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Author: S. P. Meek

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK B. C. 30,000 ***



With a roar, the apemen charged.

Back in the dim dawn of civilization
Anak the Hunter stands in his might
before the encroaching
Neanderthal men.

B. C. 30,000

By Capt. S. P. Meek

A SCREAM of rage split the darkness. From the side of the fire where the women sat darted Esle, the High Priestess, a bloody bit of liver in her hand. Following her, and snarling like an enraged cat, came one of the maidens of the tribe. The aged hag, Esle, whose duty it was to declare to the tribe the will of Degar Astok, the mighty one who dwelt in the heavens and sent the storms to enforce his will, came to a pause before Ugluk, the Chief and tribal Father.

"Una was eating of the man's piece," she shrilled as she held the fragment aloft.

Ugluk dropped the thigh bone from which he had been ripping the meat in huge chunks. He took the liver from Esle and examined it.

"Bring me my spear!" he roared as he lunged forward and grasped Una by the hair. "Una has stolen that which is tabu to her and I will punish her."

Una moaned with fright but attempted no resistance. Ugluk grasped his spear and raised it over his head.

"Hold, Father!" came a clear voice from the group of hunters who sat near the chief.

Ugluk paused in amazement at the interruption. Anak, the Chief Hunter, rose to his feet and made a step forward.

"She stole it not," he said. "Anak, the Chief Hunter, gave it to her."

Ugluk released the girl and stared at the hunter in surprise. Anak returned the stare coolly and Ugluk raised his throwing-spear threateningly. Anak did not let his gaze wander from the Father's, but his grasp tightened ever so slightly on the sharp flint smiting-stone which he had taken from the skin pouch which dangled from his leather waist belt before he had made his announcement.

"Anak, the Chief Hunter, gave it to her," he repeated slowly. "Anak killed the buck, and half of the liver is, by the law of the tribe, his to dispose of. Does the Father deny the right?"

U GLUK lowered the point of his spear and thought rapidly. Anak's act constituted unheard-of rebellion against his authority. On the other hand, the Chief Hunter was the cleverest tracker of the tribe and a mighty warrior in battle. The tribe of Ugar had lost most of its

warriors in their long six-month march north from the fertile valley where the Mediterranean Sea now rolls. Uglík was too wise a leader to waste men on a trivial quarrel, able though he felt himself to kill Anak, should the latter cry the rannag, the duel to the death by which the Father must at any time prove to any challenger, his right to rule.

"It is the right of the killer to dispose of half of the liver of the kill," he conceded. "It is also the right of the stronger to take what he wills from the weaker. To Esle belongs the liver. The girl will not be punished. Anak will join me at meat."

Anak's face flushed momentarily at the arrogant tone of the Father's ruling. He realized, as well as Uglík, what had caused the Father to condone his semi-rebellion. He shrugged his shoulders and sat down beside Uglík.

Uglík ate slowly, looking meditatively at Una as she tore off chunks of the meat with her strong teeth and swallowed them. The girl was about eighteen and in the first flush of womanhood. Her tawny brown skin gleamed like satin in the firelight, which was reflected from her slightly curling masses of black hair. She stood eight inches over five feet and her entire body was built on generous lines, lines of perfect health and almost masculine strength. Anak's eyes followed the direction of Uglík's gaze and he grew thoughtful in turn.

"Is the Father satisfied with the Chief Hunter?" he asked ceremoniously.

"The Father is," replied Uglík in similar vein.

"Then the Chief Hunter has a boon to ask."

"Name it."

"I desire that maiden, Una, be given to me."

"What?"

Uglík could hardly believe his ears. All of the women of the tribe belonged of immemorial right to the Father. While he might lend one for a time to a favored hunter as a mark of distinction, the suggestion that he completely relinquish his claim to one of them, and a young and handsome one at that, struck him with such astonishment that he was momentarily speechless.

"I desire that the maiden, Una, be given to me," repeated Anak. "She pleases me. I would have her carry my weapons on the march and sleep by my side in the camp."

UGLÍK leaped to his feet, spear in hand, but before the Chief Hunter's cool gaze, he wavered, again. Men were too scarce to waste, unless it became necessary.

"I will consider the matter," he said shortly. "I may lend her to you for a time, but I will not give her to you. Such is not the law."

"The Father who ruled before you gave women to his favored hunters," replied Anak. "I was the son of such a one."

"And Degar Astok assumed the form of a lion and punished him for his impiety by destroying him," retorted Uglík.

"Then Uglík killed the lion and so became Father," replied Anak, "since none dared challenge the slayer of Degar Astok. Is it not possible that Esle, who was young and who favored Uglík in those days, made a mistake? Despite his death, Degar Astok still has power."

Uglík's face flushed at the hunter's words.

"Degar Astok may be robbed of one body, but he still lives," he answered. "Say no more. I will consider your request."

Anak saluted and strode to the other side of the men's fire. He dropped down beside Invar, the youngest of the hunters. It was on his recommendation that Invar had been initiated into the ranks of manhood a full season before his time. The young hunter looked up with adoration in his eyes.

"This I saved for my friend, Anak," he said proudly as he extended a generous chunk of liver. "Invar will be honored if his friend will eat of the liver of his kill."

Anak took the morsel with thanks and ate it slowly. His thoughts ran to the tall maiden whom he had requested from the Father, and his blood boiled at the way he had been put off. He was half inclined to cry the rannag, but he was not yet ready for the death duel which would determine whether he or Uglík would rule the tribe. There was no other solution, for, while he ruled, the Father's word was law, subject only to the higher law of Degar Astok as given out by the High Priestess. This overlordship was more nominal than actual, for those priestesses who lived long lives were invariably those who found that the will of the Father coincided exactly with the law of Degar Astok. Anak revolved the problem in his mind for a time, but the repletion of raw meat in his stomach was not conducive to protracted thought. Gradually his head slumped forward and he slept sitting. The other hunters followed his example, leaving the youths from ten to seventeen to guard the camp, keep the fires going, and rouse the hunters should need arise.

THE night passed slowly without alarms. Womoo, the lion, roared in the distance, and from near at hand came the coughing laugh of Kena, the jackal, who always prowled around the camp when the tribe fed on meat. Gradually the sky grew lighter. One of the children moaned in his sleep and raised his head. He rose, and with a word to the youth on guard, trotted off toward the stream which gurgled near the camp. He disappeared in the darkness. Suddenly there came a sudden scream, shut off in mid-note. Hardly had the cry ceased than the hunters were on their feet with spears ready in their hands.

"What is it?" cried Uglik.

"Loda went to the stream to drink," stuttered the guard. "He screamed, and I saw a gray shape run off into the darkness. It ran like Grup, the bear, but it was small."

"Bring fire!" cried Anak.

The youth seized a burning brand and led the way toward the stream. By the light of the torch Anak scrutinized the ground carefully. With a sudden exclamation, he pointed out to Uglik the print of a long and narrow, but unmistakably human, foot in the mud by the river bank. Uglik studied it carefully.

"What think you?" he demanded of Anak.

"It is the mark of man, yet not of our tribe," replied the Chief Hunter. "Such marks have I never seen."

"Wait until Degar Astok sends the light," directed Uglik. "As soon as you can trail, the hunters will go in pursuit."

SLOWLY the light grew brighter. As soon as he could pick out the trail, Anak led the way, Uglik with the warriors and youths following closely. The trail led straight up the valley for a half mile before it turned and followed a branch of the stream which came from a ravine in the valley wall. The hunters went a hundred yards up the ravine following Anak. The Chief Hunter paused and held up his hand. He sniffed the air and then led the way cautiously past a projecting shoulder of rock. On a ledge, half way up the hillside, sat two monstrous things.

They were manlike and yet hardly man. Their bodies were covered with stiff, coarse, gray hair which lengthened into a mane on the head and neck. Their foreheads were low and receding, an impression which was heightened by the enormously developed brow ridges, although the cranial capacity of the creatures was not small, as was evidenced by enormous bulges at the back of their heads. They walked on two legs but with a peculiar slouch, the torso inclined forward from the hips, and their eyes bent perpetually on the ground. Their arms were long and at times they bent forward so much that it appeared almost as though they were going on all fours. A close examination of their hands would have shown that it was impossible for them to hold a needle between the thumb and forefinger.

"Gumor, the gray ape!" cried one of the hunters.

"It is not Gumor," replied Anak, "although they are like his cousins. See what they eat!"

As the hunters of the Cro-Magnon tribe of Ugar saw the meat which the Neanderthalers were tearing, a cry of wrath broke from them. Uglik stepped forward and raised the war cry of the tribe. The Neanderthalers looked stupidly down at him for a moment. The huge male dropped the meat he was eating and rose, his mane and beard bristling with rage. With a roar, he charged down the slope, a huge flint smiting-stone in either hand.

THE hunters closed up on Uglik. As the attacker came within range, he was saluted with a shower of stones which sprang harmlessly from his huge rounded chest. Uglik hurled his spear. It pierced the apeman's shoulder but did not make him pause. Other spears were hurled and struck their mark, but without a pause the Neanderthaler came on with howls of rage and pain, bloody froth flying from his lips.

Anak had not thrown his spear, and Invar, who stood beside his hero, had likewise retained his weapon. The apeman came on with a rush. Uglik sprang forward to meet him, but another hunter was directly in the path of the attack. He swung his flint smiting-stone with a will, but his blow was futile. He went down before a sweep of the apeman's arm, his skull crushed to fragments.

Uglik struck at the attacker. The Neanderthaler turned toward him, but as he did so, Anak hurled his spear. At close range, the stone-tipped weapon passed nearly through the apeman. He stopped his rush and began to cough up blood from a pierced lung. Anak seized Invar's spear and sprang to the attack. An unfledged youth who craved distinction, rushed ahead of the Chief Hunter, but his act spelled his doom. One blow of the huge smiting-stone laid him dead. Anak hurled Invar's spear and again his weapon found its mark. The Neanderthaler roared with pain and sank gradually to his knees. Uglik dashed in, knife in hand. He threw himself on the prostrate monster and stabbed him again and again. The blows struck home, but with a last effort the apeman threw off his assailant and struck at him with the huge stone which had already robbed the tribe of two of its members. Before the blow could fall, Samo, one of the hunters, threw himself in the way and took the blow on his arm. The arm bone snapped like a pipestem, but it

was the monster's dying effort. With a shudder, he fell back dead.

A FEROCIOUS howl rent the air. With a smiting-stone in each hand, the female charged down at them. She was somewhat smaller than the male, but still a match for any two of the men. Uglik's face paled as he wrenched Invar's spear from the dead male and turned to face her. The howl was repeated from farther up the ravine. Two more males were approaching at a lumbering run, smiting-stones in either hand. Uglik was a brave man, but he was also a cautious leader. He did not care to expose his tribe to almost certain annihilation and he led a wild retreat down the valley, Samo, with his arm hanging limp, bringing up the rear. The Neanderthals did not follow into the open valley.

Again at the camping place, Uglik called his hunters into council. The situation was grave enough. With the Neanderthals so near them, it meant eventual annihilation to stay where they were, yet there was no place they could go. They had been driven from their old home by hordes of men who came up from the south. They had fought to retain their ancestral hunting grounds where they had dwelt since the beginning of time, but a series of defeats at the hands of overwhelming numbers had dwindled down the tribe until a migration was necessary. They had followed the migrating game toward the unknown north.

Several times they had tried to stop, but each time they had found the land in possession of other and stronger tribes. Their men had been killed and their women stolen until they again took up their march to the north. From the hundred that had formerly called Uglik "Father," there now remained only a score of women and children, a half dozen youths, and five able-bodied hunters, besides Uglik.

South, they dared not go. North, there lay unknown horrors. West lay the raging sea. East, the Neanderthals blocked the way.

THE council broke up with no action decided on. Faced with the alternatives of moving or staying, there seemed to be little choice. Only death faced them, whichever way they turned. Uglik posted guards about the camp and announced that he would retire and consult with Degar Astok as to their future course.

As he disappeared into the woods, Esle sidled up to Anak.

"It seems that Degar Astok no longer loves Uglik," she said slyly. "Does not the Chief Hunter agree with me?"

Anak looked at the withered hag coldly.

"Who am I to tell his Priestess whom Degar Astok loves?" he asked. "You are his voice and should know."

"True, Anak, I am his voice, and the God loves me," she went on, "yet it may be that men do not always love me. Uglik thinks that I have given him false counsel and he is ready for a new Priestess to announce the will of Degar Astok to him. He believes that a new and younger Priestess would bring back the favor of the God."

"What is that to me?" asked Anak.

"You desire the maiden, Una?"

"And if I do?"

"You are not to have her. Uglik will never grant your request. Already he plans to make her the High Priestess, should an accident happen to me."

Anak started. If Esle spoke the truth, it ended his chances of having Una. All women were tabu to all save the Father, but the High Priestess was doubly sacred.

"What am I to do?" he demanded.

Esle smiled slyly.

"I was the Voice of the God before Uglik was Father," she said in a low voice, "and I would be so after he is gone. Cry you rannag on him. I know many things, and I will cast a spell on him so that victory will be easy for you. Then will you be Father. The maiden Una will be yours, and old Esle will remain the High Priestess."

"To give me false counsel as you have Uglik, and in time to plot my overthrow and death with another," said Anak sternly. "No, woman or devil, whichever you are, I want no help of yours. If I ever cry rannag on Uglik, I will defeat him by my strength or not at all. If I win to be Father, be assured that an 'accident' will happen to you shortly."

ESLE frothed at the mouth with rage.

"You shall never have the maiden!" she screamed. "Rather will I kill her than that you shall have her. It was in my mind to make you Chief and to lead you from this trap that Uglik had brought you into, but you have sealed your doom and hers. I go to prepare a curse."

She turned to depart, but Anak grasped her by the arm.

"Listen, woman," he said sternly as he raised his spear, "it is in my mind to kill you and make an end of your evil plottings."

"Spare me! Spare me, noble Anak!" shrieked the hag, dropping to her knees as the flint point of Anak's spear hovered over her. "I will not harm her nor you, either. I will soften Uglik's heart toward you and make him give you the maiden. I will declare it is the will of the God."

Anak lowered the spear.

"As long as Una is safe, your life is spared," he said grimly; "but pray to Degar Astok to keep her safe. Should any harm befall her, your life will answer for it."

"I will weave spells to guard her from harm, Anak," she cried eagerly. "Only let me live, brave hunter!"

Anak spurned her contemptuously from him. The hag scuttled away and took the path into the woods which Uglik had taken earlier. Later in the day she returned with the Father. Uglik announced briefly that it was the will of Degar Astok that they remain at their present camping place.

THEN began a time of horror for the children of the tribe. If one of them strayed for even a short distance from the circle of the camp fire at night, there came a scream from the darkness and the tribe would mourn another lost member. The tales of man-eating giants and ogres which even yet haunt the dreams of childhood have descended to us through the ages from those grim times when the race of men learned the lesson of fear of the dark that they are now slowly and painfully unlearning.

Anak did not renew his request for Una. He knew from her smiles that the maiden was more than willing to become his property, but in the face of their daily peril, he was not willing to precipitate a crisis which might easily cost the tribe most or all of their few remaining warriors. He kept a sharp watch on Esle and on Uglik, but neither the High Priestess nor the Father seemed to notice the girl.

As time went on, the Neanderthalers lost their fear of the fire and grew bolder. Their gray shapes could be seen prowling around at night, just outside the protecting circle of light. The climax came at last. There was a scream in the night. A howl of triumph came from the darkness. The quickly aroused hunters could see nothing at which to cast their spears.

"Who is missing?" demanded Uglik as the hunters returned empty handed.

"The maiden, Una," cried Esle shrilly.

Anak rushed at her, spear in hand.

"Unsay those words, hag of evil omen!" he roared. "Where have you hidden her?"

"Ask of the cousins of Gumor," she replied as she ducked behind the protecting frame of Uglik. "They have taken her from us."

Anak dropped his spear and buried his face in his hands. When he raised his head again, resolution showed in his handsome face.

"Prepare spears and throwing-stones," he cried. "To-morrow we attack the cousins of Gumor. Either they or we shall be no more when the night falls again."

A murmur of dissent went around the camp. Uglik sprang to his feet.

"What means the Chief Hunter of the tribe of Ugar?" he demanded.

"I mean that to-morrow we settle for all time who rules in this valley, the tribe of Ugar or the cousins of Gumor."

"And has the Father no voice in the council of the tribe?"

"We have come to the end," replied Anak. "If we do not strike now, soon we will be too weak to strike. To-morrow we attack!"

"I am Father of the tribe of Ugar," replied Uglik with a dangerous note in his voice. "No one gives orders here except me. On you, Anak, the Chief Hunter that was, I place the word of death! Slay him!"

The hunters raised their spears doubtfully. Anak raised his, ready to cast it at Uglik. Before a blow could be struck, a figure sprang across the fire and took a stand, back to back with Anak.

"Who strikes my friend, strikes me!" cried Invar.

UGLIK gave a gasp at this fresh defection from his authority. He roared to the hunters to strike. The three hunters remaining to the tribe advanced half-heartedly. None of them cared to face Anak; and Invar, young as he was, had already proven himself a mighty

warrior. Uglik shouldered them aside with a roar of wrath. Before he could attack, Anak's cry stopped him.

"Hold, Uglik!" cried the Chief Hunter. "If you attack, the tribe will lose most or all of its hunters. You have put the death word on me, as is your right. I go now against the cousins of Gumor, and that, I think, is death. Let me go in peace and with weapons. Before they tear me limb from limb, at least one of them will not be alive."

"And I go with Anak!" cried Invar. "More than one of the cousins of Gumor will know that the Chief Hunter of the tribe of Ugar and his friend have visited their home."

Uglik paused. No trace of fear entered his heart, but the wily politician saw the force of Anak's argument. He would gain doubly by the course that the hunter had proposed.

"Go in peace, and with weapons," he said as he lowered his spear. "Esle will take your weapons and make spells over them that will increase their might. At dawn you shall go. The word of death is on you, so come not back to the tribe again. Once you leave the camp, you are outlaw."

"So be it!" replied Anak.

Shortly before the dawn, Esle crept to Anak's side.

"I've wrought spells over your weapons, Chief Hunter," she said softly, "and over those of your companion. Remember this when the cousins of Gumor attack you."

"I will, hag of evil," said Anak grimly. "Better will it be for you that we never return."

"Why leave?" came Esle's insinuating voice. "I am still ready to help you. Cry rannag on Uglik in the morning. Your weapons have had my attention and his have not. That alone would decide the fight. Slay him and the warriors of the tribe will fight at your back. I know spells, and mayhap, they will prevail even against the cousins of Gumor."

"I go but for vengeance, Esle," said Anak wearily. "With Una gone, I have no desire to live."

"There are other maidens who are fair, Anak, and when you are Father you will have them all."

"Leave me, Esle," said Anak shortly. "I desire none but Una."

"And may the cousins of Gumor crack your bones between their teeth," she hissed venomously as she slipped away into the darkness.

AS the sun rose above the horizon, Anak and Invar took their way up the valley. Each carried three flint-tipped throwing-spears, while a good supply of flint throwing-stones were in their skin pouches. Half a mile from camp, Anak turned to his companion.

"I thank you for coming with me," he said, his hand on Invar's shoulder. "It is the deed of a brave man."

Invar flushed and looked down.

"The least that I can do is to go to Degar Astok with my friend," he said.

"It is the deed of a brave man, yet I think we are not yet ripe to die."

"We go against the cousins of Gumor, do we not?" asked the lad.

"We do."

"And is that not death?"

"Mayhap, and yet, I have a plan. We may live."

"How can we two expect to do what all the tribe of Ugar dare not try?"

"The tribe of Ugar, or a dozen tribes of Ugar, could not conquer with Uglik leading them," replied Anak, "yet we two may do so. Hark now to my plan. Like Gumor, the gray ape, his cousins walk ever with their eyes cast down. While we have been hunting, I have been spying on them in their home. Never have I seen one look up, and it may be that they cannot. Above or on a level with us, they can easily kill us. If we stand on the rocks above them, they cannot see us and will be at our mercy. They can run as fast as we on level ground, but going uphill, we will leave them as Guno, the deer, leaves Kena. They are few in number; I have watched and seen but two hunters and three females. It is my plan to scale the cliffs and watch them below us. When the time is ripe, we will launch our throwing-spears. If we fail to make a kill, we will bound up the hill and escape to strike again."

Invar looked with admiration at his leader. The habit of connected thought and reasoning was new in the world in those days. Such boldness of conception as was shown by Anak's plan was a thing for marvel. As the ramifications of the plan seeped into Invar's brain, his face glowed with enthusiasm.

"Anak should be Father of the tribe of Ugar!" he cried.

"That may yet come to pass," replied Anak enigmatically. "If I kill Uglik, however, it will be to

avenge Una, not to win the chieftainship. Now keep silence, for here is the home of the cousins of Gumor."

CAUTIOUSLY the two hunters passed the mouth of the ravine and climbed the slopes of the valley. Once on the level ground, they moved to the edge of the ravine and looked down into it. Nothing could be seen moving. Anak led the way a hundred yards farther up the ravine.

"Below us is a cave where dwell two," he whispered. "Make ready your spear while I sound the challenge."

He raised his voice in a wild howl of challenge. For a moment there was silence. Then from the ravine came a hoarse rumbling bellow. An enormous male made his appearance, his mane and beard bristling with rage. He darted his eyes hither and thither, seeking the source of the challenge. Again a hoarse roar came from his broad, thick lips. As it rose to a crescendo, Anak hurled his spear.

His aim was true. The point struck the Neanderthaler at the junction of his neck and shoulder. As it struck, the haft flew from the spear and bounded down the slope. The first point made only a surface wound.

The apeman roared with pain and rage. Still he did not see his enemies. With careful aim, Invar launched his weapon. The stone-tipped spear struck the giant's groin, but the haft broke and the head was barely buried in the flesh. The Neanderthaler pricked up his pointed, lobeless ears, and located the source of the shout. By bending back his torso, he looked upward. With a roar of rage he started up the slope, a huge flint smiting-stone grasped in each hairy paw.

Anak and Invar dashed up the slope ahead of him. The keenness of the Chief Hunter's powers of observation was attested by the fact that they easily increased their distance from their pursuer. As they ran, Invar's foot dislodged a boulder which thundered down the slope. The Neanderthaler did not see it coming until it was too late to dodge. The stone took him full in the chest and he rolled down the slope, a shower of smaller stones going with him.

He smashed against a tree. With shouts of triumph, Anak and Invar bounded down the slope. The Neanderthaler was dying, his chest crushed in. Invar raised a spear and drove it at his heart. The weapon struck fair, but again the head of the spear came off the shaft. A sudden thought illuminated Anak's brain.

"Esle!" he cried in rage. "She had our weapons last night!"

HE studied the two spears remaining in his hand. Each of them had the hide lashing which bound the head to the haft cut through. The weapons were useless.

Invar's face paled. From up the slope a roar assailed their ears. The female was rushing down at them, smiting-stones in hand.

"Fly, Invar!" cried Anak. "Run up the slope and throw down stones at her. I will hold her for a moment."

"Invar stays with his friend!" cried the boy stubbornly as he gripped his useless throwing-spear.

"Run up the slope!" stormed Anak. "It is our only chance. Remember how the male died!"

Slowly the idea penetrated Invar's brain. With a shout he dashed away. He circled the oncoming female and got above her. Anak hurled one of his crippled spears. It struck her full in the chest, but made only a flesh wound as the handle dropped away. The female roared with rage and hurled herself at the hunter. Anak leaped to one side and ran for dear life. The clumsy female checked her rush and turned after him. He rapidly gained on her. A shout from above reached him.

"Run to your left, Anak!"

The hunter swerved sharply to his left. Invar threw his shoulder against a huge boulder on the slope. The stone rocked but did not fall. Again the lad exerted himself until his muscles cracked under the strain. The boulder tottered for a moment and then rolled down the slope, gathering momentum as it rolled. It was deflected from the direct line of the female's attack, but a smaller stone it dislodged struck her on the shoulder and knocked her from her feet.

"More stones, Invar!" cried Anak.

THE two exerted themselves and an avalanche of rocks thundered down the slope. The female strove to rise, but she was overwhelmed. Down the slope rushed the two hunters, intent on finishing her with their smiting-stones and knives. She lay in a twisted heap, whimpering plaintively. Invar's knife found her heart, and she sank back dead.

"Well struck, Invar!" cried Anak. "Would that we had spears. Others of the cousins of Gumor are coming."

Bellowing roars came from higher up the ravine. The two hunters bounded back up the slope.

Down the ravine came another female, followed by a fourteen-year-old boy. Contemptuous of their assailants, the hunters betrayed their whereabouts with shouts. The female accepted the challenge and climbed heavily up the slope toward them, the boy trailing her and aping her cries with shrill shouts.

The hunters allowed her to approach to within a few yards before they threw their combined weight on a huge mass of rock. The boulder gave and thundered down the slope. It brushed past the female but did not strike her.

"Higher up and try again, Invar!" cried the Chief Hunter.

They bounded up the slope. Anak paused and hurled a flint throwing-stone with deadly aim. It struck the female a glancing blow on the face, tearing the flesh from one of the prominent brow ridges. She stopped, momentarily blinded. Invar raised a rock high above his head with both hands and cast it at her. It struck her on the chest and she fell backwards. Again Anak's strategy was successful and an avalanche of rolled rocks overwhelmed her. The boy turned to fly, but the fleet-footed Invar overtook him and the knives of the two hunters quickly put an end to his career.

As they bent over his dead body, a shrill scream rose on the air. It was not the voice of an apeman, or an apewoman, but held a human quality. The hunters straightened up and sought the source of it. Again came the scream. From the mouth of a cave above them bounded a girl. She won momentarily to freedom, but a huge Neanderthal male followed her from the cave. His hairy arm seized and dragged her back.

"Una!" cried Invar and Anak in one voice.

FORGOTTEN were strategy and tactics. Anak bounded up the slope, Invar at his heels. Into the mouth of the cave they charged. The huge male dropped the girl and faced them with a growl. Anak hurled a throwing-stone, but his aim was poor. It rebounded harmlessly from the great arched chest of the Neanderthaler. With a roar, the apeman charged.

The hunter sidestepped the rush and swung his smiting-stone. The blow was deflected by the upraised arm of the apeman and fell on his shoulder. Invar hurled a throwing-stone which found the monster's face and made him pause. The apeman recovered himself and rushed at the youth. The boy met him, smiting-stone in hand, but one swing of the heavier flint broke through his guard and stretched him senseless on the floor, blood flowing from a gash in his head.

Anak hurled another throwing-stone which caught the apeman on the back of the head, dazing him. With a shout, Anak closed. The effects of the blow had been only momentary and the Neanderthaler met his rush with both his stones swinging. One of them tore a long gash down Anak's back while the other laid open his thigh. The apeman dropped his stones and wound his long hairy arms about the hunter's body. Anak threw himself back and the two rolled on the floor, the apeman striving to crush the life out of his slighter opponent, while Anak smote futilely with his smiting-stone at the hairy body. Slowly, the hunter's ribs gave under the pressure. Spots of fire danced before his eyes. He strove valiantly, but his muscles were as a child's, compared to the enormous development of his opponent. With a gasp, his body went limp.

UNA had watched the struggle with horror-stricken eyes. As the apeman's grip tightened about Anak's body, she gave a low moan. Her gaze fell on the discarded smiting-stones of the Neanderthaler. She sprang forward and lifted one in both hands. The apeman threw back his head to give a roar of victory. The note never issued from his throat. The huge flint which he had chipped patiently to a sharp edge, struck him on the back of the head. With a gasp and a convulsive shudder, the apeman rolled over, his skull crushed in.

Invar slowly recovered consciousness, and now sat up. He looked dully at the dead body of the Neanderthaler. Beside it, Anak lay in a pool of blood. He staggered to his feet, asking dully:

"Is Anak with Degar Astok?"

"Not yet," replied Una. "Help me to stop the flow of his blood."

"He said there were five of the cousins of Gumor," said the boy as he looked around apprehensively. "We have slain but four."

Una pointed toward the ravine.

"The other lies there," she said. "This one slew his mate an hour gone. I think he designed me to take her place."

Fever took Anak, and for three days he hovered between life and death. Then he slept and woke conscious, although his strength was badly sapped by the fever. There was no lack of food, for game was plentiful and Invar had found and mended the throwing-spears which Esle had tampered with. Slowly Anak recovered his strength. A month after the fight he stretched his muscles and announced himself as well.

"I return to-day to the tribe of Ugar," he announced.

"Can you return?" asked Invar doubtfully. "Remember the word of death."

"That, let Uglík answer," replied Anak. "In peace or in war, I will return. Soon the winter will come and here are warm caves and game in plenty. Here shall the tribe make a home."

"Where you go, there go I," exclaimed Invar.

"And I likewise," said Una.

"Una will stay here until we return," replied Anak in a tone which brooked no argument.

THE girl pouted, but a sharp word from Anak settled the matter. Throwing-spear and smiting-stone in hand, the two hunters approached the camping place of Uglík's tribe. They were within a hundred yards before they were seen. Esle set up a shrill cry.

"Here come those on whom the Father passed the death word. Slay, oh, hunters!"

Anak raised his hand and made the sign of peace.

"Wait before you attack two such as we," he said. "We are bearers of good tidings. By our hands, the cousins of Gumor have died. Think you, do you care to attack two such as we?"

The hunters looked at one another doubtfully.

"He lies!" shrilled Esle.

"We do not lie!" retorted Anak. "Their bones, picked clear by Kena, lie in their ravine. We come in peace to lead you to their home. There are warm caves and game in plenty. We will rejoin the tribe if the Father will remove the death word. Otherwise, attack us if you dare, and the tribe of Ugar will join the cousins of Gumor."

Uglík's face plainly showed hesitation.

"The death word has been passed," he said doubtfully. "It can be withdrawn only by a sacrifice to Degar Astok."

"We two have offered five of the cousins of Gumor, and a boy. Is that not enough?"

"It must be a human sacrifice!" cried Esle.

"Then, hag of evil omen, traitor to Uglík, attempted slayer of Invar and me, I offer you!" cried Anak furiously, his spear raised.

"Sacrilege!" she shrilled, darting behind Uglík. "Slay the defamer of the God!"

"What mean these charges, Anak?" asked Uglík darkly.

"Esle tampered with our spears, which you ordered her to strengthen for the battle with the cousins of Gumor," said Anak. "They broke in our hands. With only smiting-stones and knives, we overcame them. Further, she tried to plot with me to kill you and take your place."

"He lies!" cried Esle in a quavering voice. Uglík turned a black face on her.

"ENOUGH!" he roared. "The sacrifice is sufficient. I withdraw the death word. Anak, the cause of dissension between us is gone. Rejoin the tribe in peace."

"I bow to the Father," replied Anak, suiting his action to his word. "The tribe of Ugar has gained three members."

"Three?" asked Uglík.

"The maiden, Una, was not slain, but borne away alive by the cousins of Gumor. I have rescued her and she waits in the valley of plenty."

"Then Degar Astok was right when he told me he should have a new High Priestess," said Uglík, licking his lips. "She shall come to my cave and take the place of that worn-out hag, Esle."

"She will dwell in mine," said Anak shortly. "I have taken her for mine and I will not give her up."

"The word of the Father is the law of the tribe," said Uglík.

"That is true. I ask that the maiden whom I have taken in war be given to me in peace."

"The maiden, Una, dwells in the Father's cave!" said Uglík.

"Then cry I rannag on you, Uglík, the Father!" cried Anak. "I challenge you to the fight to death, which you may not refuse and continue to rule."

"And on you I pass the death word!" shouted Uglík. "Hunters—"

"The Father may not pass the death word on one who has cried rannag," retorted Anak. "Such is the law!"

"Such is the law!" echoed the hunters, glad of an excuse not to attack the two hunters of whose prowess they knew so much.

Uglik looked from one group to the other.

"When the sun starts to rest, the rannag will be fought," he answered. "When I have slain this traitor, Una becomes High Priestess. Hunters, bind the hag, Esle, that she may not escape. Anak, lead the way to the valley of plenty."

PACKING up was a simple matter for the tribe of Ugar. In five minutes they were following Anak to the valley of the Neanderthalers. When they arrived, Uglik picked out the largest of the caves, and told the hunters to choose their own. In a few minutes the tribe was established in their new home. Esle was released from her bonds, for it was essential that the High Priestess of Degar Astok prepare the ground for the rannag.

Anak and Invar walked slowly up to the cave where Una waited.

"Uglik is a mighty warrior," said Invar doubtfully.

"So is Anak," was the reply. "Further, I have a plan."

"Then are Uglik's days numbered," replied Invar with delight. "Tell me what I am to do to aid you."

"When we get to the cave, you may cut off my hair and beard."

Invar started back aghast.

"Your strength will go with it," he protested. "The glory of the warrior is his beard."

"I do not believe it," said Anak. "By cutting it, I will rob Uglik of a handhold he could use to my downfall. Fear not, I know what I am doing."

With a flint knife, Invar slowly and painfully hacked off Anak's long hair and beard. When the operation was over, Anak smeared himself plentifully with the fat of a wild pig which had fallen to one of Invar's spears the day before. When he was ready, he threw himself down to sleep. When he had dropped off to slumber, Una rose. She took the liver of the pig from the back of the cave and approached the doorway.

"Where go you, Una?" demanded Invar.

"I take this to the Father that he may strengthen himself for the rannag," she said enigmatically. "Should not the best be given to the Father?"

Invar's hand tightened on his throwing-spear.

"Minded am I to slay you," he said darkly.

"And fight to the death with Anak when he awakens? Listen, oh, fool, if the Father eats greatly, he will be slow and Anak may slay him with ease."

A light of admiration flashed into Invar's eyes.

"It is well thought," he said.

WITH a swift glance around, Una took from her girdle a tiny skin packet. She opened it and displayed a brown powder.

"This, Esle gave me," she whispered. "She said that Uglik had threatened her death and she wished Anak to kill him. If I give Anak this, Degar Astok would make him strong."

"Why did you not do so?"

"Because I am a woman, and I know a woman's heart. It would have the opposite effect. I will rub it into the liver I give to Uglik."

With the aid of the women, Esle laid out a rough oval on the ground where the two combatants were to meet. Throwing-stones and spears were not allowed in rannag, the two combatants fighting their duel with smiting-stones and flint knives only. At the appointed hour, the two combatants appeared, stripped to their loin-clothes only. The Father was hideous with streaks of paint, red, yellow, white, and black. Anak glistened from his coat of grease, but his skin was bare of ornament.

The two combatants took their places, while around the fighting ground gathered the hunters and youths, throwing-spears in hand. Their privilege and duty it was to slay either of the fighters who fled or who was forced out of the ring. Esle intoned a long prayer to Degar Astok. The word for combat was given. The two men approached each other cautiously. The Father confident in his strength, but he felt heavy and lethargic. Anak was clear-eyed and alert, ready to take advantage of any opening offered him.

The two men circled, wary as great jungle cats. Anak, suddenly ducked his head and rubbed his eyes. With a roar of triumph, Uglik charged.

Outside the ring, there was a commotion. A woman's scream, rent the air. Invar leaped to Una's side, to find her wrestling with Esle.

"Kill her, Invar!" shrieked the girl. "She tried to cast a spell on Anak."

The young hunter forced open the High Priestess' hand. In it was grasped a bit of shiny quartz with which she had reflected the sun into the hunter's eyes. With upraised hand, he struck her to the ground.

"She shall be judged after the rannag," he said. "Take you this spear, Una, and drive it through her if she moves."

The girl took the spear. Invar returned to watch the fight. Anak had sidestepped the first rush of the Father and his smiting-stone had bit heavily into Uglik's shoulder. Uglik had whirled and charged again. Anak made as if to leap to one side. As Uglik changed his direction to meet him, Anak swayed back. Again his smiting-stone bit heavily into the Father's side. With a cry of pain, Uglik paused and changed his tactics. He approached cautiously, ready to leap to either side. Farther and farther Anak retreated until the hunters at the end of the oval raised their spears in anticipation. Then Anak charged.

Uglik was taken by surprise. His blow glanced off Anak's upraised stone while an upward sweep of the weapon took him in the neck. He dropped his stone and threw his arms around Anak's body. Well had Anak planned when he greased his body, for Uglik's grip failed. Anak shook him loose and struck again. Once more Uglik grasped him, and this time threw him heavily to the ground. Again the grease made his hold slip. Anak struggled to his feet, but it was evident that the fall had hurt him.

UGLIK followed up his advantage. He warded off the blow of the hunter's stone and again flung him to earth. Anak dropped his stone.

Uglik's hands fastened on the hunter's throat, and mercilessly he banged Anak's head on the rocky ground. Anak wound his mighty legs about the Father's middle. Silently they put forth their strength. Uglik's hold was the more deadly, and slowly the hunter weakened.

"The Father kills!" screamed Esle.

She strove to rise to her feet, but Una had her orders from Invar. She pressed home the spear. With a sob, Esle fell back.

Anak's tongue began to protrude from his mouth and his eyes swelled. An expression of triumph spread over Uglik's face, which suddenly changed to one of amazement, and then to pain and fear.

As they rolled over, Anak had felt something pierce his leg. The pain was nothing, but it persisted. As his consciousness slipped away, only that one feeling remained. He reached down to his leg. Thrust deep into his thigh was a knife-like sliver of flint. With a supreme effort, he rallied his failing consciousness and grasped it. The Father's chest was directly over him. With his last conscious effort, he thrust upward with the fragment of flint. His aim was true. Uglik suddenly released his hold and raised himself to his knees, his hands plucking at his chest. For a moment he swayed forward and back. Then, with a cry, he pitched forward, blood gushing from his chest over the unconscious hunter.

ANAK recovered consciousness to find his opponent lying dead before him, the sliver of flint buried in his heart. He staggered to his feet and tried to speak. His vocal cords refused to act and he massaged his throat gently.

"I am Father of the tribe of Ugar by right of rannag," he said hoarsely. "Do any challenge the right?"

There was no answer. Anak stepped to Una's side.

"Uglik spoke truth when he said that Una would be High Priestess of Degar Astok," he said. "This I now proclaim her. You, Esle, stripped of your office, shall do menial tasks for all who will until death claims you. If your homage wavers, death will not be long.

"Lo, I make a new law for the tribe. No longer shall all the women belong to the Father, but to those to whom the Father awards them. To each hunter, I now give one woman. He shall take her to his cave and hunt for her. She shall obey him and no other. The others shall live in a woman's cave, and shall be tabu until they are chosen by one who has no woman, or until a hunter desires more than one woman to chip his flints and dress his skins. Hunters, choose your women and take up caves. Here stays the tribe of Ugar forever, and we will allow no others in the valley."

Followed by Una he strode toward the Father's cave. Below the hunters and the women eyed one another a trifle fearfully. At last Invar stepped forward and grasped one of them by the arm.

"Come to my cave!" he ordered.

The woman followed him submissively.

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