful risks to pass them. I shudder even now as I contemplate what this girl passed through for my sake and how she enhanced her peril in loading herself down with the weight of my arms and ammunition and the awkwardness of the long rifle which she was unaccustomed to bearing.

I could have knelt and kissed her hand in reverence and gratitude; nor am I ashamed to say that that is precisely what I did after I had been freed from my bonds and heard the story of her trials. Brave little Ajor! Wonder-girl out of the dim, unthinkable past! Never before had she been kissed; but she seemed to sense something of the meaning of the new caress, for she leaned forward in the dark and pressed her own lips to my forehead. A sudden urge surged through me to seize her and strain her to my bosom and cover her hot young lips with the kisses of a real love, but I did not do so, for I knew that I did not love her; and to have kissed her thus, with passion, would have been to inflict a great wrong upon her who had offered her life for mine.

No, Ajor should be as safe with me as with her own mother, if she had one, which I was inclined to doubt, even though she told me that she had once been a babe and hidden by her mother. I had come to doubt if there was such a thing as a mother in Caspak, a mother such as we know. From the Bo-lu to the Kro-lu there is no word which corresponds with our word mother. They speak of ata and cor sva jo:, meaning reproduction and from the beginning, and point toward the south; but no one has a mother.

After considerable difficulty we gained what we thought was our cave, only to find that it was not, and then we realized that we were lost in the labyrinthine mazes of the great cavern. We retraced our steps and sought the point from which we had started, but only succeeded in losing ourselves the more. Ajor was aghast--not so much from fear of our predicament; but that she should have failed in the

functioning of that wonderful sense she possessed in common with most other creatures Caspakian, which makes it possible for them to move unerringly from place to place without compass or guide.

Hand in hand we crept along, searching for an opening into the outer world, yet realizing that at each step we might be burrowing more deeply into the heart of the great cliff, or circling futilely in the vague wandering that could end only in death. And the darkness! It was almost palpable, and utterly depressing. I had matches, and in some of the more difficult places I struck one; but we couldn't afford to waste them, and so we groped our way slowly along, doing the best we could to keep to one general direction in the hope that it would eventually lead us to an opening into the outer world. When I struck matches, I noticed that the walls bore no paintings; nor was there other sign that man had penetrated this far within the cliff, nor any spoor of animals of other kinds.

It would be difficult to guess at the time we spent wandering through those black corridors, climbing steep ascents, feeling our way along the edges of bottomless pits, never knowing at what moment we might be plunged into some abyss and always haunted by the ever-present terror of death by starvation and thirst. As difficult as it was, I still realized that it might have been infinitely worse had I had another companion than Ajor--courageous, uncomplaining, loyal little Ajor! She was tired and hungry and thirsty, and she must have been discouraged; but she never faltered in her cheerfulness. I asked her if she was afraid, and she replied that here the Wieroo could not get her, and that if she died of hunger, she would at least die with me and she was quite content that such should be her end. At the time I attributed her attitude to something akin to a doglike devotion to a new master who had been kind to her. I can take oath to the fact that I did not think it was anything more.

Whether we had been imprisoned in the cliff for a day or a week I could not say; nor even now do I know. We became very tired and hungry; the hours dragged; we slept at least twice, and then we rose and stumbled on, always weaker and weaker. There were ages during which the trend of the corridors was always upward. It was heartbreaking work for people in the state of exhaustion in which we then were, but we clung tenaciously to it. We stumbled and fell; we sank through pure physical inability to retain our feet; but always we managed to rise at last and go on. At first, wherever it had been possible, we had walked hand in hand lest we become separated, and later, when I saw that Ajor was weakening rapidly, we went side by side, I supporting her with an arm about her waist. I still retained the heavy burden of my armament; but with the rifle slung to my back, my hands were free. When I too showed indisputable evidences of exhaustion, Ajor suggested that I lay aside my arms and ammunition; but I told

her that as it would mean certain death for me to traverse Caspak without them, I might as well take the chance of dying here in the cave with them, for there was the other chance that we might find our way to liberty.

There came a time when Ajor could no longer walk, and then it was that I picked her up in my arms and carried her. She begged me to leave her, saying that after I found an exit, I could come back and get her; but she knew, and she knew that I knew, that if ever I did leave her, I could never find her again. Yet she insisted. Barely had I sufficient strength to take a score of steps at a time; then I would have to sink down and rest for five to ten minutes. I don't know what force urged me on and kept me going in the face of an absolute conviction that my efforts were utterly futile. I counted us already as good as dead; but still I dragged myself along until the time came that I could no longer rise, but could only crawl along a few inches at a time, dragging Ajor beside me. Her sweet voice, now almost inaudible from weakness, implored me to abandon her and save myself-- she seemed to think only of me. Of course I couldn't have left her there alone, no matter how much I might have desired to do so; but the fact of the matter was that I didn't desire to leave her. What I said to her then came very simply and naturally to my lips. It couldn't very well have been otherwise, I imagine, for with death so close, I doubt if people are much inclined to heroics. "I would rather not get out at all, Ajor," I said to her, "than to get out without you." We were resting against a rocky wall, and Ajor was leaning against me, her head on my breast. I could feel her press closer to me, and one hand stroked my arm in a weak caress; but she didn't say anything, nor were words necessary.

After a few minutes' more rest, we started on again upon our utterly hopeless way; but I soon realized that I was weakening rapidly, and presently I was forced to admit that I was through. "It's no use, Ajor," I said, "I've come as far as I can. It may be that if I sleep, I can go on again after," but I knew that that was not true, and that the end was near. "Yes, sleep," said Ajor. "We will sleep together-- forever."

She crept close to me as I lay on the hard floor and pillowed her head upon my arm. With the little strength which remained to me, I drew her up until our lips touched, and, then I whispered: "Good-bye!" I must have lost consciousness almost immediately, for I recall nothing more until I suddenly awoke out of a troubled sleep, during which I dreamed that I was drowning, to find the cave lighted by what appeared to be diffused daylight, and a tiny trickle of water running down the corridor and forming a puddle in the little depression in which it chanced that Ajor and I lay. I turned my eyes quickly upon Ajor, fearful for what the light might disclose; but she still breathed, though very faintly. Then I searched about for an explanation of the light, and soon discovered that it came

from about a bend in the corridor just ahead of us and at the top of a steep incline; and instantly I realized that Ajor and I had stumbled by night almost to the portal of salvation. Had chance taken us a few yards further, up either of the corridors which diverged from ours just ahead of us, we might have been irrevocably lost; we might still be lost; but at least we could die in the light of day, out of the horrid blackness of this terrible cave.

I tried to rise, and found that sleep had given me back a portion of my strength; and then I tasted the water and was further refreshed. I shook Ajor gently by the shoulder; but she did not open her eyes, and then I gathered a few drops of water in my cupped palm and let them trickle between her lips. This revived her so that she raised her lids, and when she saw me, she smiled.

"What happened?" she asked. "Where are we?"

"We are at the end of the corridor," I replied, "and daylight is coming in from the outside world just ahead. We are saved, Ajor!"

She sat up then and looked about, and then, quite womanlike, she burst into tears. It was the reaction, of course; and then too, she was very weak. I took her in my arms and quieted her as best I could, and finally, with my help, she got to her feet; for she, as well as I, had found some slight recuperation in sleep. Together we staggered upward toward the light, and at the first turn we saw an opening a few yards ahead of us and a leaden sky beyond--a leaden sky from which was falling a drizzling rain, the author of our little, trickling stream which had given us drink when we were most in need of it.

The cave had been damp and cold; but as we crawled through the aperture, the muggy warmth of the Caspakian air caressed and confronted us; even the rain was warmer than the atmosphere of those dark corridors. We had water now, and warmth, and I was sure that Caspak would soon offer us meat or fruit; but as we came to where we could look about, we saw that we were upon the summit of the cliffs, where there seemed little reason to expect game. However, there were trees, and among them we soon descried edible fruits with which we broke our long fast.