

Chapter 7

October 8, 1916: This is the last entry I shall make upon my manuscript. When this is done, I shall be through. Though I may pray that it reaches the haunts of civilized man, my better judgment tells me that it will never be perused by other eyes than mine, and that even though it should, it would be too late to avail me. I am alone upon the summit of the great cliff overlooking the broad Pacific. A chill south wind bites at my marrow, while far below me I can see the tropic foliage of Caspak on the one hand and huge icebergs from the near Antarctic upon the other. Presently I shall stuff my folded manuscript into the thermos bottle I have carried with me for the purpose since I left the fort--Fort Dinosaur we named it--and hurl it far outward over the cliff-top into the Pacific. What current washes the shore of Caprona I know not; whither my bottle will be borne I cannot even guess; but I have done all that mortal man may do to notify the world of my whereabouts and the dangers that threaten those of us who remain alive in Caspak--if there be any other than myself.

About the 8th of September I accompanied Olson and von Schoenvorts to the oil-geyser. Lys came with us, and we took a number of things which von Schoenvorts wanted for the purpose of erecting a crude refinery. We went up the coast some ten or twelve miles in the U-33, tying up to shore near the mouth of a small stream which emptied great volumes of crude oil into the sea--I find it difficult to call this great lake by any other name. Then we disembarked and went inland about five miles, where we came upon a small lake entirely filled with oil, from the center of which a geyser of oil spouted.

On the edge of the lake we helped von Schoenvorts build his primitive refinery. We worked with him for two days until he got things fairly well started, and then we returned to Fort Dinosaur, as I feared that Bradley might return and be worried by our absence. The U-33 merely landed those of us that were to return to the fort and then retraced its course toward the oil-well. Olson, Whitely, Wilson, Miss La Rue, and myself disembarked, while von Schoenvorts and his German crew returned to refine the oil. The next day Plesser and two other Germans came down overland for ammunition. Plesser said they had been attacked by wild men and had exhausted a great deal of ammunition. He also asked permission to get some dried meat and maize, saying that they were so busy with the work of refining that they had no time to hunt. I let him have everything he asked for, and never once did a suspicion of their intentions enter my mind. They returned to the oil-well the same day, while we continued with the multitudinous duties of camp life.

For three days nothing of moment occurred. Bradley did not return; nor did we have any word from von Schoenvorts. In the evening Lys and I went up into one of the bastion towers and listened to the grim and terrible nightlife of the frightful ages of the past. Once a saber-tooth screamed almost beneath us, and the girl shrank close against me. As I felt her body against mine, all the pent love of these three long months shattered the bonds of timidity and conviction, and I swept her up into my arms and covered her face and lips with kisses. She did not struggle to free herself; but instead her dear arms crept up about my neck and drew my own face even closer to hers.

"You love me, Lys?" I cried.

I felt her head nod an affirmative against my breast. "Tell me, Lys," I begged, "tell me in words how much you love me."

Low and sweet and tender came the answer: "I love you beyond all conception."

My heart filled with rapture then, and it fills now as it has each of the countless times I have recalled those dear words, as it shall fill always until death has claimed me. I may never see her again; she may not know how I love her--she may question, she may doubt; but always true and steady, and warm with the fires of love my heart beats for the girl who said that night: "I love you beyond all conception."

For a long time we sat there upon the little bench constructed for the sentry that we had not as yet thought it necessary to post in more than one of the four towers. We learned to know one another better in those two brief hours than we had in all the months that had intervened since we had been thrown together. She told me that she had loved me from the first, and that she never had loved von Schoenvorts, their engagement having been arranged by her aunt for social reasons.

That was the happiest evening of my life; nor ever do I expect to experience its like; but at last, as is the way of happiness, it terminated. We descended to the compound, and I walked with Lys to the door of her quarters. There again she kissed me and bade me good night, and then she went in and closed the door.

I went to my own room, and there I sat by the light of one of the crude candles we had made from the tallow of the beasts we had killed, and lived over the events of the evening. At last I turned in and fell asleep, dreaming happy dreams and planning for the future, for even in savage Caspak I was bound to make my girl safe and happy. It was daylight when I awoke. Wilson, who was acting as cook, was up and astir at his duties in the cook-house. The others slept; but I arose and followed by Nobs went down to the stream for a plunge. As was our custom,

I went armed with both rifle and revolver; but I stripped and had my swim without further disturbance than the approach of a large hyena, a number of which occupied caves in the sand-stone cliffs north of the camp. These brutes are enormous and exceedingly ferocious. I imagine they correspond with the cave-hyena of prehistoric times. This fellow charged Nobs, whose Capronian experiences had taught him that discretion is the better part of valor--with the result that he dived head foremost into the stream beside me after giving vent to a series of ferocious growls which had no more effect upon *Hyaena spelaeus* than might a sweet smile upon an enraged tusker. Afterward I shot the beast, and Nobs had a feast while I dressed, for he had become quite a raw-meat eater during our numerous hunting expeditions, upon which we always gave him a portion of the kill.

Whitely and Olson were up and dressed when we returned, and we all sat down to a good breakfast. I could not but wonder at Lys' absence from the table, for she had always been one of the earliest risers in camp; so about nine o'clock, becoming apprehensive lest she might be indisposed, I went to the door of her room and knocked. I received no response, though I finally pounded with all my strength; then I turned the knob and entered, only to find that she was not there. Her bed had been occupied, and her clothing lay where she had placed it the previous night upon retiring; but Lys was gone. To say that I was distracted with terror would be to put it mildly. Though I knew she could not be in camp, I searched every square inch of the compound and all the buildings, yet without avail.

It was Whitely who discovered the first clue--a huge human-like footprint in the soft earth beside the spring, and indications of a struggle in the mud.

Then I found a tiny handkerchief close to the outer wall. Lys had been stolen! It was all too plain. Some hideous member of the ape-man tribe had entered the fort and carried her off. While I stood stunned and horrified at the frightful evidence before me, there came from the direction of the great lake an increasing sound that rose to the volume of a shriek. We all looked up as the noise approached apparently just above us, and a moment later there followed a terrific explosion which hurled us to the ground. When we clambered to our feet, we saw a large section of the west wall torn and shattered. It was Olson who first recovered from his daze sufficiently to guess the explanation of the phenomenon.

"A shell!" he cried. "And there ain't no shells in Caspak besides what's on the U-33. The dirty boches are shellin' the fort. Come on!" And he grasped his rifle and started on a run toward the lake. It was over two miles, but we did not pause until the harbor was in view, and still we could not see the lake because of the sandstone cliffs which intervened. We ran as fast as we could around the lower

end of the harbor, scrambled up the cliffs and at last stood upon their summit in full view of the lake. Far away down the coast, toward the river through which we had come to reach the lake, we saw upon the surface the outline of the U-33, black smoke vomiting from her funnel.

Von Schoenvorts had succeeded in refining the oil! The cur had broken his every pledge and was leaving us there to our fates. He had even shelled the fort as a parting compliment; nor could anything have been more truly Prussian than this leave-taking of the Baron Friedrich von Schoenvorts.

Olson, Whitely, Wilson, and I stood for a moment looking at one another. It seemed incredible that man could be so perfidious--that we had really seen with our own eyes the thing that we had seen; but when we returned to the fort, the shattered wall gave us ample evidence that there was no mistake.

Then we began to speculate as to whether it had been an ape-man or a Prussian that had abducted Lys. From what we knew of von Schoenvorts, we would not have been surprised at anything from him; but the footprints by the spring seemed indisputable evidence that one of Caprona's undeveloped men had borne off the girl I loved.

As soon as I had assured myself that such was the case, I made my preparations to follow and rescue her. Olson, Whitely, and Wilson each wished to accompany me; but I told them that they were needed here, since with Bradley's party still absent and the Germans gone it was necessary that we conserve our force as far as might be possible.