

H. Rider Haggard

Allan and the Ice-Gods

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Allan Quatermain

Генри Райдер Хаггард
Allan and the Ice-Gods

«РИПОЛ Классик»

1927

УДК 82
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This novel is the final volume of the Allan Quatermain saga. Once more Quatermain takes the hallucinogenic taduki drug, as he did in previous novels, and he finds himself reliving as Wi, an civilized man living in the barbaric ice age as part of a clan of cavemen. The novel has been noted as a treatment of the topics of eugenics and evolution in literature and culture.

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Содержание

Chapter 1	6
Chapter 2	13
Chapter 3	19
Chapter 4	25
Chapter 5	33
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	37

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Allan and the Ice-Gods

A tale of beginnings

*A fire mist and a planet, –
A crystal and a cell, –
A jellyfish and a saurian
And caves where the cave men dwell;
Then a sense of law and beauty,
And a face turned from the clod, –
Some call it Evolution And others call it God.*
From “Each In His Own Tongue,” by William Herbert Carruth

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Chapter 1

Allan Refuses a Fortune

Had I the slightest qualification for the task, I, Allan Quatermain, would like to write an essay on Temptation.

This, of course, comes to all, in one shape or another, or at any rate to most, for there are some people so colourless, so invertebrate that they cannot be tempted – or perhaps the subtle powers which surround and direct, or misdirect, us do not think them worth an effort. These cling to any conditions, moral or material, in which they may find themselves, like limpets to a rock; or perhaps float along the stream of circumstance like jellyfish, making no effort to find a path for themselves in either case, and therefore die as they have lived – quite good because nothing has ever moved them to be otherwise – the objects of the approbation of the world, and, let us hope, of Heaven also.

The majority are not so fortunate; something is always egging their living personalities along this or that road of mischief. Materialists will explain to us that this something is but the passions inherited from a thousand generations of unknown progenitors who, departing, left the curse of their blood behind them. I, who am but a simple old fellow, take another view, which, at any rate, is hallowed by many centuries of human opinion. Yes, in this matter, as in sundry others, I put aside all the modern talk and theories and am plumb for the good, old-fashioned, and most efficient Devil as the author of our woes. No one else could suit the lure so exactly to the appetite as that old fisherman in the waters of the human soul, who knows so well how to bait his hooks and change his flies so that they may be attractive not only to all fish but to every mood of each of them.

Well, without going further with the argument, rightly or wrongly, that is my opinion.

Thus, to take a very minor matter – for if the reader thinks that these words are the prelude to telling a tale of murder or other great sins he is mistaken – I believe that it was Satan himself, or, at any rate, one of his agents, who caused my late friend, Lady Ragnall, to bequeath to me the casket of the magical herb called *Taduki*, in connection with which already we had shared certain remarkable adventures.¹

Now, it may be argued that to make use of this *Taduki* and on its wings to be transported, in fact or in imagination, to some far-away state in which one appears for a while to live and move and have one's being is no crime, however rash the proceeding. Nor is it, since, if we can find new roads to knowledge, or even to interesting imaginings, why should we not take them? But to break one's word is a crime, and because of the temptation of this stuff, which, I confess, for me has more allurements than anything else on earth, at any rate, in these latter days, I have broken my word.

For, after a certain experience at Ragnall Castle, did I not swear to myself and before Heaven that no power in the world, not even that of Lady Ragnall herself, would induce me again to inhale those timedissolving fumes and look upon that which, perhaps designedly, is hidden from the eyes of man; namely, revealments of his buried past, or mayhap of his yet unacted future? What do I say? This business is one of dreams – no more; though I think that those dreams are best left unexplored, because they suggest too much and yet leave the soul unsatisfied. Better the ignorance in which we are doomed to wander than these liftings of corners of the veil; than these revelations which excite delirious hopes that, after all, may be but marsh lights which, when they vanish, will leave us in completer blackness.

Now I will get on to the story of my fall; of how it came about and the revelations to which it led, and which I found interesting enough, whatever others may think of them.

¹ See the books *The Ivory Child* and *The Ancient Allan*.

Elsewhere I have told how, years after our joint adventure in to Central Africa, once again I came into touch with the widowed Lady Ragnall and allowed myself to be persuaded in her company to inhale the charmed smoke of the *Taduki* herb, with which she became familiar when, in a state of mental collapse, she fell into the hands of the priests of some strange African faith. Under its influence, the curtain of time seemed to swing aside, and she and I saw ourselves playing great parts as in habitants of Egypt in the days of the Persian domination. In that life, if the tale were true, we had been very intimate, but before this intimacy culminated in actual union, the curtain fell and we reawoke to our modern world.

Next morning, I went away, much confused and very frightened, nor did I ever again set eyes upon the stately and beautiful Lady Ragnall. After all that we had learned or dreamed, I felt that further meetings would be awkward. Also, to tell the truth, I did not like the story of the curse which was said to hang over the man who had to do with her who, in it, was named Amada and filled the role of priestess of Isis, the goddess whom she betrayed, in whatever generation might be born, or perchance reborn. Of course, such ancient maledictions are the merest nonsense. And yet – well, the truth is that in our separate fashions we are all superstitious, and really the fate of Lord Ragnall, who had married this lady, was most unpleasant and suggestive; too much so to encourage anyone else to follow his example. Further, I had come to a time of life when I did not wish for more adventures in which women were mixed up, even in dreams; since such, I have observed, however entrancing at the moment, lead to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward.

Thus it came about that when Lady Ragnall wrote asking me to stay with her – as she did on two subsequent occasions – I put her off with excuses which were perfectly valid, although at this moment I forget what they may have been, it being my firm intention never again to place myself within reach of her beautiful and commanding personality. You see, in that dream we dreamed together, the story came to an end just as I was about to marry the Princess and High Priestess Amada, who was, or appeared to be, Lady Ragnall's prototype. Indeed, on regaining her senses, she, whose vision lasted a second or two longer than did mine, let it slip that we actually had been married in some primitive Egyptian fashion, and I could see clearly enough, although I knew it to be nonsense, she believed that this event had happened.

Now, even when the scene was laid a long while ago, it is extremely awkward to foregather with an imperial woman who is firmly convinced that she was once your wife, so awkward that, in the end, it might have proved necessary to resume what she considered to be an established, if an interrupted, relationship.

This, for sundry reasons, I was determined not to do, not the least of them being that certainly I should have been set down as a fortune hunter; also, as I have said, there was always the curse in the background, which I hoped fondly would recognize my self-denial and not operate in my direction. And yet – although to think of it makes me feel cold down the back – if perchance that dream were true, already it was incurred. Already I, Allan, the Shabaka of former days, am doomed “to die by violence far from my own country where first I had looked upon the sun,” as its terms, recorded in the papyrus from Kandahland, of which I read a translation at the Castle, provide, with antique directness and simplicity, as the lot of all and sundry who have ever ventured to lay hands or lips upon the person of Amada, High Priestess of Isis.

To return. In reply to my second letter of excuse, I received a quaint little epistle from the lady to whom it had been written. It ran thus:

Shabaka, why do you seek to escape the net of Fate when already you are enveloped in its meshes? You think that never more, seated side by side, shall we see the blue *Taduki* smoke rise up toward us, or feel its subtle strength waft our souls afar.

Perhaps this is so, though assuredly even here you are doomed to acknowledge its dominion, how often I do not know, and will you find it less to be feared alone than in my company? Moreover,

from that company you never can escape, since it has been with you from time immemorial, if not continuously, and will be with you when there is no more sun.

Yet, as it is your wish, until we meet again in the past or in the future, farewell, O Shabaka.
Amada.

When I had finished reading this very peculiar note, of which the envelope, by the way, was sealed with the ancient Egyptian ring that my late friend Lord Ragnall had found and given to his wife just before his terrible fate overtook him, literally I felt faint and lay back in my chair to recover myself. Really, she was an ominous and, in her way, rather creepy woman, one unlike all others, one who seemed to be in touch with that which, doubtless by intention, is hidden from mankind. Now it came back to me that, when first I met her as the Hon. Luna Holmes and was so interested in her at the Ragnall Castle dinner party before her marriage, I was impressed with this ominous quality which seemed to flow from her, as, had he been more sensitive, her future husband would have been also.

During our subsequent association in Africa, too, it had always been with me, and, of course, it was in full force through our joint experience with the *Taduki* herb. Now again it flowed up in me like an unsealed fountain and drowned my judgment, washing the ordered reason on which I prided myself from its foundations. Also, in this confusion, another truth emerged, namely, that from the first moment I set my eyes on her I had always been attracted by and, in a kind of hidden way, “in love” with her. It was not a violent and passionate sort of affection, but then the same man can love sundry women in different ways, all of which are real enough.

Yet I knew that it was permanent. For a little while her phantasies got a hold upon me, and I began to believe that we always had been and always should be mixed up together; also that, in some undeclared fashion, I was under deep obligations to her, that she had stood my friend, not once but often, and so would stand while our personalities continued to endure. True, she had been Ragnall’s wife, yet – and this through no personal vanity, since Heaven knows that this vice is lacking in me – of a sudden I became convinced that it was to me that her nature really turned and not to Ragnall. I did not seek it, I did not even hope that it was so, for surely she was his possession, not mine, and I wanted to rob no man. Yet in that moment there the fact loomed before me large and solid as a mountain, a calm, immovable mountain, a snow-capped volcano, apparently extinct, that still, one day, might break into flames and overwhelm me, taking me as its possession upon wings of fire.

Such were my reflections during the moments of weakness which followed the shock I had received from that remarkable letter, outwardly and visibly so final, yet inwardly and spiritually opening up vast avenues of unexpected possibilities. Presently, they passed with the faintness and I was my own man again. Whatever she might or might not be, so far as I was concerned, there was an end to my active association with Lady Ragnall – at any rate, until I was certain that she was rid of her store of *Taduki*. As she admitted in her curiously worded communication, that book was closed for our lives, and any speculations concerning the past and the future, when we were not in being, remained so futile that about them it was unnecessary to trouble.

A little while later, I read in a newspaper, under the head of “Fashionable Intelligence,” that Lady Ragnall had left England to spend the winter in Egypt, and, knowing all her associations with that country, I marvelled at her courage. What had taken her there, I wondered; then shrugged my shoulders and let the matter be.

Six weeks or so afterward, I was out shooting driven partridges. A covey came over me, of which I got two. As I thrust new cartridges into my gun, I saw approaching me, flying very fast and high, a couple of wild duck that I suppose had been disturbed from some pond by the distant beaters. I closed the gun and lifted it, being particularly anxious to bag those wild duck, which were somewhat rare in the neighbourhood, especially at that season of the year. At that moment I was smitten by a most extraordinary series of impressions that had to do with Egypt and Lady Ragnall, the last things I had been thinking of a minute before.

I seemed to see a desert and ruins that I knew to be those of a temple, and Lady Ragnall herself seated among them, holding up a sunshade which suddenly fell onto the sand. This illusion passed, to be followed by another; namely, that she was with me, talking to me very earnestly but in a joyful, vigorous voice, only in a language of which I could not understand one word. Yet the burden of her speech seemed to reach my mind; it was to the effect that now we should always be near to each other, as we had been in the past.

Then all was gone, nor can those impressions have endured for long, seeing that, when they began, I was pointing my gun at the wild duck, and they left me before the dead birds touched the ground for, automatically, I went on with the business at hand, nor did my accustomed skill desert me.

Setting down the fancy as once of those queer mental pranks that cannot be explained – unless, in this instance, it was due to something I had eaten at lunch – I thought no more about it for two whole days. Then I thought a great deal, for, on opening my newspaper, which reached the Grange about three o'clock, that is exactly forty-eight hours after my telepathic experience, or whatever it may have been, the first thing that my eye fell on among the foreign telegrams was the following from Cairo:

A message has been received here conveying the sad intelligence of the sudden death yesterday of Lady Ragnall, the widow of the late Lord Ragnall, who, as a famous Egyptologist, was very well known in Egypt, where he came to a tragic end some years ago. Lady Ragnall, who was noted for her wealth and beauty, was visiting the ruins of a temple of Isis which stands a little way back from the east bank of the Nile between Luxor and Assouan, where her husband met with his fatal accident while engaged in its excavation. Indeed, she was seated by the monument erected on the sand which entombed him so deeply that his body was never recovered, when suddenly she sank back and expired. The English medical officer from Luxor certified heart disease as the cause of death and she has been buried where she died, this ground having been consecrated at the time of the decease of Lord Ragnall.

If I had felt queer when I received Lady Ragnall's mystical letter before she left for Egypt, now I felt much queerer. Then I was perplexed; now I was terrified, and, what is more, greatly moved. Again that conviction came to me that, deep down in my being, I was attached, unchangeably attached, to this strange and charming woman, and that with hers my destiny was intertwined. If this were not so, indeed, why had her passing become known to me, of all people and in so incongruous a fashion, for, although the hour of her death was not stated, I had little doubt that it occurred at the very moment when I shot the wild duck.

Now I wished that I had not refused to visit her, and even that I had given her some proof of my regard by asking her to marry me, notwithstanding her great wealth, the fact that I had been her husband's friend, and all the rest. No doubt, she would have refused; still, the quiet devotion of even so humble an individual as myself might have pleased her. However, regrets came too late; she was dead and all between us at an end.

A few weeks later, I discovered that here I was mistaken, for, after a preliminary telegram inquiring whether I was in residence at the Grange, which I answered on a prepaid form to the address of some unknown lawyers in London, there arrived at lunch time on the following day a gentleman of the name of Mellis, evidently one of the firm of Mellis & Mellis who had sent me the telegram. He was shown in and, without waiting for luncheon, said:

“I believe I am addressing Mr. Allan Quatermain.”

I bowed and he went on:

“I come upon a strange errand, Mr. Quatermain, so strange that I doubt whether, in the course of your life, which as I have heard has been full of adventure, you have ever known its equal. You were, I believe, well acquainted with our late client, Lord Ragnall, also with his wife, Lady Ragnall, formerly the Hon. Luna Holmes, of whose recent sad death you may per haps have heard.”

I said that this was so, and the lawyer went on in his dry precise way, watching my face as he spoke:

“It would appear, Mr. Quatermain, that Lady Ragnall must have been much attached to you, since, a while ago, after a visit that you paid to her at Ragnall Castle, she came to our office and made a will, a thing I may add that we had never been able to persuade her to do. Under that will – as you will see presently, for I have brought a copy with me – she left everything she possessed, that is, all the great Ragnall property and accumulated personality of which she had the power to dispose at her unfettered discretion, to – ahem – to you.”

“Great heavens!” I exclaimed, and sank back into a chair.

“As I do not sail under false colours,” went on Mr. Mellis with a dry smile, “I may as well tell you at once that both I and my partner protested vehemently against the execution of such a will, for reasons that seemed good to us but which I need not set out. She remained firm as a rock.

“You think I am mad,” she said. ‘Foreseeing this, I have taken the precaution of visiting two eminent London specialists to whom I told all my history, including that of the mental obscuration from which I suffered for a while as the result of shock. Each of these examined me carefully and subjected me to tests with the result – but here are their certificates and you can judge for yourselves.’

“I, or rather we, read the certificates, which, of course, we have preserved. To be brief, they stated that her ladyship was of absolutely sound and normal mind, although certain of her theories might be thought unusual, but not more so than those of thousands of others, some of them eminent in various walks of life. In face of these documents, which were entirely endorsed by our own observation, there was but one thing to do, namely, to prepare the will in accordance with our client’s clear and definite instructions. While we were writing these down, she said suddenly:

“Something has occurred to me. I shall never change my mind, nor shall I remarry, but, from my knowledge of Mr. Quatermain, I think it possible and even probable that he will refuse this great inheritance’ – a statement, sir, which struck us as so incredible that we made no comment.

“In that event,” she continued, ‘I wish all the real property to be realized and together with the personality, except certain legacies, to be divided among the societies, institutions, and charities that are written down upon this list,’ and she handed us a document, ‘unless indeed Mr. Quatermain, whom, should he survive me, I leave my sole executor, should disapprove of any of them.’

“Do you now understand the situation, sir?”

“Quite,” I answered. “That is, no doubt I shall when I have read the will. Meanwhile, I suggest that you must be hungry after your journey and that we should have lunch.”

So we lunched, talking of indifferent matters while the servants were in the room, and afterward returned to my study, where the documents were read and expounded to me by Mr. Mellis. To cut the story short, it seemed that my inheritance was enormous; I am afraid to state from memory at what figure it was provisionally valued. Subject to certain reservations, such as an injection that no part of the total, either in land or in money, was to be alienated in favour of Mr. Atterby-Smith, a relative of Lord Ragnall whom the testatrix held in great dislike, or any member of his family, and that, for part of the year, I must inhabit Ragnall Castle, which might not be sold during my lifetime, or even let. All this vast fortune was left at my absolute disposal, both during my life and after my death. Failure to observe these trusts might, it seemed, invalidate the will. In the event of my renouncing the inheritance, however, Ragnall Castle, with a suitable endowment, was to become a county hospital, and the rest of the estate was to be divided in accordance with the list that I have mentioned – a very admirable list, but one which excluded any society or institution of a sectarian nature.

“Now I think that I have explained everything,” said Mr. Mellis at length, “except a minor and rather peculiar provision as to your acceptance of certain relics, particularly described by the testatrix in a sealed letter which I will hand to you presently. So it only remains for me, Mr. Quatermain, to ask you to sign a document which I have already prepared and brought with me, to enable me to deal with these great matters on your behalf. That is,” he added with a bow, “should you propose to continue that confidence in our firm with which the family of the late Lord Ragnall has honoured it for several generations.”

While he was hunting in his bag for this paper, explaining, as he did so, that I must be prepared to face an action brought by Mr. Atterby-Smith, who had been raging round his office “like a wild animal,” suddenly I made up my mind.

“Don’t bother about that paper, Mr. Mellis,” I said, “because Lady Ragnall was right in her supposition. I have no intention of accepting this inheritance. The estate must go for division to the charities, etcetera, set down in her list.”

The lawyer heard, and stared at me.

“In my life,” he gasped at last, “I have known mad testators and mad heirs, but never before have I come across a case where both the testator and the heir were mad. Perhaps, sir, you will be pleased to explain.”

“With pleasure,” I said when I had finished lighting my pipe. “In the first place, I am already what is called a rich man and I do not want to be bothered with more money and property.”

“But, Mr. Quatermain,” he interrupted, “you have a son who, with such wealth behind him, might rise to anything – yes, anything.” (This was true, for, at that time, my boy Harry was living.)

“Yes, but, as it chances, Mr. Mellis, I have ideas upon this matter which you may think peculiar. I do not wish my son to begin life with enormous resources, or even the prospect of them. I wish him to fight his own way in the world. He is going to be a doctor. When he has succeeded in his profession and learned what it means to earn one’s own bread, it will be time for him to come into other people’s money. Already I have explained this to him with reference to my own, and being a sensible youth, he agrees with me.”

“I daresay,” groaned the lawyer. “Such – well, failings – as yours, are often hereditary.”

“Another thing is,” I went on, “that I do not wish to be bothered by a lawsuit with Mr. Atterby-Smith. Further, I cannot bind myself to live half the year in Ragnall Castle in a kind of ducal state. Very likely, before all is done, I might want to return to Africa, which then I could not do. In short, it comes to this: I accept the executorship and my out-of-pocket expenses, and shall ask your firm to act for me in the matter. The fortune I positively and finally refuse, as you observe Lady Ragnall thought it probable I should do.”

Mr. Mellis rose and looked at the clock. “If you will allow me to order the dogcart,” he said, “I think there is just time for me to catch the afternoon train up to town. Meanwhile, I propose to leave you a copy of the will and of the other documents to study at your leisure, including the sealed letter which you have not yet read. Perhaps after taking independent advice, from your own solicitors and friends, you will write me your views in a few days’ time. Until then, this conversation of ours goes for nothing. I consider it entirely preliminary and without prejudice.”

The dogcart came round – indeed, it was already waiting – and thus this remarkable interview ended. From the door step I watched the departure of Mr. Mellis and saw him turn, look at me, and shake his head solemnly. Evidently he thought that the right place for me was a lunatic asylum.

“Thank goodness, that’s done with!” I said to myself. “Now I’ll order a trap and go and tell Curtis and Good about all the business. No, I won’t; they’ll only think me mad as that lawyer does, and argue with me. I’ll take a walk and mark those oaks that have to come down next spring. But first I had better put away these papers.”

Thus I reflected and began to collect the documents. Lifting the copy of the will, I saw lying beneath it the sealed letter of which Mr. Mellis had spoken, addressed to me and marked To be delivered after my death, or in the event of Mr. Quatermain pre-deceasing me, to be burned unread.

The sight of that well-known writing and the thought that she who penned it was now departed from the world and that nevermore would my eyes behold her, moved me. I laid the letter down, then took it up again, broke the seal, seated myself, and read as follows:

My dear friend, my dearest friend, for so I may call you, knowing as I do that if ever you see these words we shall no longer be fellow citizens of the world. They are true words, be cause between you and me there is a closer tie than you imagine, at any rate, at present. You thought our Egyptian

vision to be a dream – no more; I believe it, on the other hand, at least in essentials, to be a record of facts that have happened in by gone ages. Moreover, I will tell you now that my revelation went further than your own. Shabaka and Amada were married and I saw them as man and wife leading a host southward to found a new empire somewhere in Central Africa, of which per chance the Kendah tribe were the last remnant. Then the darkness fell.

Moreover, I am certain that this was not the first time that we had been associated upon the earth, as I am almost certain that it will not be the last. This mystery I cannot understand or explain, yet it is so. In some of our manifold existences we have been bound together by the bonds of destiny, as in some we may have been bound to others, and so, I suppose, it will continue to happen, perhaps for ever and ever.

Now, as I know that you hate long letters, I will tell you why I write. I am going to make a will, leaving you practically everything I possess – which is a great deal. As there is no relationship or other tie between us, this may seem a strange thing to do, but after all, why not? I am alone in the world, without a relative of any kind. Nor had my late husband any except some distant cousins, those Atterby-Smiths whom you may remember, and these he detested even more than I do, which is saying much. On one point I am determined – that they shall never inherit, and that is why I make this will in such a hurry, having just received a warning that my own life may not be much prolonged.

Now, I do not deceive myself. I know you to be no money-hunter and I think it highly probable that you will shrink from the responsibilities of this fortune which, if it came to you, you would feel it your duty to administer it for the good of many to the weariness of your own flesh and spirit. Nor would you like the gossip in which it would involve you, or the worry of the actions-at-law which the Atterby-Smiths, and perhaps others unknown, would certainly bring against you. Therefore, it seems possible that you will refuse my gift, a contingency for which I have provided by alternative depositions. If a widowed lady without connections chooses to dispose of her goods in charity or for the advancement of science, etc., no one can complain. But even in this event I warn you that you will not altogether escape, since I am making you my soul executor, and although I have jotted down a list of the institutions which I propose to benefit, you will be given an absolute discretion concerning them with power to vary the amounts, and add to, or lessen, their number. In return for this trouble, should you yourself renounce the inheritance, I am leaving you an executor's fee of 5,000 pounds, which I beg that you will not renounce, as the mere thought of your doing so offends me. Also, as a personal gift, I ask you to accept all that famous set of Caroline silver which was used on grand occasions at Ragnall, that I remember you admired so much, and any other objects of art that you may choose.

Lastly – and this is the really important thing – together with the Egyptian collection, I pass on to you the chest of *Taduki* herb with the Kendah brazier, etc., enjoining you most strictly, if ever you held me in any friendship, to take it, and above all to keep it sacred.

In this, Friend, you will not fail me. Observe, I do not direct you to make further experiments with the *Taduki*. To begin with, it is unnecessary, since, although you have recently refused to do so in my company – perhaps because you were afraid of complications – sooner or later you will certainly breathe it by yourself, knowing that it would please me much, and, perhaps, when I am dead, hoping that through it you may see more of me than you did when I was alive. You know the dead often increase in value at compound interest, and I am vain enough to hope that this may be so in my case.

I have no more to say. Farewell – for a little while.

Luna Ragnall.

P.S. You can burn this letter if you like; it does not in the least matter, as you will never forget its contents. How interesting it will be to talk it over with you one day.

Chapter 2

Back to the Past

It is unnecessary that I should set out the history of the disposal of the great Ragnall fortune in any detail. I adhered to my decision which at last was recorded with much formality; though, as I was a totally unknown individual, few took any interest in the matter. Those who came to hear of it for the most part set me down as mad; indeed, I could see that even my friends and neighbours, Sir Henry Curtis and Captain Good, with whom I declined to discuss the business, more or less shared this view, while a society journal of the lower sort printed a paragraph headed:

THE HUNTER HERMIT. IVORY TRADER WHO MOCKED AT MILLIONS!

Then followed a distorted version of the facts. Also I received anonymous letters written, I do not doubt, by members of the Atterby-Smith family, which set down my self-denial to “the workings of a guilty conscience” and “to fears of exposure.”

Of all these things I took no heed, and notwithstanding wild threats of action by Mr. Atterby-Smith, in due course the alternative clauses of the will came into operation, under which, with only a rough list to guide me, I found myself the practical dispenser of vast sums. Then indeed I “endured hardness.” Not only had collieries and other properties to be sold to the best advantage, not only was I afflicted by constant interviews with Messrs. Mellis & Mellis and troubles too numerous to mention. In addition to these, I think that every society and charity in the United Kingdom and quite eighty per cent. of its beggars must have written or sought interviews with me to urge their public or private claims, so that, in the end, I was obliged to fly away and hide myself, leaving the lawyers to deal with the correspondence and the mendicants.

At length I completed my list, allotting the bulk of the money to learned societies, especially such of them as dealt with archaeological matters in which the testatrix and her husband had been interested; to those who laboured among the poor; to the restoration of an abbey in which I had heard Lady Ragnall express great interest, and to the endowment of the castle as a local hospital in accordance with her wish.

This division having been approved and ratified by an order in Court, my duties came to an end. Further, my fee as executor was paid me, which I took without scruple, for seldom has money been harder earned, and the magnificent service of ancient plate was handed over to me – or rather to the custody of my bank – with the result that I have never set eyes upon it from that day to this, and probably never shall.

Also, I selected certain souvenirs, including a beautiful portrait of Lady Ragnall by a noted artist, painted before her marriage, concerning which there was a tragic story whereof I have written elsewhere. This picture I hung in my dining room where I can see it as I sit at table, so that never a day passes that I do not think twice or thrice of her whose young loveliness it represents. Indeed, I think of her so much that often I wish I had placed it somewhere else.

The Egyptian collection I gave to a museum which I will not name; only the chest of *Taduki* and the other articles connected with it I kept, as I was bound to do, hiding them away in a bookcase in my study and hoping that I should forget where I had put them, an effort wherein I failed entirely. Indeed, that chest might have been alive to judge from the persistence with which it inflicted itself upon my mind, just as if someone were imprisoned in the bookcase. It was stowed away in the bottom part of an old Chippendale bookcase which stood exactly behind my writing chair and which I had taken over as a fixture when I bought the Grange. Now this chair, that I am using at the moment of writing, is one of the sort that revolves, and, heedless of the work I had to do, continually I found myself turning it round so that I sat staring at the bookcase instead of at my desk.

This went on for some days, until I began to wonder whether there was anything wrong; whether, for instance, I had placed the articles so that they could fall over and my subconscious self was reminding me of the fact. At length, one evening after dinner, this idea fidgeted me so much that I could bear it no more. Going to my bedroom, I opened the little safe that stands there and took out the key of the bookcase which I had stowed away so that I could not get at it without some trouble. Returning, I unlocked the faded mahogany door of the Eighteenth Century bookcase and was surprised when it opened itself very quickly, as if something were pushing at it.

Next moment, I saw the reason. My subconscious self had been right. Owing, I suppose, to insufficient light when I put them away, I had set the ebony tripod upon which rested the black stone bowl that formerly was used in the *Taduki* ceremonies in the sanctuary of the temple in Kendahland, whence Lady Ragnall had brought it, so that one of its feet projected over the edge of the shelf. Thus it pressed against the door, and when it was opened, of course fell forward. I caught it, rather smartly, I flattered myself, or rather I caught the bowl, which was very heavy, and the tripod fell to the floor. Setting down the bowl on the hearthrug which was near, I picked up its stand and made a hasty examination, fearing lest the brittle, short-grained wood should have broken. It had not; its condition was as perfect as when it was first used, perhaps thousands of years before.

Next, that I might examine this curiosity with more care than I had ever yet done, I placed the bowl upon its stand to consider its shape and ornamentation. Though so massive, I saw that in its way it was a beautiful thing, and the heads of the women carved upon the handles were so full of life that I think they must have been modelled from a living person. Perhaps that model was the priestess who had first used it in her sacred rites of offering or of divination, or perhaps Amada herself, to whom, now that I thought of it, the resemblance was great, as I had seen her in my *Taduki* dream.

The eyes (for both handles were identical) seemed fixed on me in a solemn and mystical stare; the parted lips looked as though they were uttering words of invitation. To what did they invite? Alas! I knew too well: it was that I should burn *Taduki* in the bowl so that they might be opened by its magic and tell me of hidden things.

Nonsense! I thought to myself. Moreover, I remembered that one must never take *Taduki* after drinking wine. Then I remembered something else; namely, that, as it happened, at dinner that night I had drunk nothing but water, having for some reason or other preferred it to claret or port. Also, I had eaten precious little – I suppose because I was not hungry. Or could it be that I was a humbug and had done these things, or rather left them undone, so that should temptation overtake me its results might not prove fatal? Upon my word, I did not know, for on such occasions it is difficult to disentangle the exact motives of the heart.

Moreover, this speculation was forgotten in a new and convincing idea that suddenly I conceived. Doubtless, the virtues, or the vices, of *Taduki* were all humbug, or rather nonexistent. What caused the illusions was the magnetic personalities of the ministrants, that is to say, of Lady Ragnall herself and, on my first acquaintance with it, here in England, of that remarkable old medicine man, Harut. Without these personalities, and especially the first who was now departed from the earth, it would be as harmless as tobacco and as ineffectual as hay. So delighted was I with this discovery that almost I determined to prove it by immediate demonstration.

I opened the carved chest of rich-coloured wood and drew out the age-blackened silver box within which now I observed for the first time had engraved upon it several times a picture of the goddess Isis in her accustomed ceremonial dress, and a god, Osiris or Ptah, I think, making incantations with their hands, holding lotus flowers and the Cross of Life stretched out over a little altar. This I opened also, whereon a well-remembered aroma arose and for a moment clouded my senses. When these cleared again, I perceived, lying on the top of the bundles of *Taduki* leaves, of which there seemed to be a large quantity remaining, a half sheet of letter paper bearing a few lines in Lady Ragnall's handwriting.

I lifted it and read as follows:

My Friend:

When you are moved to inhale this *Taduki*, as certainly you will do, be careful not to use too much lest you should wander so far that you can return no more. One of the little bundles, of which I think there are thirteen remaining in the box, should be sufficient, though perhaps as you grow accustomed to the drug you may require a larger dose. Another thing – for a hidden reason with which I will not trouble you, it is desirable, though not necessary, that you should have a companion in the adventure. By preference, this companion should be a woman, but a man will serve if he be one in whom you have confidence and who is sympathetic to you. L.R.

“That settles it,” I thought. “I am not going to take *Taduki* with one of the housemaids, and there is no other woman about here,” and I rose from my chair, preparing to put the stuff away.

At that moment, the door opened and in walked Captain Good.

“Hullo, old fellow,” he said. “Curtis says a farmer tells him that a lot of snipe have come in onto the Brathal marshes, and he wants to know if you will come over to-morrow morning and have a go at them – I say, what is this smell in the room? Have you taken to scented cigarettes or hashish?”

“Not quite, but, to tell you the truth, I was thinking of it,” I answered, and I pointed to the open silver box.

Good, who is a person of alert mind and one very full of curiosity, advanced, sniffed at the *Taduki*, and examined the brazier and the box, which in his ignorance he supposed to be of Grecian workmanship. Finally, he overwhelmed me with so many questions that, at length, in self-defence, I told him something of its story and how it had been bequeathed to me with its contents by Lady Ragnall.

“Indeed!” said Good. “She who left you the fortune which you wouldn’t take, being the lineal descendant of Don Quixote, or rather of Sancho Panza’s donkey. Well, this is much more exciting than money. What happened to you when you went into that trance?”

“Oh!” I answered wearily, “I seemed to foregather with a very pretty lady who lived some thousands of years ago, and after many adventures, was just about to marry her when I woke up.”

“How jolly! though I suppose you have been suffering from blighted affections ever since. Perhaps, if you took some more, you might pull it off next time.”

I shook my head and handed him the note of instructions that I had found with the *Taduki*, which he read with attention, and said:

“I see, Allan, that a partner is required and that failing a lady, a man in whom you have confidence and who is sympathetic to you, will serve. Obviously that’s me, for in whom could you have greater confidence, and who is more sympathetic to you? Well, my boy, if there’s any hope of adventures, real or imaginary, I’ll take the risk and sacrifice myself upon the altar of friendship. Light up your stuff – I’m ready. What do you say? That I can’t because I have been dining and drinking wine or whisky? Well, as a matter of fact, I haven’t. I’ve only had some tea and a boiled egg – I won’t stop to explain why – and intended to raise something more substantial out of you. So fire away and let’s go to meet your lovely lady in ancient Egypt or anywhere else.”

“Look here, Good,” I explained, “I think there is a certain amount of risk about this stuff, and really you had better reflect”

“Before I rush in where angels fear to tread, eh? Well, you’ve done it and you ain’t even an angel. Also I like risks or anything that makes a change in this mill round of a life. Come on. What have we got to do?”

Then, feeling that Fate was at work, under a return of the impulse of which the strength had been broken for a moment by the reading of Lady Ragnall’s note of instructions, I gave way. To tell the truth, Good’s unexpected arrival when such a companion was essential, and his strange willingness, and even de sire, to share in this unusual enterprise, brought on one of the fits of fatalism from which I

suffer at times. I became convinced that the whole business was arranged by something or somebody beyond my ken – that I must take this drug with Good as my companion. So, as I have said, I gave way and made the necessary preparations, explaining everything to Good as I did so.

“I say!” he said at last, just as I was fishing for an ember from the wood fire to lay upon the *Taduki* in the bowl, “I thought this job was a joke, but you seem jolly solemn about it, Allan. Do you really think it dangerous?”

“Yes, I do, but more to the spirit than to the body. I think, to judge from my own experience, that anyone who has once breathed *Taduki* will wish to do so again. Shall we give it up? It isn’t too late.”

“No,” answered Good. “I never funk’d anything yet, and I won’t begin now. ‘Lay on, Macduff!’”

“So be it, Good. But first of all, listen to me. Move that armchair of yours close to mine, but not quite up against it. I am going to place the brazier just between and a little in front of us. When the stuff catches a blue flame will burn for about thirty seconds – at least, this happened on a previous occasion. So soon as it dies away and you see the smoke begin to rise, bend your head forward and a little sideways so that it strikes you full in the face, but in such a fashion that, when you become insensible, the weight of your body will cause you to fall back into the chair, not outward to the floor. It is quite easy if you are careful. Then open your mouth and draw the vapour down into your lungs. Two or three breaths will suffice, as it works very quickly.”

“Just like laughing gas,” remarked Good. “I only hope I shan’t wake with all my teeth out. The last time I took it I felt – “

“Stop joking,” I said, “for this is a serious matter.”

“A jolly sight too serious! Is there anything else?”

“No. That is, if there is anybody you particularly wish to see, you might concentrate your thoughts on him – “

“Him! I can’t think of any him, unless it is the navigating lieu tenant of my first ship, with whom I always want to have it out in the next world, as he is gone from this, the brute.”

“On her, then; I meant her.”

“Then why didn’t you say so instead of indulging in pharisaic al humbug? Who would breathe poison just to meet another man?”

“I would,” I replied firmly.

“That’s a lie,” muttered Good. “Hullo! don’t be in such a hurry with that coal, I ain’t ready. Ought I to say any hocus-pocus? Dash it all! it is like a nightmare about being hanged.”

“No,” I replied, as I dropped the ember onto the *Taduki* just as Lady Ragnall had done. “Now, play fair, Good,” I added, “for I don’t know what the effect of half a dose would be; it might drive you mad. Look, the flame is burning! Open your mouth and arrange your weight as I said, and when your head begins to whirl, lean back at the end of the third deep breath.”

The mysterious, billowy vapour arose as the pale blue flame died away, and spread itself out fanwise.

“Aye, aye, my hearty,” said Good, and thrust his face into it with such vigour that he brought his head into violent contact with mine, as I leant forward from the other side.

I heard him mutter some words that were better left unsaid, for often enough Good’s language would have borne editing. Then I heard no more and forgot that he existed.

My mind became wonderfully clear and I found myself arguing in a fashion that would have done credit to the greatest of the Greek philosophers upon all sorts of fundamental problems. All I can remember about that argument or lecture is that, in part at any rate, it dealt with the possibility of reincarnation, setting out the pros and cons in a most vivid manner.

Even if I had not forgotten them, these may be passed over, as they are familiar to students of such subjects. The end of the exposition, however, was to the effect that, accepted as it is by a quarter of the inhabitants of the earth, this doctrine should not lightly be set aside, seeing that in it there is hope for man; that it is at least worthy of consideration. If the sages who have preached it,

from Plato down – and indeed for countless ages before his time, since without doubt he borrowed it from the East – are right, then at least we pure human creatures do not appear and die like gnats upon a summer's eve, but in that seeming day pass on to life eternally renewed, climbing a kind of Jacob's ladder to the skies.

It is true that as our foot leaves it, each rung of that ladder vanishes. Below is darkness and all the gulf of Time. Above is darkness and we know not what. Yet our hands cling to the uprights and our feet stand firm upon a rung, and we know that we do not fall, but mount; also that, in the nature of things, a ladder must lean against some support and lead somewhere. A melancholy business, this tread mill doctrine, it may be said, where one rung is so like another and there are so many of them. And yet, and yet – is it not better than that of the bubble which bursts and is gone? Aye, because life is better than death, especially if it be progressive life, and if at last it may lead to some joy undreamed, to some supernal light in which we shall see all the path that we have trodden, and with it the deep foundations of the Rock of Being upon which our ladder stands and the gates of Eternal Calm whereon it leans.

Thus, in the beginning of my dream state, I, the lecturer, argued to an unknown audience, or perhaps I was the audience and the lecturer argued to me, I am not sure, pointing out that otherwise we are but as those unhappy victims of the Revolution in the prisons of Paris, who for a little while bow and talk and play our part, waiting till the door opens and the jailer Death appears to lead us to the tumbrel and the knife.

The argument, I should point out, was purely rational; it did not deal with faith, or any revealed religion, perhaps because these are too personal and too holy. It dealt only with the possible development of a mighty law, under the workings of which man, through much tribulation, might accomplish his own weal and at last come to look upon the source of that law and understand its purpose.

Obviously these imperfectly reported reflections, and many others that I cannot remember at all, were induced by the feeling that I might be about to plunge into some seeming state of former existence, as I had done once before under the influence of this herb. My late friend, Lady Ragnall, believed that state to be not seeming but real; while I, on the other hand, could not accept this as a fact. I set it down, as I am still inclined to do, to the workings of imagination, superexcited by a strange and powerful drug and drawing, perhaps, from some fount of knowledge of past events that is hidden deep in the being of every one of us.

However these things may be, this rhetorical summing up of the case, of which I can only recollect the last part, was but a kind of introductory speech such as is sometimes made by a master of ceremonies before the curtain rises upon the play. Its echoes died away into a deep silence. All the living part of me went down into darkness, dense darkness that seemed to endure for ages. Then, with strugglings and effort, I awoke again – reborn. A hand was holding my own, leading me forward; a voice I knew whispered in my ear, saying:

“Look upon one record of the past, O Doubter. Look and believe.” Now there happened to me, or seemed to happen, that which I had experienced before in the museum at Ragnall

Castle; namely, that I, Allan, the living man of to-day, beheld myself another man, and yet the same; and whilst remaining myself, could enter into and live the life of that other man, knowing his thoughts, appreciating his motives and his efforts, his hopes and his fears, his loves and his hates, and yet standing outside of them, reading him like a book and weighing everything in the scales of my modern judgment.

The voice – surely it was that of Lady Ragnall, though I could not see her face – died away; the hand was loosed. I saw a man in the cold, glimmering light of dawn. He was a very sturdy man, thick-limbed, deep-chested, and somewhat hairy, whose age I judged to be about thirty years. I knew at once that he was not a modern man, although his weather-tanned skin was white where the furs he wore had slipped away from his shoulder, for there was something unusual about his aspect. Few modern men

are so massive of body, and never have I seen one with a neck so short and large in circumference, although the feet and hands were not large. His frame was extraordinarily solid; being not more than five feet seven inches in height and by no means fat, yet he must have weighed quite fifteen stone, if not more. His dark hair was long and parted in the middle; it hung down to his shoulders.

He turned his head, looking behind him as though to make sure that he was alone, or that no wild beast stalked him, and I saw his face. The forehead was wide and not high, for the hair grew low upon it; his eyebrows were beetling and the eyes beneath them deep set. They were remarkable eyes, large and gray, quick-glancing also, yet when at rest somewhat sombre and very thoughtful. The nose was straight with wide and sensitive nostrils, suggesting that its owner used them as a dog or a deer does, to scent with. The mouth was thick-lipped but not large, and within it were splendid and regular white teeth, broader than those we have; the chin was very massive, and on it grew two little tufts of beard, though the cheeks were bare.

For the rest, this man was long armed, for the tip of his middle finger came down almost to the kneecap. He had a sort of kilt about his middle and a heavy fur robe upon his shoulder which looked as though it were made of bearskin. In his left hand he held a short spear, the blade of which seemed to be fashioned of chipped flint, or some other hard and shining stone, and in the girdle of his kilt was thrust a wooden-handled instrument or ax, made by setting a great, sharp-edged stone that must have weighed two pounds or so into the cleft end of the handle which was lashed with sinews both above and below the axhead.

I, Allan, the man of to-day, looked upon this mighty savage, for mighty I could see he was – both in his body and, after a fashion, in his mind also – and in my trance knew that the spirit which had dwelt in him hundreds of thousands of years ago, mayhap, or at least in the far, far, past, was the same that animated me, the living creature whose body for aught I knew descended from his, thus linking us in flesh as well as soul. Indeed, the thought came to me – I know not whence – that here stood my remote forefather whose forgotten existence was my cause of life, without whom my body could not have been.

Now, I, Allan Quatermain, fade from the story. No longer am I he. I am Wi the Hunter, the future chief of a little tribe which had no name, since, believing itself to be the only people on the earth, it needed none. Yet remember that my modern intelligence and individuality never went to sleep, that always it was able to watch this prototype, this primeval one, to enter in to his thoughts, to appreciate his motives, hopes, and fears, and to compare them with those that actuate us to-day. Therefore, the tale I tell is the substance of that which the heart of Wi told to my heart, set out in my own modern tongue and interpreted by my modern intellect.

Chapter 3

Wi Seeks a Sign

Wi, being already endowed with a spiritual sense, was praying to such gods as he knew, the Ice-gods that his tribe had always worshipped. He did not know for how long it had worshipped them, any more than he knew the beginnings of that tribe, save for a legend that once its forefathers had come here from behind the mountains, driven sunward and southward by the cold. These gods of theirs lived in the blue-black ice of the mightiest of the glaciers which moved down from the crests of the high snow mountains. The breast of this glacier was in the central valley, but most of the ice moved down smaller valleys to the east and west and so came to the sea, where in spring time the children of the Ice-gods that had been begotten in the heart of the snowy hills were born, coming forth in great bergs from the dark wombs of the valleys and sailing away southward. Thus it was that the vast central glacier, the house of the gods, moved but little.

Urk the Aged-One, who had seen the birth of all who lived in the tribe, said that his grandfather had told him, when he was little, that in his youth the face of this glacier was perhaps a spear's cast higher up the valley than it stood to-day, no more. It was a mighty threatening face of the height of a score of tall forest pines set one upon the other, sloping backward to its crest. For the most part, it was of clear black ice which some times when the gods within were talking, cracked and groaned, and when they were angry, heaved itself forward by an arm's length, shaving off the rocks of the valley which stood in its path and driving them in front of it. Who or what these gods might be, Wi did not know. All he knew was that they were terrible powers to be feared, in whom he believed as his forefathers had done, and that in their hands lay the fate of the tribe.

In the autumn nights, when the mists rose, some had seen them: vast, shadowy figures moving about before the face of the glacier, and even at times advancing toward the beach beneath, where the people dwelt. They had heard them laughing also, and their priest, N'gae the Magician, and Taren the Witch-Who-Hid-Herself, who only came out at night and who was the lover of N'gae, said that they had spoken to them, making revelations. But to Wi they had never spoken, although he had sat face to face with them at night, which none others dared to do. So silent were they that, at times, when he was well fed and happy hearted and his hunting had prospered, he began to doubt this tale of the gods and to set down the noises that were called their voices to breakings in the ice caused by frosts and thaws.

Yet there was something which he could not doubt. Deep in the face of the ice, the length of three paces away, only to be seen in certain lights, was one of the gods who for generations had been known to the tribe as the Sleeper because he never moved. Wi could not make out much about him, save that he seemed to have a long nose as thick as a tree at its root and growing smaller toward the end. On each side of this nose projected a huge curling tusk that came out of a vast head, black in colour and covered with red hair, behind which swelled an enormous body, large as that of a whale, whereof the end could not be seen.

Here indeed was a god – not even Wi could doubt it – for none had ever heard of or seen its like – though for what reason it chose to sleep forever in the bosom of the ice he could not guess. Had such a monster been known alive, he would have thought this one dead, not sleeping. But it was not known and therefore it must be a god. So it came about that, for his divinity, like the rest of the tribe, Wi took a gigantic elephant of the early world caught in the ice of a glacial period that had happened some hundreds of thousands of years before his day, and slowly borne forward in the frozen stream from the far-off spot where it had perished, doubtless to find its ultimate sepulchre in the sea. A strange god enough, but not stranger than many have chosen and still bow before to-day.

Wi, after debate with his wife Aaka, the proud and fair, had climbed to the glacier while it was still dark to take counsel of the gods and learn their will as to a certain matter. It was this: The greatest

man of the tribe, who by his strength ruled it, was Henga, a terrible man born ten springs before Wi, huge in bulk and ferocious. This was the law of the tribe, that the mightiest was its master, and so remained until one mightier than he came to the opening of the cave in which he lived, challenged him to single combat, and killed him. Thus Henga had killed his own father who ruled before him.

Now he oppressed the tribe; doing no work himself, he seized the food of others or the skin garments that they made. Moreover, although there were few and all men fought for them, he took the women from their parents or husbands, kept them for a while, then cast them out, or perhaps killed them, and took others. Nor might they resist him, because he was sacred and could do what he pleased. Only, as has been said, any man might challenge him to single combat, for to slay him otherwise was forbidden and would have caused the slayer to be driven out to starve as one accursed. Then, if the challenger prevailed, he took the cave of this sacred one, with the women and all that was his, and became chief in his place, until in his turn he was slain in like fashion. Thus it came about that no chief of the tribe lived to be old, for as soon as years began to rob him of his might, he was killed by someone younger and stronger who hated him. For this reason also none desired to be chief, knowing that, if he were, sooner or later he would die in blood, and it was better to suffer oppression than to die.

Yet Wi desired it because of the cruelties of Henga and his misrule of the tribe which he was bringing to misery. Also he knew that, if he did not kill Henga, Henga would kill him from jealousy. Long ago he, Wi, would have been murdered had he not been beloved by the tribe as their great hunter who won them much of their meat food, and therefore a man whose death would cause the slayer to be hated. Yet, fearing to attack him openly, already Henga had tried to do away with him secretly; and a little while before, when Wi was visiting his pit traps on the edge of the forest, a spear whizzed past him, thrown from a ledge of overhanging rock which he could not climb. He picked up the spear and ran away. It was one which he knew belonged to Henga; moreover, its flint point had been soaked in poison made from a kind of cuttlefish that had rotted, mixed with the juice of a certain herb, as Wi could tell, for sometimes he used this poison to kill game. He kept the spear and, save to his wife Aaka, said nothing of the matter.

Then followed a worse thing. Besides his son Foh, a lad of ten years whom he loved better than any thing on earth, he had a little daughter one year younger, named Fo-a. This was all his family, for children were scarce among the tribe, and most of those who were born died quite young of cold, lack of proper food, and various sicknesses. Moreover, if girls, many of them were cast out at birth to starve or be devoured by wild beasts.

One evening, Fo-a was missing, and it was thought that wood wolves had taken her, or perhaps the bears that lived in the forest. Aaka wept, and Wi, when there was no one to see, wept also as he searched for Fo-a, whom he loved. Two mornings afterward, when he came out of his hut, near to the door place he found something wrapped in a skin, and, on unwinding it, saw that it was the body of little Fo-a with her neck broken and the marks of a great hand upon her throat. He knew well that Henga had done this thing, as did everybody else, since among the tribe none murdered except the chief, though sometimes men killed each other fighting for women, of whom there were so few, or when they were angry. Yet, when he showed the body to the people, they only shook their heads and were silent, for had not Henga the right to take the life of any among them?

Then it was that Wi's blood boiled within him and he talked with Aaka, saying that it was in his heart to challenge Henga to fight.

"That is what he wishes you to do," answered Aaka, "for being a fool, he thinks himself the stronger and that thus he will kill you without reproach, who otherwise, when he is older, will kill him. Also I have wished it for long who am sure that you can conquer Henga, but you will not listen to me in this matter."

Then she rolled herself up in her skin rug and pretended to go to sleep, saying no more.

In the morning she spoke again and said:

“Hearken, Wi. Counsel has come to me in my sleep. It seemed to me that Fo-a our daughter who is dead stood before me, saying:

“Let Wi my father go up at night to make prayer to the Icegods and seek a sign from them. If a stone fall from the crest of the glacier at the dawn, it shall be a token to him that he must fight Henga and avenge my blood upon him and take his chieftainship; but if no stone falls, then, should he fight, Henga will kill him. Also, afterward, he will kill Foh my brother, and take you, my mother, to be one of his wives.’

“Now, Wi, I say that you will do well to obey the voice of our child who is dead and to go up to make prayer to the Icegods and await their omen.”

Wi looked at her doubtfully, putting little faith in this tale, and answered:

“Such a dream is a thin stick on which to lean. I know well, Wife, that for a long while you have desired that I should fight Henga, although he is a terrible man. Yet, if I do, he may kill me and then what would happen to you and Foh?”

“That which is fated to happen to us and nothing else, Husband. Shall it be said in the tribe that Wi was afraid to avenge the blood of his daughter upon Henga?”

“I know not, Wife, but I know also that, if such words are whispered, they will not be true. It is of you and Foh that I think, not of myself.”

“Then go and seek an omen from the Ice-gods, Husband.”

“I will go, Aaka, but do not blame me afterward if things happen awry.”

“They will not happen awry,” answered Aaka, smiling for the first time since Fo-a died.

For she was sure that Wi would conquer Henga, if only he could be brought to fight him, and thus avenge Fo-a and become chief in his place. Also she smiled because, for reasons of which she did not speak, she was sure also that a stone would fall from the crest of the glacier at dawn when the sun struck upon the ice.

Thus it came about that, on the following night, Wi the Hunter slipped from the village of the tribe and, walking round the foot of the hill that ran down to the beach on the east, scaled the cleft between the mountains until he came to the base of the great glacier. The wolves that were prowling round the place, still winter-hungry because the spring was so late, scented him and surrounded him with glaring eyes. But he, the Hunter, was not afraid of the wolves; moreover, woe had made his heart fierce. So with a yell he charged at the biggest of them, the leader of the pack, and drove his flint spear into its throat, then, while it writhed upon the spear, gnashing its red jaws, he dashed out its brains with his stone ax, muttering: “Thus shall Henga die! Thus shall Henga die!”

The wolves knew their master and sped away, all save their leader that lay dead. Wi dragged its carcass to the top of a rock and left it there where the rest could not reach it, purposing to skin it in the morning.

This done, he went on up the cold valley where no beasts came, because here there was nothing to eat, till he reached the face of the glacier, a mighty wall of backward sloping ice that gleamed faintly in the moonlight and filled the cleft from side to side, four hundred paces or more in width. When last he was here, twelve moons gone, he had driven a stake of driftwood between two rocks and another stake five paces lower down, because of late it had seemed to him that the glacier was marching forward.

So it was indeed, for the first stake was buried, and the cruel, crawling lip of the glacier had nearly reached the second. The gods were awake! The gods were marching toward the sea!

Wi shivered, not because of the cold, to which he was accustomed, but from fear – for this place was terrible to him. It was the house of the gods who dwelt there in the ice, the gods in whom he believed, and who were always angry, and now he remembered that he had brought no offering to propitiate them. He went back to the place where he had killed the wolf, and with difficulty, by aid of his sharp flint spear and stone ax, hacked off its head. Returning with this head, he set the grisly thing upon a rock at the foot of the glacier, muttering:

“It bleeds and the gods love blood. Now I swear that, if I kill Henga, I will give them his carcass, which is better than the head of a wolf.”

Then he knelt down, as men have ever done before that which they fear and worship, and began to pray after his rude fashion:

“O Mighty Ones,” he said, “who have lived here since the beginning, and O Sleeper with a shape such as no man has ever seen, Wi throws out his spirit to you; hear ye the prayer of Wi and give him a sign. Henga the fierce and hideous, who kills his own children lest in a day to come they should slay him as he slew his father, rules the people and does evilly. The people groan, but according to the old law may not rebel, and to speak they are afraid. Henga would kill me, and my little daughter Foha he has killed, and her mother weeps. I, Wi, would fight Henga as I may do under the law, but he is strong as the wild bull of the forest, and if he prevails, not only will he kill me, he will also take Aaka, whom he covets, and will murder our son Foh and perhaps devour him. Therefore, I am afraid to fight, for their sakes. Yet I would be revenged upon Henga and slay him, and live in the cave and rule the People better, not devouring their food, but storing it up for them; not taking the women, but leaving them to be the wives of those who have none. I have brought you an offering, O Gods, the head of a wolf fresh slain, which bleeds, the best thing I have to give you, and if I kill Henga, I will bring you a richer one, that of his dead body, because our fathers have always said that you love blood.”

Wi paused, for he could think of nothing more to say; then, remembering that as yet he had made no request, went on:

“Show me what I must do, O Gods. Shall I challenge Henga in the old way and fight him openly for the rule of the tribe? or, since if I fear to do this I cannot stay here among the people, shall I fly away with Aaka and Foh and, perhaps, Pag, the wise dwarf, the Wolf-man who loves me, to seek another home beyond the woods, if we live to win through them? Accept my offering and tell me, O Gods. If I must fight Henga, let a stone fall from the crest of the glacier, and if I must fly to save the lives of Aaka and Foh, let no stone fall. Here, now, I will wait till an hour after sunrise. Then, if a stone falls, I shall go down to challenge Henga, and if it does not fall, I shall give it out that I am about to challenge him, and in the night I shall slip away with Aaka and Foh, and Pag if he chooses; whereby you will lose worshippers, O Gods.”

Pleased with this master argument, which had come as an inspiration, since he had never thought of it before, and sure that it would appeal to gods whose followers were few and who therefore could not afford to lose any of them, Wi ceased praying, a terrible exercise which tired him more than a whole day's hunting or fishing, and, remaining on his knees, stared at the face of ice in front of him. He knew nothing of the laws of nature, but he did know that heavy bodies, if once set in motion, moved very fast down a hill, going quicker and quicker as they came near to its foot. Indeed, once he had killed a bear by rolling a stone down on it, which overtook the running beast with wonderful swiftness.

This being so, he began to marvel what would happen if all that mighty mass of ice should move in good earnest instead of at the rate of only a few handbreadths a year. Well, he knew something of that also. For once, when he was in the woods, he had seen an ice child born, a vast mass large as a mountain which suddenly rushed down one of the western valleys into the sea, sending foam flying as high as heaven. That had hurt no one, except, perhaps, some of the seal people which were basking in the bay, because there was no one to hurt. But if it had been the great central glacier that thus moved and gave birth, together with the other smaller glaciers of the west, what would chance to the tribe upon the beach beneath? They would be killed, every one, and there would be no people left in the world.

He did not call it the world, of course, since he knew nothing of the world, but rather by some word that meant “the place,” that is, the few miles of beach and wood and mountain over which he wandered. From a great height he had seen other beaches and woods, also mountains beyond a rocky, barren plain, but to him these were but a dreamland. At least, no men and women lived in them,

because they had never heard their voices or seen the smoke of their fires, such as the tribe made to warm themselves by and for the cooking of their food. It was true that there were stories that such people existed and Pag, the cunning dwarf, thought so. However, Wi, being a man who dealt with facts, paid no heed to these tales. There below him lived the only people in the world, and if they were crushed, all would be finished.

Well, if so, it would not matter very much, except in the case of Aaka, and, above all, of Foh his son, for of other women he thought little, while the creatures that furnished food, the seals and the birds and the fish, especially the salmon that came up the stream in spring, and the speckled trout, would be happier if they were gone.

These speculations also tired him, a man of action who was only beginning to learn how to think. So he gave them up, as he had given up praying, and stared with his big, thoughtful eyes at the ice in front of him. The light was gathering now, very soon the sun should rise and he should see into the ice. Look! There were faces, grotesque faces, some of them vast, some tiny, that seemed to shift and change with the changes of the light and the play of the shadows. Doubtless, these were those of the lesser gods of whom probably there were a great number, all of them bad and cruel, and they were peering and mocking at him.

Moreover, beyond them, a dim outline, was the great Sleeper, as he had always been, a mountain of a god with huge tusks and the curling nose much longer than the body of a man, and a head like a rock, and ears as big as the sides of a hut, and a small, cold eye that seemed to be fixed upon him, and behind all this, vanishing into the depths of the ice, an enormous body the height of three men standing on each other's heads, perhaps. There was a god indeed, and, looking at him, Wi wondered whether one day he would awake and break out of the ice and come rushing down the mountain. That he might see him better, Wi rose from his knees and crept timidly to the face of the glacier to peer down a certain crevice in the ice. While he was thus engaged, the sun rose in a clear sky over the shoulder of the mountain and shone with some warmth upon the glacier for the first time that spring – or rather early summer. Its rays penetrated the cleft in the ice so that Wi saw more of the Sleeper than he had ever done.

Truly, he was enormous, and look, behind him was something like the figure of a man of which he had often heard but never before seen so clearly. Or was it a shadow? Wi could not be sure, for just then a cloud floated over the face of the sun and the figure vanished. He waited for the cloud to pass away, and well was it for him that he did so, for just then a great rock which lay, doubtless, upon the extreme lip of the glacier, loosened from its last hold by the warmth of the sun, came thundering down the slope of the ice and, leaping over Wi, fell upon the spot where he had just been standing, making a hole in the frozen ground and crushing the wolf's head to a pulp, after which, with mighty bounds, it vanished towards the beach.

"The Sleeper has protected me," said Wi to himself, as he turned to look after the vanishing rock. "Had I stayed where I was, I should have been as that wolf's head."

Then, suddenly, he remembered that this stone had fallen in answer to his prayer; that it was the sign he had sought, and removed himself swiftly, lest another that he had not sought should follow after it.

When he had run a few paces down the frozen slope, he came to a little bay hollowed in the mountainside, and sat down, knowing that there he was safe from falling stones. Confusedly, he began to think. What had he asked the gods? Was it that he must fight Henga if the stone fell, or that he must not fight him? Oh! now he remembered. It was that he must fight as Aaka wished him to do, and a cold trembling shook his limbs. To talk of fighting that raging giant was easy enough, but to do it was another matter. Yet the gods had spoken, and he dared not disobey the counsel that he had sought. Moreover, by sparing his life from the falling stone, surely they meant that he would conquer Henga. Or perhaps they only meant that they wished to see Henga tear him to pieces for their sport,

for the gods loved blood, and the gods were cruel. Moreover, being evil themselves, would it not, perhaps, please them to give victory to the evil man?

As he could not answer these questions, Wi rose and walked slowly toward the beach, reflecting that probably he had seen his last of the glacier and the Ice-gods who dwelt therein, he who was about to challenge Henga to fight to the death. Presently he drew near to the place where he had killed the wolf, and, looking up, was astonished to see that someone was skinning the beast. Indeed, his fingers tightened upon the haft of his spear, for this was a crime against the hunter's law – that one should steal what another had slain. Then the head of the skinner appeared, and Wi smiled and loosened his grip of the spear. For this was no thief, this was Pag, his slave who loved him.

A strange-looking man was Pag, a large-headed, one-eyed dwarf, greatchested, long-armed, powerful, but with thick little legs, no longer than those of a child of eight years; a monstrous, flat-nosed, bigmouthed creature, who yet always wore upon his scarred countenance a smiling, humorous air. It was told of Pag that, when he was born, a long while before – for his youth had passed – he was so ugly that his mother had thrown him out into the woods, fearing that his father, who was absent killing seals farther up the beach, would be angry with her for bearing such a son and purposing to tell him that the child had been stillborn.

As it chanced, when the father came back, he went to search for the infant's bones, but in place of them found the babe still living, but with one eye dashed out against a stone and its face much scarred. Still, this being his first-born, and because he was a man with a merciful heart, he brought it home into the hut, and forced the mother to nurse it. This she did, like one who is frightened, though why she was frightened she would not say, nor would his father ever tell where and how he had found Pag. Thus it came about that Pag did not die, but lived, and because of what his mother had done to him, always was a hater of women; one, too, who lived much in the forest, for which reason, or some other, he was named "wolf-man." Moreover, he grew up the cleverest of the tribe, for nature, which had made him ugly and deformed, gave him more wits than the rest of them, and a sharp tongue that he used to gibe with at the women.

Therefore they hated him also and made a plot against him, and when there came a time of scarcity, persuaded the chief of the tribe of that day, the father of Henga, that Pag was the cause of ill-fortune. So that chief drove out Pag to starve. But when Pag was dying for lack of food, Wi found him and brought him to his hut, where, although like the rest of her sex Aaka loved him little, he remained as a slave; for this was the law, that, if any saved a life, that life belonged to him. In truth, however, Pag was more than a slave, because, from the hour that Wi, braving the wrath of the women, who thought that they were rid of Pag and his gibes, and perchance the anger of the chief, had rescued him when he was starving in a season of bitter frost, Pag loved him more than a woman loves her firstborn, or a young man his one-day bride.

Thenceforward he was Wi's shadow, ready to suffer all things for him, and even to refrain from sharp words and jests about Aaka or any other woman upon whom Wi looked with favour, though to do so he must bite a hole in his tongue. So Pag loved Wi and Wi loved Pag, for which reason Aaka, who was jealoushearted, came to hate him more than she had done at first.

There was trouble about this business of the saving of the life of Pag by Wi after he had been driven out to starve as an evil eyed and scurrilous fellow, but the chief, Henga's father, a kindly natured man, when the matter came before him, said that, since twice Pag had been thrown out and brought back again, it was evident that the gods meant him to die in some other fashion. Only now that Wi had taken him, Wi must feed him and see that he hurt none. If he chose to keep a one-eyed wolf, it was his own business and that of no one else.

Shortly after this, Henga killed his father and became chief in place, and the matter of Pag was forgotten. So Pag stayed on with Wi and was beloved of him and by Wi's children, but hated of Aaka.

Chapter 4

The Tribe

“A good pelt,” said Pag, pointing to the wolf with his red knife, “for, the spring being so late, this beast had not begun to shoot its hair. When I have brayed it as I know how, it will make a cloak for Foh. He needs one that is warm, even in the summer, for lately he has been coughing and spitting.”

“Yes,” answered Wi anxiously. “It has come upon him ever since he hid in the cold water because the black bear with the great teeth was after him, knowing that the beast hates water, for which,” he added viciously, “I swear that I will kill that bear. Also he grieves for his sister, Fo-a.”

“Aye, Wi,” snarled Pag, his one eye flashing with hate. “Foh grieves, Aaka grieves, you grieve, and I, Pag the Wolf-man, grieve, too. Oh, why did you make me come hunting with you that day when my heart was against it and, smelling evil, I wished to stop with Fo-a, whom Aaka let run off by herself just because I told her that she should keep the girl at home?”

“It was the will of the gods, Pag,” muttered Wi, turning his head away.

“The gods! What gods? I say it was the will of a brute with two legs – nay, of the great-toothed tiger himself of which our forefather told, living in a man’s skin, yes, of Henga, helped by Aaka’s temper. Kill that man tiger, Wi, and never mind the great black bear. Or, if you cannot, let me. I know a woman who hates him because he has put her away and made her serve another who has her place, and I can make good poison, very good poison – “

“Nay, it is not lawful,” said Wi, “and would bring a curse upon us. But it is lawful that I should kill him, and I will. I have been talking to the gods about it.”

“Oh! that is where the wolf’s head has gone – an offering, I see. And what did the gods say to you, Wi?”

“They gave me a sign. A stone fell from the brow of the ice, as Aaka said that it would if I was to fight Henga. It nearly hit me, but I had moved closer to the ice to look at the Sleeper, the greatest of the gods.”

“I don’t believe it is a god, Wi. I believe it is a beast of a sort we do not know, dead and frozen, and that the shadow behind it is a man that was hunting the beast when they both fell into the snow that turned to ice.”

Wi stared at him, for this indeed was a new idea.

“How can that be, Pag, seeing that the Sleeper and the Shadow have always been there, for our grandfathers knew them, and there is no such beast known? Also, except us, there are no other men.”

“Are you sure, Wi? The place is big. If you go to the top of that hill, you see other hills behind as far as the eye can look, and between them plains and woods; also, there is the sea, and there may be beaches beyond the sea. Why, then, should there not be other men? Did the gods make us alone? Would they not make more to play with and to kill?”

Wi shook his head at these revolutionary arguments, and Pag went on:

“As for the falling of the stone, it often happens when the heat of the sun melts the edge of the ice or makes it swell. And as for the groans and callings of the gods, does not ice crack when the frost is sharp, or when there is no frost at all and it begins to move of its own weight?”

“Cease, Pag, cease,” said Wi, stuffing his fingers into his ears. “No longer will I listen to such mad words. If the gods hear them, they will kill us.”

“If the people hear them, they may kill us because they walk in fear of what they cannot see and would save themselves at the cost of others. But for the gods – that!” and Pag snapped his fingers in the direction of the glacier, which, after all, is a very ancient gesture of contempt.

Wi was so overcome that he sat down upon a stone, unable to answer, and, that first of sceptics, Pag, went on:

“If I must have a god, who have found men quite bad enough to deal with, without one above them more evil than they, I would choose the sun. The sun gives life; when the sun shines, everything grows, and the creatures mate and the birds lay eggs and the seals come to bear their young and the flowers bloom. When there is no sun only frost and snow, then all these die or go away, and it is hard to live, and the wolves and bears raven and eat men, if they can catch them. Yes, the sun shall be my good god and the black frost my evil god.”

Thus did Pag propound a new religion, which since then has been very popular in the world. Next, changing the subject rapidly, as do children and savages, he asked:

“What of Henga, Wi? Are you going to challenge him to fight?”

“Yes,” said Wi fiercely, “this very day.”

“May you be victorious! May you kill him, thus and thus and thus,” and Pag jabbed his flint knife into the stomach of the dead wolf. “Yet,” he added reflectively, “it is a big business. There has been no such man as Henga among our people that I have heard of. Although N’gae, who calls himself a magician, is without doubt a cheat and a liar, I think he is right when he says that Henga’s mother made a mistake. She meant to have twins but they got mixed up together and Henga came instead. Otherwise, why is he double-jointed, why has he two rows of teeth, one behind the other, and why is he twice the size of any other man and more than twice as wicked? Still, without doubt he is a man and not what you call a god, since he grows fat and heavy and his hair is beginning to turn gray. Therefore, he can be killed if anyone is strong enough to break in that thick skull of his. I should like to try poison on him, but you say that I must not. Well, I will think the matter over, and we will talk again before you fight. Meanwhile, as there may be no chance afterward when chattering women are about, give me your commands, Wi, as to what is to be done if Henga kills you. I suppose that you do not wish him to take Aaka as he desires to do, or Foh that he may make a nothing of him and keep him as a slave.”

“I do not,” said Wi.

“Then please direct me to kill them, or to see that they kill themselves, never mind how.”

“I do so direct you, Pag.”

“Good, and what are your wishes as regards myself?”

“I don’t know,” answered Wi wearily. “Do what you will. I thank you and wish you well.”

“You are not kind to me, Wi. Although I am called the Twicethrownout, and the Wolf-man, and the Hideous, and the Barbed-tongued, still I have served you well. Now, when I ask you what I must do after you are dead and I have killed your family, you do not say: ‘Why, follow me, of course, and look for me in the darkness, and if you find nothing it will be because there is nothing to find,’ as you would have done did you love me. No, you say, ‘Do as you will. What is it to me?’ Still, I shall come with Foh and Aaka, although, of course, I must be a little behind them, because it will take time to fulfil your orders, and afterward to do what is necessary to myself. Still, wait for me an hour, even if Aaka is angry, as she will be.”

“So you think you would find me somewhere, you who do not believe in the gods,” said Wi, staring at him with his big, melancholy eyes.

“Yes, Wi, I think that, though I don’t know why I think it. I think that the lover always finds the beloved, and that therefore you will find Fo-a and I shall find you. Also, I think that, if I am wrong, it doesn’t matter, for I shall never know that I was wrong. But as for those gods who dwell in the ice, *piff!*” and again Pag snapped his fingers in the direction of the glacier and went on with the skinning of the wolf.

Presently this was finished and he threw the gory hide, flesh side down, over his broad shoulders to keep it stretched, as he said, for a little blood did not trouble him. Then, without more talk, the pair walked down to the beach, the squat misshapen Pag waddling on his short legs after the burly, swift-moving Wi.

Here, straggling over a great extent of shore, were a number of rough shelters not unlike the Indian wigwams of our own age, or those rude huts that are built by the Australian savages. Round these huts wandered or squatted some sharp nosed, surly-looking, long-coated creatures, very powerful of build, that a modern man would have taken for wolves rather than dogs. Wolves their progenitors had been, though how long before it was impossible to say. Now, however, they were tamed, more or less, and the most valued possession of the tribe, which by their aid kept at bay the true wild wolves and the other savage beasts that haunted the beach and the woods.

When these animals caught sight of Wi and Pag, they rushed at them, open-mouthed and growling fiercely till, getting their wind, of a sudden they became gentle and, for the most part, returned to the huts whence they had come. Two or three of them, however, which were his especial property and lived in his hut, leapt up at Wi, wagging their tails and striving to lick his hand or face. He patted one upon the head, the great hound Yow whom he loved, and who was his guard and companion when out hunting, whereon the other two, in their fierce jealousy, instantly flew at its throat, nor did Pag find it easy to separate them.

The noise of the worrying attracted the tribe, many of whom appeared from out of the huts or elsewhere to discover its cause. They were wild-looking people, all dark-haired like Wi, though he was taller and bigger than most of them, very like each other in countenance, moreover, as a result of inbreeding for an unknown number of generations. Indeed, a stranger would have found difficulty in distinguishing them apart except by their ages, but as no stranger ever came to the home of the beach people, this did not matter.

The most of them also were coarse-faced and crushed-looking as though they were well-acquainted with the extremities of cruelty and hardship – which was indeed the case; like Wi, however, some of them had fine eyes, though even these were furtive and terror-stricken. Of children there were not many, for reasons that have been told, and these hung together in a little group, perhaps to keep out of the way of blows when their elders appeared, or in some instances wandered round the fires of driftwood on which food was cooking, bits of seal meat, for the most part, toasting upon sticks – for the tribe were not advanced enough in the domestic arts to possess cooking vessels – as though, like the dogs, they hoped to snatch a mouthful when no one saw them. Only a few of the smaller of these children sat about upon the sand playing with sticks or shells, which they used as toys. Many of the women seemed even more depressed than the men, which was not strange, as, like slaves, it was their lot to do the hard work and to wait hand and foot on their masters, those who had taken them as wives, either by capture or in exchange for other women, or for such goods as this people possessed and valued – bone fish hooks, flint weapons, fibre rope, and dressed skins.

Through this collection of primitive humanity – our forebears be it remembered – Wi, preceded by Pag, marched toward his own hut, a large one more neatly constructed than most, of fir poles from the wood tied together at the top, tent-shaped and covered with untanned skins laid over a roof of dried ferns and seaweed, arranged so as to keep out the cold. Obviously, he was a person held in respect, as the men made way for him, though some of the short little women stood staring at him with sympathy in their eyes, for they remembered that a few days ago Henga had stolen and killed his daughter. One of these mentioned this to another, but this one, who was elderly and cynical, replied as soon as he was out of hearing:

“What does it matter? It will be a mouth less to feed next winter, and who can wish to bring up daughters to be what we are?”

Some of the younger females – there did not seem to be any girls, they were all either children or women – clustered about Pag and, unable to retain their curiosity, questioned him as to the wolfskin on his shoulders. Living up to his reputation, he replied by telling them to mind their own business and get to their work, instead of standing idle; whereon they jeered at him, giving him ugly names, and calling attention to his deformity, or making faces, until he set one of the dogs at them, whereon they ran away.

They came to Wi's hut. As they approached, the hide curtain which hung over the front opening was thrust aside and out rushed a lad of some ten years of age, a handsome boy though rather thin, with a bright, vivacious face, very different in appearance to others of the tribe of the same age. Foh, for it was he, flung himself into his father's arms, saying:

"My mother made me eat in the hut because the wind is so cold and I still cough, but I heard your step, also that of Pag, who lumbers along like a seal on its flippers. Where have you been, Father? When I woke up this morning I could not find you."

"Near to the God's House, Son," answered Wi, nodding toward the glacier, as he kissed him back.

At this moment, Foh's quick glance fell upon the wolfskin which hung from Pag's shoulders to the ground and still dripped blood.

"Where did you get that?" he cried. "What a beautiful skin! A wolf indeed, a father of wolves. Did you kill it, Pag?"

"No, Foh, I flayed it. Learn to take note. Look at your father's spear. Is it not red?"

"So is your knife, Pag, and so are you, down to the heels. How was I to know which of you slew this great beast when both are so brave? What are you going to do with the skin?"

"Bray it into a cloak for you, Foh; very cunningly with the claws left on the pads, but polished so that they will shine in front when you tie it about you."

"Good. Cure it quickly, Pag, for it will be warm and these winds are cold. Come into the hut, Father, where your food is waiting, and tell us how you killed the wolf," and seizing Wi by the hand, the boy dragged him between the skin curtains while Pag and the dogs retreated to some shelter behind, which the dwarf had constructed for himself.

The place within was quite spacious, sixteen feet long, perhaps, by about twelve in breadth.

In the centre of it, on a hearth of clay, burned a wood fire, the smoke of which escaped through a hole in the roof, though, the morning being still, much hung about, making the air thick and pungent, but this Wi, being accustomed to it, did not notice.

On the farther side of the fire, attending to the grilling of strips of flesh set upon pointed sticks, stood Aaka, Wi's wife, clothed in a kirtle of sealskins fastened beneath her breast, for here, the place being warm, she wore no cloak. She was a finely built woman of about thirty years of age, with masses of black hair that hung to her middle, clean and well-kept hair arranged in four tresses, each of which was tied at the end with fibres of grass or sinew. Her skin was whiter than that of most of her race; indeed, quite white, except where it was tanned by exposure to the weather; her face, though rather broad, was handsome and fine-featured, if somewhat querulous, and, like the rest of her people, she had large and melancholy dark eyes.

As Wi entered, she threw a curious, searching glance at him, as though to read his mind, then smiled in rather a forced fashion and drew forward a block of wood. Indeed, there was nothing else for him to sit on, for furniture, even in its simplest forms, was not known in the tribe. Sometimes a thick, flat stone was used as a table, or a divided stick for a fork, but beyond such expedients the tribe had not advanced. Thus their beds consisted of piles of dried seaweed thrown upon the floor of the hut and covered with skins of one sort or another, and their lamps were made of large shells filled with seal oil in which floated a wick of moss.

Wi sat down on the log, and Aaka, taking one of the sticks on which was spitted a great lump of frizzling seal meat, not too well cooked and somewhat blackened by the smoke, handed it to him and stood by dutifully while he devoured it in a fashion which we should not have considered elegant. Then it was that Foh, rather shyly, draw out from some hiding place a little parcel wrapped in a leaf, which he opened and set upon the ground. It contained desiccated and somewhat sandy brine, or rather its deposit, that the lad with much care had scraped off the rocks of a pool from which the sea water had evaporated. Once Wi by accident had mingled some of this dried brine with his food and found that thereby its taste was enormously improved. Thus he became the discoverer of salt among

the People, the rest of whom, however, looked on it as a luxurious innovation which it was scarcely right to use. But Wi, being more advanced, did use it, and it was Foh's business to collect the stuff, as it had been that of his sister, Fo-a. Indeed, it was while she was thus engaged, far away and alone, that Henga the chief had kidnapped the poor child.

Remembering this, Wi thrust aside the leaf, then, noting the pained expression of the boy's face at the refusal of his gift, drew it back again and dipped the meat into its contents. When Wi had consumed all he wanted of the flesh, he signed to Aaka and Foh to eat the rest, which they did hungrily, having touched nothing since yesterday, for it was not lawful that the family should eat until its head had taken his fill. Lastly, by way of dessert, Wi chewed a lump of sun-dried stockfish upon which no modern teeth could have made a mark for it was as hard as stone, and by way of a savoury a handful or so of prawns that Foh had caught among the rocks and Aaka had cooked in the ashes.

The feast finished, Wi bid Foh bear the remnants to Pag in his shelter without, and stay with him till he was called. Then he drank a quantity of spring water, which Aaka kept stored in big shells and in a stone, her most valued possession, hollowed to the shape of a pot by the action of ice, or the constant grinding of other stones at the bottom of the sea. This he did because there was nothing else, though at certain times of the year Aaka made a kind of tea by boiling an herb she knew of in a shell, a potion that all of them loved for both its warmth and its stimulating properties. This herb, however, grew only in the autumn and it had never occurred to them to store it and use it dry. Therefore, their use of the first intoxicant was limited of necessity, which was perhaps as well.

Having drunk, he closed the skins that hung over the hut entrance, pinning them together with a bone that passed through loops in the hide, and sat down again upon his log.

"What said the gods?" asked Aaka quickly. "Did they answer your prayer?"

"Woman, they did. At sunrise a rock fell from the crest of the ice field and crushed my offering so that the ice took it to itself."

"What offering?"

"The head of a wolf that I slew as I went up the valley."

Aaka brooded awhile, then said:

"My heart tells me that the omen is good. Henga is that wolf, and as you slew the wolf, so shall you slay Henga. Did I hear that its hide is to be a cloak for Foh? If so, the omen is good also, since one day the rule of Henga shall descend to Foh. At least, if you kill Henga, Foh shall live and not die as Fo-a died."

An expression of joy spread over Wi's face as he listened.

"Your words give me strength," he said, "and now I go out to summon the People and to tell them that I am about to challenge Henga to fight to the death."

"Go," she said, "and hear me, my man. Fight you without fear, for if my rede be wrong and Henga the Mighty should kill you, what of it? Soon we die, all of us, for the most part slowly by hunger or otherwise, but death at the hands of Henga will be swift. And if you die, then we shall die soon, very soon. Pag will see to it, and so we shall be together again."

"Together again! Together where, Wife?" he asked, staring at her curiously.

A kind of veil seemed to fall over Aaka's face, that is, her expression changed entirely, for it grew blank and wooden, secret also, like to the faces of all her sisters of the tribe.

"I don't know," she answered roughly. "Together in the light or together in the dark, or together with the Ice-gods – who can tell? At least together somewhere. You shake your head. You have been talking to that hater of the gods and changeling, Pag, who really is a wolf, not a man, and hunts with the wolves at night, which is why he is always so fat in winter when others starve."

Here Wi laughed incredulously, saying:

"If so, he is a wolf that loves us; I would that we had more such wolves."

"Oh! you mock, as all men do. But we women see further, and we are sure that Pag is a wolf by night, if a dwarf by day. For, if any try to injure him, are they not taken by wolves? Did not wolves

eat his father, and were not the leaders of those women who caused him to be driven forth to starve when there was such scarcity that even the wolves fled far away, afterward taken by wolves, they or their children?”

Then, as though she thought she had said too much, Aaka added:

“Yet all this may be but a tale spread from mouth to mouth, because we women hate Pag who mocks us. At least he believes in naught, and would teach you to do the same, and already you begin to walk in his footsteps. Yet, if you hold that we live no more after our breath leaves us, tell me one thing. Why, when you buried Fo-a yonder, did you set with her in the hole her necklace of shells and the stone ball that she played with and the tame bird she had, after you killed it, and her winter cloak, and the doll you made for her of pinewood last year? Of what good would these things be to her bones? Was it not because you thought that they and the little stone ax might be of use to her elsewhere, as the dried fish and the water might serve to feed her?”

Here she ceased, and stared at him.

“Sorrow makes you mad,” said Wi, very gently, for he was moved by her words, “as it makes me mad, but in another fashion. For the rest, I do not know why I did thus; perhaps it was because I wished to see those things no more, perhaps because it is a custom to bury with the dead what they loved when they were alive.”

Then he turned and left the hut. Aaka watched him go, muttering to herself:

“He is right. I am mad with grief for Fo-a and with fear for Foh; for it is the children that we women love, yes, more than the man who begat them; and if I thought that I should never find her again, then I would die at once and have done. Meanwhile, I live on to see Wi dash out the brains of Henga, or, if he is killed, to help Pag poison him. They say that Pag is a wolf, but, though I hate him of whom Wi thinks too much, what care I whether he be wolf or monster? At least he loves Wi and our children and will help me to be revenged on Henga.”

Presently she heard the wild-bull horn that served the tribe as a trumpet being blown, and knew that Wini-wini, he who was called the Shudderer because he shook like a jellyfish even if not frightened, which was seldom, was summoning the people that they might talk together or hear news. Guessing what that news would be, Aaka threw her skin cloak about her and followed the sound of the horn to the place of assembly.

Here, on a flat piece of ground at a distance from the huts that lay about two hundred paces from a cliff-like spur of the mountain, all the people, men, women, and children, except a few who were in childbed or too sick or old to move, were gathering together. As they walked or ran, they chattered excitedly, delighted that something was happening to break the terrible sadness of their lives, now and again pointing toward the mouth of the great cave that appeared in the stone cliff opposite to the meeting place. In this cave dwelt Henga, for by right, from time immemorial, it was the home of the chiefs of the tribe, which none might enter save by permission, a sacred place like to the palaces of modern times.

Aaka walked on, feeling that she was being watched by the others but taking no heed, for she knew the reason. She was Wi's woman, and the rumour had run round that Wi the Strong, Wi the Great Hunter, Wi whose little daughter had been murdered, was about to do something strange, though what it might be none was sure. All of them longed to ask Aaka, but there was something in her eye which forbade them, for she was cold and stately and they feared her a little. So she went on unmolested, looking for Foh, of whom presently she caught sight walking in the company of Pag, who still had the reeking wolfskin on his shoulders, of which, as he was short, the tail dragged along the ground. She noted that, as he advanced, the people made way for him, not from reverence or love, but because they feared him and his evil eye.

“Look,” said one woman to another in hearing, “there goes he who hates us, the spear-tongued dwarf.”

“Aye,” answered the other. “He is in such haste that he has forgotten to take off the wolf’s hide he hunted in last night. Have you heard that Buk’s wife has lost her little child of three? It is said that the bears took it, but perhaps yonder wolfman knows better.”

“Yet Foh does not fear him. Look, he holds his hand and laughs.”

“No, because – ” Here suddenly the woman caught sight of Aaka and was silent.

“I wonder,” reflected Aaka, “whether we women hate Pag because he is ugly and hates us, or because he is cleverer than we are and pierces us with his tongue. I wonder also why they all think he is half a wolf. I suppose it is because he hunts with Wi, for how can he be both a man and a wolf? At least, I too believe that report speaks truth and that he and the wolves have dealings together. Or perhaps he puts the tale about that all may fear him.”

She came to the meeting ground and took her stand near to Foh and Pag among the crowd which stood or sat in a ring about an open space of empty ground where sometimes the tribe danced when they had plenty of food and the weather was warm, or took counsel, or watched the young men fight and wrestle for the prize of a girl they coveted.

At the head of the ring, which was oblong in shape rather than round, standing about Winiwini the Shudderer, who from time to time still blew blasts upon his horn, were some of the leaders of the tribe, among them old Turi the Avaricious, the hoarder of food who was always fat, whoever grew thin; and Pitokiti the Unlucky with whom everything went wrong, whose fish always turned rotten, whose women deserted him, whose children died, and whose net was sure to break, so that he must be supported by others for fear lest he should die and pass on his ill-luck to them who neglected him; and Whaka the Bird-of-Ill-Omen, the lean-faced one who was always howling of misfortunes to come; and Hou the Unstable, a feather blown by the wind, who was never of the same mind two days together and Rahi the Rich, who traded in stone axes and fish hooks and thus lived well without work; and Hotoa, the great-bellied and slow-speeched, who never gave his word as to a matter until he knew how it was settled, and then shouted it loudly and looked wise; and Taren, She-Who-hid, with N’gae the priest of the Icegods and the magician who told fortunes with shells, and only came out when there was evil in the wind.

Lastly there was Moananga, Wi’s younger brother, the brave, the great fighter who had fought six men to win and keep Tana, the sweet and loving, the fairest woman of the tribe, and killed two of them who strove to steal her by force. He was a round-eyed man with a laughing face, quick to anger but good-tempered, and after Wi the Hunter, he who stood first among the people. Moreover, he loved Wi and clung to him, so that the two were as one, for which reason Henga the chief hated them both and thought that they were too strong for him.

All these were talking with their heads close together, till presently appeared Wi, straight, strong, and stern, at whose coming they grew silent. He looked round at them, then said:

“I have words.”

“We are listening,” replied Moananga.

“Hearken,” went on Wi. “Is there not a law that any man of the tribe may challenge the chief of the tribe to fight, and if he can kill him, may take his place?”

“There is such a law,” said Urk, the old wizard, he who made charms for women and brewed love potions, and in winter told stories of what had happened long ago before his grandfather’s grandfather was born, very strange stories, some of them. “Twice it has chanced in my day, the second time when Henga challenged and killed his own father and took the cave.”

“Yes,” added Whaka the Bird-of-Ill-Omen, “but if he who challenges is defeated, not only is he killed, his family is killed also” – here he glanced at Aaka and Foh – “and perhaps his friend or brother” – here he looked at Moananga. “Yes, without doubt that is the law. The cave only belongs to the chief while he can defend it with his hands. If another rises who is stronger than he, he may take the cave, and the women, also the children if there are any, and kill them or make them slaves, until his strength begins to fail him and he in turn is killed by some mightier man.”

“I know it,” said Wi. “Hearken again. Henga has done me wrong; he stole and murdered my daughter Fo-a. Therefore I would kill him. Also he rules the tribe cruelly. No man’s wife or daughter or robe or food is safe from him. His wickedness makes the gods angry. Why is it that the summers have turned cold and the spring does not come? I say it is because of the wickedness of Henga. Therefore, I would kill him and take the cave, and rule well and gently so that every man may have plenty of food in his hut and sleep safe at night. What say you?”

Now Wini-wini the Shudderer spoke, shaking in all his limbs:

“We say that you must do what you will, Wi, but that we will not mix with the matter. If we mix, when you are killed, as you will be – for Henga is mightier than you – yes, he is the tiger, he is the bull of the woods, he is the roaring bear – then he will kill us also. Do what you will, but do it alone. We turn our backs on you, we put our hands before our eyes and see nothing.”

Pag spat upon the ground and said in his low, growling voice that seemed to come out of his stomach:

“I think that you will see something one night when the stars are shining. I think, Wini-wini, that one night you will meet that which will make you shudder yourself to pieces.”

“It is the wolf-man,” exclaimed Wini-wini. “Protect me! Why should the wolf-man threaten me when we are gathered to talk?”

Nobody answered, because if some were afraid of Pag, all, down to the most miserable slave-woman, despised Wini-wini.

“Take no heed of his words, Brother,” said Moananga the Happy-faced. “I will go up with you to the cave-mouth when you challenge Henga, and so I think will many others to be witnesses of the challenge, according to the custom of our fathers. Let those stop behind who will. You will know what to think of them when you are chief and sit in the cave.”

“It is well,” said Wi. “Let us go at once.”

Chapter 5

The Ax that Pag Made

This matter being settled, there followed a jabber of argument as to the method of conveying the challenge of Wi to Henga the chief. Urk the Aged was consulted as to precedents and made a long speech in which he contradicted himself several times. Hou the Unstable sprang up at length and said that he was not afraid and would be the leader. Suddenly, however, he changed his mind, declaring he remembered that this office by right belonged to Wini-wini the Horn-Blower, who must sound three blasts at the mouth of the cave to summon the chief. To this all assented with a shout, perhaps because there was a sense of humour even in their primitive minds, and protest as he would, Wini-wini was thrust forward with his horn.

Then the procession started, Wini-wini going first, followed close behind by Pag in the bleeding wolfskin, who, from time to time, pricked him in the back with his sharp flint knife to keep him straight. Next came Wi himself with his brother Moananga, and after these the elders and the rest of the people.

At least, they started thus to cover the three hundred paces or so which lay between them and the cliff, but before they reached the cave, most of them lagged behind so that they were dotted in a long line reaching from the meeting place to its entrance.

Indeed, here remained only Wini-wini, who could not escape from Pag, Wi, Moananga, and, at a little distance behind, Whaka the Bird-of-Ill-Omen, prophesying evil in a ceaseless stream of words. At his side, too, was Aaka, walking boldly and looking down at his withered shape with scorn. Of the remainder, the bravest, drawn by curiosity, kept within hearing, but the rest stayed at a distance or hid themselves.

“Blow!” growled Pag to Wini-wini and, as he still hesitated, pricked him in the back with his knife.

Then Wini-wini blew a quavering blast.

“Blow again louder,” said Pag.

Wini-wini set the horn to his lips, but before a sound came out of it, a large stone hurled from the cave struck him in the middle and down he went, writhing and gasping.

“Now you have something to shake for,” said Pag, as he waddled to one side lest another stone should follow.

None came, but out of the cave with a roar rushed a huge, hairy, black-browed fellow waving a great wooden club – Henga himself. He was a mighty, thick limbed man of about forty years of age, with a chest like a bull’s, a big head from which long black hair fell upon his shoulders, and a wide, thick-lipped mouth whence projected yellow tusk-like teeth. From his shoulders, in token of his rank, hung the hide of a cave tiger and round his neck was a collar made from its claws and teeth.

“Who sends that dog to waken me from my rest?” he shouted in his bellowing voice, and pointed with the club to Wini-wini, twisting on the ground.

“I do,” answered Wi, “I and all the people. I, Wi, whose child you murdered, come to challenge you, the chief, to fight me for the rule of the tribe, as you must do according to the law, in the presence of the tribe.”

Henga ceased from his shouting and glared at him.

“Is it so?” he asked in a quiet voice that had in it a hiss of hate. “Know that I hoped that you would come on this errand and that is why I killed your brat to give you courage, as I will kill the other that remains to you,” and he glanced at the boy Foh who stood at a distance. “You have troubled me for long, Wi, with your talk and threats against me, of which I am hungry to make an end. Now, tell me, when does it please the people to see me break your bones?”

“When the sun is within an hour of its setting, Henga, for I have a fancy to sleep in the cave to-night as chief of the people,” answered Wi quietly.

Henga glowered at him, gnawing at his lip, then said:

“So be it, dog. I shall be ready at the meeting place an hour before the sun sets. For the rest, it is Aaka who will sleep in the cave to-night, not you who I think will sleep in the bellies of the wolves. Now begone, for a salmon has been sent to me, the first of the year, and I who love salmon would cook and eat it.”

Then Aaka spoke, saying:

“Eat well, devil-man who murders children, for I, the mother, tell you that it shall be your last meal.”

Laughing hoarsely, Henga went back into the cave, and Wi and all the others slipped away.

“Who gave Henga the salmon?” asked Moananga idly, as one who would say something.

“I did,” answered Pag, who was walking beside him but out of earshot of Wi. “I caught it last night in a net and sent it to him, or rather caused it to be laid on a stone by the mouth of the cave.”

“What for?” asked Moananga.

“Because Henga is greedy over salmon, especially the first of the year. He will eat the whole fish and be heavy when it comes to fighting.”

“That is clever; I should never have thought of that,” said Moananga. “But how did you know that Wi was going to challenge Henga?”

“I did not know, nor did Wi. Yet I guessed it because Aaka sent him to consult the gods. When a woman sends a man to seek a sign from the gods, that sign will always be the one she wishes. So at least she will tell him, and he will believe.”

“That is cleverer still,” said Moananga, staring at the dwarf with his round eyes. “But why does Aaka wish Wi to fight Henga?”

“For two reasons. First, because she would revenge the killing of her child, and, second, because she thinks that Wi is the better man, and that presently she will be the wife of the chief of the tribe. Still, she is not sure about this, because she has made a plan, should Wi be defeated, that I must kill her and Foh at once, which I shall do before I kill myself. Or perhaps I shall not kill myself, at any rate, until I have tried to kill Henga.”

“Would you then be chief of the tribe, Wolf-man?” asked Moananga, astonished.

“Perhaps, for a little while; for do not those who have been spat upon and reviled always wish to rule the spitters and the revilers? Yet I will tell who are Wi’s brother and love him that, if he dies, I, who love him better and love no one else, save perhaps Foh, because he is his son, shall not live long after him. No, then I should pass on the chieftainship to you, Moananga, and be seen no more, though perhaps in the after years you might hear me at night howling round the huts in winter – with the wolves, Moananga, to which fools say I belong.”

Moananga stared again at this sinister dwarf whose talk frightened him. Then, that he might talk of something else, asked him:

“Which of these two do you think will conquer, Pag?”

Pag stopped and pointed to the sea. At some distance from the shore a mighty struggle was in progress between a thresher shark and a whale. The terrible shark had driven the whale into shallow water, where it floundered, unable to escape by sounding. Now the sea wolf, as it is called, was leaping high in to the air, and each time as it fell it smote the whale upon the head with its awful sword-like tail, blow upon blow that echoed far and wide. The whale rolled in agony, beating the water to a foam with its giant flukes, but for all its size and bulk could do nothing. Presently, it began to gasp and opened its great mouth, whereon the thrasher, darting between its jaws, seized its tongue and tore it out. Then the whale rolled over and began to bleed to death.

“Look,” said Pag. “There is Henga the huge and mighty and there is Wi the nimble, and Wi wins the day and will feed his fill upon whale’s flesh, he and his friends. That is my answer, and the omen is very good. Now I go to make Wi ready for this battle.”

When Pag reached the hut, he sent Aaka and Foh out of it, leaving himself alone with Wi. Then, causing Wi to strip off his cloak, he made him lie down and rubbed him all over with seal oil. Also, with a sharp flint and a shell ground to a fine edge, slowly and painfully he cut his hair short, so short that it could give no hold to Henga’s hand, and, this done, greased what remained of it with the seal oil. Next he bade Wi sleep awhile and left the hut, taking with him Wi’s stone ax, also his spear, that with which he had killed the wolf, and his flint knife that was hafted with two flat pieces of ivory rubbed down from a walrus tusk and lashed onto the end of the flint.

Outside the hut, he met Aaka, who was wandering to and fro in an ill-humour. She made as though she would pass him, setting her face toward the hut.

“Nay,” said Pag, “you do not enter.”

“Why not?” she asked.

“Because Wi rests and must not be disturbed.”

“So a misshapen monster, a wolf-man hated of all, who lives on bounty, may enter my husband’s hut, when I, the wife, may not,” she said furiously.

“Yes, for presently he goes upon a man’s business, namely, to kill his enemy or be killed of him, and it is best that no woman should come near to him till the thing is ended.”

“You say that because you hate women, who will not look on you, Pag.”

“I say it because women take away the strength of men and suck out their courage and disturb them with weak words.”

She leapt to one side as though to rush past him, but Pag leapt also, lifting the spear in his hand, whereon she stopped, for she feared the dwarf.

“Listen,” he said. “You do ill to reproach me, Aaka, who am your best friend. Still, I do not blame you overmuch for I know the reason of your hate. You are jealous of me because Wi loves me more than he does you, as does Foh, in another fashion.”

“Loves you, you abortion, you hideous one!” she gasped.

“Yes, Aaka, who, it seems, do not know that there are different sorts of love, that of the man for the woman which comes and goes, and that of man for man which changes not. I say that you are jealous. Only this day I told Wi that, if he had not taken me with him hunting but had left me to watch Fo-a, she would not have been stolen and killed by yonder cave dweller. It was a lie. I could have refused to go hunting with Wi and he would have let me be, who knows that always I have a reason for what I do. I went with him because of words which you had spoken which you will remember well. I told you that Fo-a was in danger from Henga the cave-dweller and that I had best watch her, and you said that no girl child of yours should be watched by a wolf’s cub and that you would take care of her yourself, which you did not do. Therefore, because you goaded me, I went hunting and Fo-a was taken and killed.”

Now Aaka hung her head, answering nothing, for she knew that his words were true.

“Let that be,” went on Pag. “The dead are dead, and well dead, perchance. Now, although I speak wisely to you, you would thwart me again and go in to awaken Wi, even when I tell you that to do so may turn the fight against him and bring about your death, and Foh’s as well.”

“Does Wi sleep?” asked Aaka, weakening a little.

“I think he sleeps because I bade him, and in such matters he obeys me. Also, last night he slept little. But the road is open and I have said my say. Go and look for yourself. Go wake him up and ask if he is asleep and wear him out with your woman’s talk, and tell him what dreams have come to you about Fo-a and the gods, and thus make him ready to fight the devil giant, Henga.”

“I go not,” she said, stamping her foot, “lest, if Wi fall, your poisoned tongue should put it about that I was the cause of his death. But know, misshapen, outcast wolf-man, that, should he conquer

and live, he must choose between you and me, for if he takes you to dwell with him in the cave, then I stay here in the hut.”

Pag laughed deep down in his throat after his fashion and answered:

“That would be peace indeed, were it not, as I remember, that, if Henga dies, he leaves behind him sundry fair women who also live in the cave and doubtless will be hard to dislodge. Still, in this matter, as in all others, do what you will. Only I tell you, Aaka, that you do ill to revile me, whom you may need presently to help you out of the world.”

Then, ceasing from his mockery and the rolling of his great head from side to side, as was his habit when he mocked, he looked her in the face with his one bright eye with which folk said he could see in the dark like a wild-cat, and said quietly:

“Why do you reproach me because I am hideous? Did I make my own shape or was it the gift of a woman? Did I throw away my right eye or did a woman dash it out against a stone? After ward, did I leave the camp to starve in the winter, or did women drive me out because I told them the truth? Why are you angry with me because I love Wi who saved me from the cruelty of women, and your son Foh whom Wi caused to be?”

Why will you not understand that, although I be misshapen, yet I have more wisdom than all the rest of you and a larger heart, and that the wisdom and the heart are the servants of Wi and those with whom he has to do? Why should you be jealous of me?”

“Would you know, Pag? Because you speak truth. Because you are more to Wi than I am – yes, and to Foh also. When one comes whom Wi loves better than he does you, then we may be friends again, but not before.”

“That may happen,” said Pag reflectively. “Now trouble me no more, who go to make ready Wi’s weapons for this fight and who have no time to waste. Go now to the hut; as I have said, the way is open, and tell your own tale to Wi.”

Aaka hesitated, then she said:

“Nay, I come to help you with the weapons, for my fingers are defter than yours. Let there be peace between us for an hour, or gibe on if you will, and I will not answer.”

Again Pag laughed his great laugh, saying:

“Women are strange, so strange that even I cannot weigh or measure them. Come on! Come on! The edges of the spear and ax need rubbing, and the lashings are worn.”

For a while did Pag and Aaka, with the lad Foh to help them, fetching and carrying or holding hide strips, labour at the simple weapons of Wi, pointing the spear and grinding the edge of the ax. When this ax was as sharp as they could make it, Pag weighed the thing in his hand and cast it down with a curse.

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