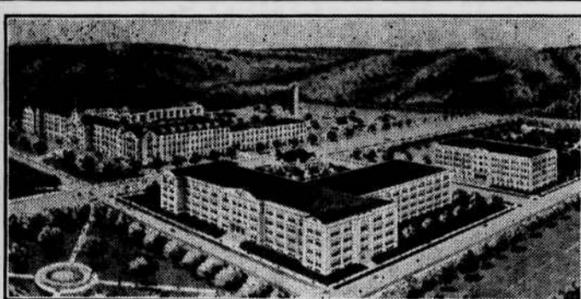


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The Eternal Lover

By EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

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(Continued from page 4.)

the two moved with of shadowy ghosts.

At the edge of the jungle Nu came upon a parklike forest, and well into this he saw a woman struggling with a white robed Arab. One sinewy brown hand clutched her throat, the other was raised to strike her in the face.

Nu saw that he could not reach the man in time to prevent the blow, but he might distract his attention for the moment that would be required for him to reach his side.

From his throat there rose the savage warcy of his long dead people, a cry that brought a hundred jungle creatures to their feet, trembling in fear or in rage, according to their kind. It brought Abul Mukarram upstanding, too, for in all his life he had never heard the like of that blood frezing challenge.

At the sight which met his eyes he dropped the girl and darted toward his donkey, where hung his long barreled rifle in its boot.

Victoria Custer looked, too, and what she saw brought unutterable relief and happiness to her. Then the Arab had turned with leveled gun just as the cave man leaped upon him.

There was the report of the firearm ere it was wrenched from Abul Mukarram's grasp and hurled to one side, but the bullet went wide of its mark, and the next instant the girl saw the two men locked in what she knew was a death struggle.

The Arab struck mighty blows at the head and face of his antagonist, while



He Saw a Woman Struggling With a White Robed Arab.

the cave man, the great muscles rolling beneath his smooth hide, sought for a hold upon the other's throat.

About the two the vicious wolfhound slunk, growling and bristling, waiting for an opportunity to rush in upon the white robed antagonist of his master.

Victoria Custer, her clinched fists tight pressed against her bosom, watched the two men who battled for her. She saw the powerful hands of her savage man bend back the head of the doomed Abdul Mukarram.

She saw her ferocious mate shake the man as a terrier shakes a rat, and her heart swelled in fierce primitive pride at the prowess of her man.

No longer did Victoria Custer exist. It was Nat-ul, the savage maiden of the Neocene who, as Nu threw the life-

less corpse of his kill to one side and opened his arms, flung herself into his embrace.

It was Nat-ul, daughter of Tha-Nat-ul of the tribe of Nu that dwelt beyond the barren cliffs beside the restless sea—who threw her arms about her lord and master's neck and drew his mouth down to her lips.

It was Nat-ul of the first born who watched Nu and the fierce wolfhound circle about the corpse of the dead Arab.

The cave man, moving in the savage steps of the death dance of his tribe, now bent half over, now leaping high in air, throwing his stone tipped spear aloft, chanted the weird victory song of a dead and buried age, while beside him his equally savage mate beat time with slim, white hands.

CHAPTER XI.

Happiness?

WHEN the dance was done Nu halted before Nat-ul. The girl rose, facing him, and for a long minute the two stood in silence looking at one another. It was the first opportunity that either had had to study the features of the other since the strange miracle that had separated them.

Nu found that some subtle change had taken place in his Nat-ul.

It was she—of that there could be no doubt, but yet there was that about her which cast a spell of reverential fear over him. She was infinitely finer and more wonderful than he ever had realized.

With the passing of the excitement of the battle and the dance the strange ecstasy which had held the girl in thrall passed slowly away. The rhythm of the dancing of the savage black haired giant had touched some cord within her which awoke the long dormant instincts of the primordial.

For the time she had been carried back a hundred thousand years to the childhood of the human race. She had not known for those brief instants Victoria Custer or the twentieth century or its civilization, for they were yet a thousand centuries in the future.

But now once more she saw through the eyes of generations of culture and refinement. Before her was a primitive man.

In his eyes was the fire of a great love that would not be denied. About her was the wild, fierce forest and the cruel jungle, and behind all this, and beyond, her vision wandered to the world she had always known—the world of cities and homes and gentlefolk.

She saw her father and her mother and her friends. What would they say?

Again she let her eyes rest upon the man. It was with difficulty that she restrained a desire to throw herself upon his broad breast and weep out her doubts and fears close to the beating of his great heart and in the safety of those protecting arms.

But with the wish there rose again the question, "What would they say?" to hold her trembling and frightened from him.

The man saw something of the girl's trouble in her eyes, but he partially misinterpreted it, for he read fear of himself where there was principally self fear, and because of what he had heard Curtiss say, he thought that he saw contempt, too, for primitive people are infinitely more sensitive than their more sophisticated brothers.

"You do not love me, Nat-ul?" he asked. "Have the strangers turned you against me? What one of them could have fetched you the head of Oo, the man hunter?"

"See!" He tapped the two great tusks that hung from his loin cloth. "Nu slew the mightiest of the beasts for Nat-ul—the head is buried in the cave of Oo—yet, now that I come to take you as my mate, I see fear in your eyes and something else which never was there before. What is it, Nat-ul? Have the strangers stolen your love from Nu?"

The man spoke in a tongue so ancient that in all the world there lived no man who spoke or knew a word of it, yet to Victoria Custer it was as intelligible as her own English, nor did it seem strange to her that she answered Nu in his own language.

"My heart tells me that I am yours, Nu," she said, "but my judgment and my training warn me against the step that my heart prompts. I love you, but I could not be happy to wander half naked through the jungle for the balance of my life, and if I go with you now, even for a day, I may never return to my people.

"Nor would you be happy in the life that I lead. It would stifle and kill you. I think I see now something of the miracle that has overwhelmed us. To you it has been but a few days since you left your Nat-ul to hunt down the ferocious Oo, but in reality countless ages have rolled by.

"By some strange freak of fate you have remained unchanged during all these ages, until now you step forth from your long sleep an unpolished cave man of the stone age into the midst of the twentieth century, while I doubtless have been born and reborn a thousand times, merging from one incarnation to another until in this we are again united.

"Had you, too, died and been born again during all these weary years no gap of ages would intervene between us now, and we should meet again upon a common footing, as do other souls, and mate and die to be born again to a new mating and a new life, with its inevitable death.

"But you have defied the laws of life and death—you have refused to die—and now that we meet again at last a hundred thousand years lie between us—an unbridgeable gulf across which I may not return and over which you may not come other than by the same route which I have followed—through death and a new life thereafter."

Much that the girl said was beyond Nu's comprehension and the most of it without the scope of his primitive language, so that she had been forced to draw liberally upon her twentieth century English to fill in the gap.

Yet the man had caught the idea in a vague sort of way; at least that his Nat-ul was far removed from him because of a great lapse of time that had occurred while he slept in the cave of Oo, and that through his own death alone could he span the gulf between them and claim her as his mate.

He placed the butt of his spear upon the ground, resting the stone tip against his heart.

"I go, Nat-ul," he said simply, "that I may return again as you would have me."

The girl and the man were so occupied and engrossed with their own tragedy that they did not note the restless pacing of Terkoz, the wolfhound, or hear the ominous growls that rumbled from his savage throat as he looked toward the jungle behind them.

The searching party from the Greystroke ranch had come upon Ibn Aswad so unexpectedly that not a shot had been exchanged between the two parties.

The Arabs, pressed from behind by the savage Wajj warriors, had literally run into the arms of the whites and the Waziri.

When Greystoke demanded that the white girl be turned over to him at once Ibn Aswad smote his breast and swore that there had been no white girl with them, but one of the slaves told a different story to a Waziri, and when the whites found that Victoria had been stolen from Ibn Aswad by one of the sheik's lieutenants only a few hours before they hastened to scour the jungle in search of her.

To facilitate their movements and insure covering as wide a territory as possible each of the whites took a few Waziri and, spreading out in a far flung skirmish line, beat the jungle in the direction toward which the slave had told them Abul Mukarram had ridden.

To comb the jungle finely each white spread his Waziri upon either side of him, and thus they advanced, seldom in sight of one another, but always within hailing distance. And so it happened that chance brought William Curtiss, unseen, to the edge of the jungle beside the parklike forest, beneath the giant trees of which he saw a tableau that brought him to a sudden halt.

There was the girl he loved and sought, apparently unharmed, and two donkeys, and the dead body of an Arab, and the great wolfhound, looking toward his hiding place and growling menacingly, and before the girl the savage white man stood.

Curtiss was about to spring forward when he saw the man place the butt of his spear upon the ground and the point against his heart. The act and the expression upon the man's face proclaimed his intention, and so Curtiss drew back again, waiting for the perpetration of the deed that he knew was coming.

A smile of anticipation played about the American's lips.

Victoria Custer, too, guessed the thing that Nu contemplated. It was,



in accordance with her own reasoning, the only logical thing for the man to do; but love is not logical, and when love saw and realized the imminence of its bereavement it cast logic to the winds, and with a little scream of terror the girl threw herself upon Nu of the Neocene, striking the spear from its goal.

"No! No!" she cried. "You must not do it! I cannot let you go! I love you, Nu—I love you!"

As the strong arms folded her once more she gave a happy sigh of content and let her head drop, again

upon the breast of him who had come back out of the ages to claim her.

The man put an arm about her waist, and together the two turned toward the west in the direction that Abul Mukarram had been fleeing; nor did either see the white faced, scowling man who leaped from the jungle behind them.

As the Strong Arms folded her Once More She Gave a Happy Sigh of Content.

hind them and with leveled rifle took deliberate aim at the back of the black haired giant.

Nor did they see the swift spring of the wolfhound nor the thing that followed there beneath the brooding silence of the savage jungle.

Ten minutes later Barney Custer broke through the tangled wall of verdure upon a sight that took his breath away.

There stood the two patient donkeys, switching their tails and flapping their long ears. Beside them lay the corpse of Abul Mukarram and upon the edge of the jungle at his feet, was stretched the dead body of William Curtiss, his breast and throat torn by savage fangs.

Across the clearing a great, gaunt wolfhound halted in its retreat at the sound of Barney's approach.

The beast bared its bloody fangs in an ominous growl of warning and then turned and disappeared into the jungle.

Barney advanced and examined the soft ground about the donkeys and the body of the Arab.

He saw the imprints of a man's naked feet and the smaller impress of a woman's riding boots.

He looked toward the jungle where Terkoz had disappeared.

What had his sister gone to within the somber, savage depths beyond? What would be bringing her back to were he to follow after?

He doubted that she would come without her dream man. Where would she be happier with him—in the pitiless jungle, which was the only world he knew, or in the still more pitiless haunts of civilized men?

A moment later he had reached his decision, and with resolution strong in the very swing of his stride he entered the jungle, but whether toward the east or the west he do not know, for I was not there.

THE END.

Her Vague Views.

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