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The Eternal Lover

by **Edgar Rice Burroughs**

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SYNOPSIS

Nu, the son of Nu, is shut up in a cave by an earthquake 100,000 years ago. He has a sweetheart, Nat-ul.

Near his cave 100,000 years later Miss Victoria Custer and her brother are on a hunting trip. She is haunted by a dream man and also by a real life lover. An earthquake releases Nu.

(Continued from last week.)

Curtiss saw assent in the silence which followed his outbreak, and, taking advantage of this tacit encouragement, he seized her hands in his and drew her toward him.

"Oh, Victoria," he whispered, "tell me that thing I wish to hear from your dear lips! Tell me that even a tenth part of my love is returned and I shall be happy!"

She looked up into his eyes, shining down upon her in the moonlight, and on her lips trembled an avowal of the love she honestly believed she could at last bestow upon the man of her choice.

In the past few moments she had thrashed out the question of that other unreal and intangible love that had held her chained to a dream for years, and in the cold light of twentieth century American rationality she had found it possible to put her hallucinations from her and find happiness in the love of this very real and very earnest young man.

"Billy," she said, "I"—

But she got no further. Even as the words that would have bound her to him were forming upon her tongue there came a low, sullen rumbling from the bowels of the earth—the ground rose and fell beneath them as the swell of the sea rises and falls.

Then there came a violent trembling and shaking and a final deafening crash in the distance that might have accompanied the birth of mountain ranges.

With a little moan of terror the girl drew away from Curtiss, and then, before he could restrain her, she had turned and fled toward the bungalow.

At the veranda steps she was met by the other members of the house party and by the Greystokes and numerous servants, who had rushed out at the first premonition of the coming shock.

Barney Custer saw his sister running toward the house and, knowing her terror of such phenomena, ran to meet her.

Close behind her came Curtiss, just in time to see the girl swoon in her brother's arms.

Barney carried her to her room, where Lady Greystoke, abandoning the youthful Jack to his black mammy, Esmeralda, ministered to her.

CHAPTER III.

The Young Hunter.

THE shock that had been felt so plainly in the valley had been much more severe in the mountains to the south. In one place an overhanging cliff had split and fallen away from the face of the mountain, tumbling with a mighty roar into the valley below.

As it hurtled down the mountain side the moonlight, shining upon the fresh scar that it had left behind it upon the hill's face, revealed the mouth of a gloomy cave, from which there tumbled the inert figure of an animal, which rolled down the steep declivity in the wake of the mass of rock that had preceded it, the tearing away of which had opened up the cavern in which it had lain.

For a hundred feet perhaps the body rolled, coming to a stop upon a broad ledge. For some time it lay perfectly motionless, but at last a feeble movement of the limbs was discernible. Then for another long period it was quiet.

Minutes dragged into hours, and still the lonely thing lay upon the lonely mountain side, while upon the plain below it hungry lions moaned and roared, and all the teeming life of the savage wilds took up their search for food, their sleeping and their love making where they had dropped them in the fright of the earthquake.

At last the stars paled, and the eastern horizon glowed to a new day, and then the thing upon the ledge sat up.

It was a man. Still partly dazed, he drew his hand across his eyes and looked about him in bewilderment; then, staggering a little, he rose to his feet, and as he came erect, the new sun shining on his bronzed limbs and his shock of black hair, roughly cropped between sharpened stones, his youth and beauty became startlingly apparent.

He looked about him upon the ground, and not finding that which he sought, turned his eyes upward toward the mountain until they fell upon the cave mouth he had just quitted so precipitately. Quickly he clambered back to the cavern, his stone hatchet and knife banging against his bare hips as he climbed.

For a moment he was lost to view within the cave, but presently he

emerged, in one hand a stone tipped spear, which seemed recently to have been broken and roughly spliced with raw tendons, and in the other the severed head of an enormous beast, which more nearly resembled the royal tiger of Asia than it did any other beast, though that resemblance was little closer than is the resemblance of the royal Bengal to a house kitten.

The young man was Nu, the son of Nu.

For a hundred thousand years he had lain hermetically sealed in his rocky tomb, as toads remain in suspended animation for similar periods of time. The earthquake had unsealed his sepulcher, and the rough tumble down the mountain side had induced respiration.

His heart had responded to the pumping of his lungs, and simultaneously the other organs of his body had resumed their various functions.

As he stood upon the threshold of the cave of Oo, the man hunter, the look of bewilderment grew upon his features as his eyes roved over the panorama of the unfamiliar world which lay spread below him. There was scarce an object to remind him of the world that had been but a brief instant before, for Nu could not know that ages had rolled by since he took hasty refuge in the lair of the great beast he had slain.

He thought that he might be dreaming, and so he rubbed his eyes and looked again; but still he saw the unfamiliar trees and bushes about him and, farther down in the valley, the odd appearing vegetation of the jungle. Nu could not fathom the mystery of it.

Slowly he stepped from the cave and began the descent toward the valley, for he was very thirsty and very hungry. Below him he saw animals grazing upon the broad plain, but even at that distance he realized that they were such as no mortal eye had ever before rested upon.

Warily he advanced, every sense alert against whatever new form of danger might lurk in this strange new world. Had he had any conception of



Slowly He Stepped From the Cave and Began the Descent Toward the Valley.

a life after death he would doubtless have felt assured that the earthquake had killed him and that he was now wandering through the heavenly vale. But men of Nu's age had not yet conceived any sort of religion other than a vague fear of certain natural phenomena, such as storms and earthquakes, the movements of the sun and moon and those familiar happenings which first awake the questionings of the primitive.

He saw the sun, but to him it was a different sun from the great, swollen orb that had shone through the thick, humid atmosphere of the Neocene.

From Oo's lair only the day before he had been able to see in the distance the shimmering surface of the restless sea, but now so far as eye could reach there stretched an interminable jungle of gently waving tree tops, except for the rolling plain at his feet, where yesterday the black jungle of the ape people had reared its lofty fronds.

Nu shook his head. It was all quite beyond him, but there were certain things which he could comprehend; and so, after the manner of the self-reliant, he set about to wrest his livelihood from nature under the new conditions which had been imposed upon him while he slept.

First of all, his spear must be attended to. It would never do to trust to that crude patch longer than it would take him to find and fit a new

haft. His meat must wait until that thing was accomplished.

In the meantime he might pick up what fruit was available in the forest toward which he was bending his steps in search of a long, straight shoot of the hard wood which alone would meet his requirements.

In the days that had been Nu's there had grown in isolated patches a few lone clumps of very straight hardwood trees. The smaller of these the men of the tribe would cut down and split lengthwise with stone wedges until from a single tree they might have produced material for a score or more spear shafts, but now Nu must seek the very smallest of saplings, for he had no time to waste in splitting a larger tree, even had he had the necessary wedges and hammers.

Into the forest the youth crept, for, though 100,000 years had elapsed since his birth, he was still to all intent and purpose a youth. Upon all sides he saw strange and wonderful trees, the like of which had never been in the forests of yesterday.

The growths were not so luxuriant or prodigious, but for the most part the trees offered suggestions of alluring possibilities to the semibarbaric Nu, for the branches were much heavier and more solid than those of the great tree ferns of his own epoch and commenced much nearer the ground. Catlike he leaped into the lower branches of them, reveling in the ease with which he could travel from tree to tree.

Gay colored birds of strange appearance screamed and scolded at him. Little monkeys hurried, chattering, from his path. Nu laughed. What a quaint, diminutive world it was indeed! Nowhere had he yet seen a tree or creature that might compare in size to the monsters among which he had traveled the preceding day.

The fruits, too, were small and strange. He scarcely dared venture to eat of them lest they be poisonous. If the lesser ape folk would only let him come close enough to speak with them he might ascertain from them which were safe, but for some unaccountable reason they seemed to fear and mistrust him. This, above all other considerations, argued to Nu that he had come in some mysterious way into another world.

Presently the troglodyte discovered a slender, straight young sapling. He came to the ground and tested its strength by bending it back and forth. Apparently it met the requirements of a new shaft.

With his stone hatchet he hewed it off close to the ground, stripped it of branches, and climbing to the safety of the trees again, where he need fear no interruption from the huge monsters of the world he knew, set to work with his stone knife to remove the bark and shape the end to receive his spearhead.

First he split it down the center for four or five inches, and then he cut notches in the surface upon either side of the split portion. Now he carefully unwrapped the rawhide that binds the spearhead into his old haft, and for want of water to moisten it crammed the whole unfragrant mass into his mouth that it might be softened by warmth and saliva.

For several minutes he busied himself in shaping the point of the new shaft that it might exactly fit the inequalities in the shank of the spearhead. By the time this was done the rawhide had been sufficiently moistened to permit him to wind it tightly about the new shaft into which he had set the spearhead.

As he worked he heard the noises of the jungle about him. There were many familiar voices, but more strange ones. Not once had the cave bear spoken; nor Zor, the mighty lion of the Neocene; nor Oo, the saber toothed tiger. He missed the bellowing of the bull bos and the hissing and whistling of monster saurian and amphibian.

To Nu it seemed a silent world. Propped up against the bole of the tree before him grinned the hideous head of the man hunter, the only familiar object in all the world about him.

Presently he became aware that the lesser apes were creeping warily closer to have a better look at him. He waited silently until from the tail of his eye he glimpsed one quite near, and then in a low voice he spoke in the language that his allies of yesterday had understood; and though ages had elapsed since that long gone day, the little monkey above him understood, for the language of the apes can never change.

"Why do you fear Nu, the son of Nu?" asked the man. "When has he ever harmed the ape people?"

"The hairless ones kill us with sharp sticks that fly through the air," replied the monkey, "or with little sticks that make a great noise that kill us from afar. But you seem not to be of these. We have never seen one like you until now. Do you not wish to kill us?"

"Why should I?" replied Nu. "It is better that we be friends. All that I wish of you is that you tell me which of the fruits that grow here be safe for me to eat and then direct me to the sea beside which dwell the tribe of Nu, my father."

The monkeys had gathered in force by this time, seeing that the strange white ape offered no harm to their fellow, and when they learned his wants they scampered about in all directions to gather nuts and fruits and berries for him.

It is true that some of them forgot what they had intended doing before the task was half completed, and ended by pulling one another's tails and frolicking among the higher branches, or else ate the fruit they had gone to gather for their new friend, but a few there were with greater powers of concentration than their fellows, who returned with fruit and berries and caterpillars, all of which Nu devoured

(Continued on page 4.)

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