

INTO THE PRIMITIVE

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SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I.—The story opens with the shipwreck of the steamer on which Miss Genevieve Leslie, an American heiress, Lord Winthrop, an Englishman, and Tom Blake, a brusque American, were passengers. The three were tossed upon an uninhabited island and were the only ones not drowned. Blake recovered from a drunken stupor.

CHAPTER II.—Blake, shunned on the boat, because of his roughness, became a hero as preserver of the helpless pair. The Englishman was suing for the hand of Miss Leslie. Blake started to swim back to the ship to recover what was left.

CHAPTER III.—Blake returned safely. Winthrop wasted his last match on a cigarette for which he was scored by Blake. Their first meal was a dead fish.

CHAPTER IV.—The trio started a ten-mile hike for higher land. Thirst attacked them. Blake was compelled to carry Miss Leslie on account of weariness. He taunted Winthrop.

CHAPTER V.—They entered the jungle. That night was passed roosting high in a tree.

CHAPTER VI.—The next morning they descended to the open again. All three constructed hats to shield themselves from the sun. They then feasted on coconuts, the only procurable food. Miss Leslie showed a liking for Blake, but detested his roughness.

CHAPTER VII.—Led by Blake they established a home in some cliffs. Blake found a fresh water spring.

CHAPTER VIII.—Miss Leslie faced an unpleasant situation. They planned their campaign.

CHAPTER IX.—Blake recovered his surveyor's magnifying glass, thus insuring fire. He started a jungle fire, killing a large leopard and smothering several cubs.

They started at once, Miss Leslie in the lead. As they rounded the point she caught sight of the smoke still rising from the cleft. A little later she noticed the vultures which were streaming down out of the sky from all quarters other than seaward. Their focal point seemed to be the trees at the foot of the cleft. A nearer view showed that they were alighting in the thorn bushes on the south border of the wood.

Of Blake there was nothing to be seen until Miss Leslie, still in the lead, pushed in among the trees. There they found him crouched beside a small fire, near the edge of the pool. He did not look up. His eyes were riveted in a hungry stare upon several pieces of flesh, suspended over the flames on spits of green twigs.

"Hello!" he sang out, as he heard their footsteps. "Just in time, Miss Jenny. Your broiled steak'll be ready in short order."

"Oh, build up the fire! I'm simply ravenous!" she exclaimed, between impatience and delight.

Winthrop was hardly less keen; yet his hunger did not altogether blunt his curiosity.

"I say, Blake," he inquired, "where did you get the meat?"

"Stow it, Win, my boy. This ain't a packing house. The stuff may be tough, but it's not—er—the other thing. Here you are, Miss Jenny. Chew it off the stick."

Though Winthrop had his suspicions, he took the piece of half-burned flesh which Blake handed him in turn and fell to eating without further question. As Blake had surmised, the roast proved far other than tender. Hunger, however, lent it a most appetizing flavor. The repast ended when there was nothing left to devour.

Blake threw away his empty spit and rose to stretch. He waited for Miss Leslie to swallow her last mouthful and then began to chuckle.

"What's the joke?" asked Winthrop.

Blake looked at him solemnly.

"Well now, that was downright mean of me," he drawled; "after robbing them, to laugh at it!"

"Robbing who?"

"The buzzards."

"You've fed us on leopard meat! It's—it's disgusting!"

"I found it filling. How about you, Miss Jenny?"

Miss Leslie did not know whether to laugh or to give way to a feeling of nausea. She did neither.

"Can we not find the spring of which you spoke?" she asked. "I am thirsty."

"Well, I guess the fire is about burnt out," assented Blake. "Come on; we'll see."

The cleft now had a far different aspect from what it had presented on their first visit. The largest of the trees, though scorched about the base, still stood with unwithered foliage, little harmed by the fire. But many of their small companions had been killed and partly destroyed by the heat and flames from the burning brush. In places the fire was yet smouldering.

Blake. "Why couldn't the blamed old tree have grown on the other side? We might have found a way to climb it. Guess we'll have to smoke out another leopard. We're no nearer those birds' nests than we were yesterday."

"By Jove, look here!" exclaimed Winthrop. "This is our chance for antelope! Here by the spring are bamboos—real bamboos—and only half the thicket burned."

"What of them?" demanded Blake. "Bows—arrows—and did you not agree that they would make knives?"

"Umph—we'll see. What is it, Miss Jenny?"

"Isn't that a hole in the big tree?"

"Looks like it. These baobabs are often hollow."

"Perhaps that is where the leopard had his den," added Winthrop.

"Shouldn't wonder. We'll go and see."

"But, Mr. Blake," protested the girl, "may there not be other leopards?"

"Might have been; but I'll bet they lit out with the other. Look how the tree is scorched. Must have been stacks of dry brush around the hole, 'nough to smoke out a fireman. We'll look and see if they left any soup bones lying around. First, though, here's your drink, Miss Jenny."

As he spoke, Blake kicked aside some smouldering branches and led the way to the crevice whence the spring trickled from the rock into a shallow stone basin. When all had drunk their fill of the clear cool water Blake took up his club and walked straight across to the baobab. Less than 30 steps brought him to the narrow opening in the trunk of the huge tree. At first he could make out nothing in the dimly lit interior; but the



One Moment After Another Passed, and He Stood Poised for the Shock.

fetid, catty odor was enough to convince him that he had found the leopards' den.

He caught the vague outlines of a long body, crouched five or six yards away, on the far side of the hollow. He sprang back, his club brandished to strike. But the expected attack did not follow. Blake glanced about as though considering the advisability of a retreat. Winthrop and Miss Leslie were staring at him, white-faced. The sight of their terror seemed to spur him to dare-devil bravado; though his actions may rather have been due to the fact that he realized the futility of flight, and so rose to the requirements of the situation—the grim need to stand and face the danger.

"Get behind the bamboos!" he called, and as they hurriedly obeyed, he caught up a stone and flung it in at the crouching beast.

He heard the missile strike with a soft thud that told him he had not missed his mark, and he swung up his club in both hands. Given half a chance he would smash the skull of the female as he had crushed her blinded mate. One moment after another passed, and he stood poised for the shock, tense and scowling. Not so much as a snarl came from within. The truth flashed upon him.

"Smothered!" he yelled.

The other saw him dart in through the hole. A moment later two limp grayish bodies were flung out into the open. Immediately after Blake reappeared, dragging the body of the mother leopard.

"It's all right; they're dead!" cried Winthrop, and he ran forward to look at the bodies.

Miss Leslie followed, hardly less curious.

"Are they all dead, Mr. Blake?" she inquired.

"Wiped out—whole family. The old cat stayed by her kittens, and all smothered together—lucky for us! Get busy with those bamboos, Win. I'm going to have these skins, and the sooner we get the cub meat hung up and curing, the better for us."

"Leopard meat again!" rejoined Winthrop.

"Spring leopard, young and tender! What more could you ask? Get a move on you."

"Can I do anything, Mr. Blake?" asked Miss Leslie.

"Hunt a shady spot."

"But I really mean it."

"Well, if that's straight, you might go on along the gully, and see if there's any place to get to the top. You could pick up sticks on the way back, if any are left. We'll have to fumigate this tree hole before we adopt it for a residence."

"Will it be long before you finish with your—with the bodies?"

"Well, now, look here, Miss Jenny; it's going to be a mess, and I wouldn't mind hauling the carcasses clear down the gully, out of sight, if it was to be the only time. But it's not, and you have got to get used to it, sooner or later. So we'll start now."

"I suppose, if I must, Mr. Blake—Really, I wish to help."

"Good. That's something like! Think you can learn to cook?"

"See what I did this morning."

Blake took the cord of cocoanut fiber which she held out to him, and tested its strength.

"Well, I'll be blessed!" he said. "This is something like. If you don't look out, you'll make quite a campaign, Miss Jenny. But now, trot along. This is hardly arctic weather, and our abattoir don't include a cold-storage plant. The sooner these lambs are dressed, the better."

CHAPTER X.

Problems in Woodcraft.

IT WAS no pleasant sight that met Miss Leslie's gaze upon her return. The nearest of butchering can hardly be termed aesthetic; and Blake and Winthrop lacked both skill and tools. Between the penknife and an improvised blade of bamboo, they had flayed the two cubs and haggled off the flesh. The ragged strips, spitted on bamboo rods, were already searing in the fierce sun-rays.

Miss Leslie would have slipped into the hollow of the baobab with her armful of fagots and brush; but Blake waved a bloody knife above the body of the mother leopard, and beckoned the girl to come nearer.

"Hold on a minute, please," he said. "What did you find out?"

Miss Leslie drew a few steps nearer, and forced herself to look at the revolting sight. She found it still more difficult to withstand the odor of the fresh blood. Winthrop was pale and nauseated. The sight of his distress caused the girl to forget her own loathing. She drew a deep breath, and succeeded in countering Blake's expectant look with a half-smile.

"How well are you getting along?" she exclaimed.

"Didn't think you could stand it. But you've got grit all right, if you are a lady," Blake said admiringly. "Say, you'll make it yet! Now, how about the gully?"

"There is no place to climb up. It runs along like this, and then slopes down. But there is a cliff at the end, as high as these walls."

"Twenty feet," muttered Blake. "Confound the luck. It isn't that jump-off; but how in—how are we going to get up on the cliff? There's an everlasting lot of omelettes in those birds' nests. If only that bloomin'—how's that, Win, me by?—that bloomin', blawsted baobab was on 't'other side. The wood's almost soft as punk. We could drive in pegs, and climb up the trunk."

"There are other trees beyond it," remarked Miss Leslie.

"Then maybe we can shin up—"

"I fear the branches that overhang the cliff are too slender to bear any weight."

"And it's too infernally high to climb up to this overhanging baobab limb."

"I say," ventured Winthrop, "if we had an ax, now, we might cut up one of the trees, and make a ladder."

"Oh, yes; and if we had a ladder, we might climb up the cliff!"

"But, Mr. Blake, is there not some way to cut down one of the trees? The tree itself would be a ladder if it fell in such a way as to lean against the cliff."

"There's only the penknife," answered Blake. "So I guess we'll have to scratch eggs off our menu card. Spring leopard for ours! Now, if you really want to help, you might scrape the soup bones out of your boudoir, and fetch a lot more brush. It'll take a big fire to rid the hole of that cat smell."

"Will not the tree burn?"

"No; these hollow baobabs have green bark on the inside as well as out. Funny thing, that! We'd have to keep a fire going a long time to burn through."

"Yet it would burn in time?"

"Yes; but we're not going to—"

"Then why not burn through the trunk of one of those small trees, instead of chopping it down?"

"By—heck, Miss Jenny, you've got an American headpiece! Come on. Sooner we get the thing started, the better."

Neither Winthrop nor Miss Leslie was reluctant to leave the vicinity of the carcasses. They followed close after Blake, around the monstrous bole of the baobab. A little beyond it stood a group of slender trees, whose trunks averaged eight inches at the base. Blake stopped at the second one, which grew nearest to the seaward side of the cleft.

"Here's our ladder," he said. "Get some firewood. Pound the bushes,

though, before you go poking into them. May be snakes here."

"Snakes?—oh!" cried Miss Leslie, and she stood shuddering at the danger she had already incurred.

The fire had burnt itself out on a bare ledge of rock between them and the baobab, and the clumps of dry brush left standing in this end of the cleft were very suggestive of snakes, now that Blake had called attention to the possibility of their presence.

He laughed at his hesitating companions. "Go on, go on! Don't squeal till you're bit. Most snakes hike out, if you give them half a chance. Take a stick each of you, and pound the bushes."

Thus urged, both started to work. But neither ventured into the thicker clumps. When they returned, with large armfuls of sticks and twigs, they found that Blake had used his glass to light a handful of dry bark, out in the sun, and was nursing it into a small fire at the base of the tree, on the side next the cliff.

"Now, Miss Jenny," he directed, "you're to keep this going—not too big a fire—understand? Same time you can keep on fetching brush to fumigate your cat hole. It needs it, all right."

"Will not that be rather too much for Miss Leslie?" asked Winthrop.

"Well, if she'd rather come and rub brains on the skins,—Indian tan, you know,—or—"

"How can you mention such things before a lady?" protested Winthrop.

"Beg your pardon, Miss Leslie! you see, I'm not much used to ladies' company. Anyway, you've got to see and hear about these things. And now I'll have to get the strings for Win's bamboo bows. Come on, Win, we've got that old tappy to peel, and a lot more besides."

Miss Leslie's first impulse was to protest against being left alone, when at any moment some awful venomous serpent might come darting at her out of the brush or the crevices in the rocks. But her half-parted lips drew firmly together, and after a moment's hesitancy, she forced herself to the task which had been assigned her. The fire, once started, required little attention. She could give most of her time to gathering brush for the fumigation of the leopard den.

She had collected quite a heap of fuel at the entrance of the hollow, when she remembered that the place would first have to be cleared of its accumulation of bones. A glance at her companions showed that they were in the midst of tasks even more revolting. It was certainly disagreeable to do such things; yet, as Mr. Blake had said, others had to do them. It was now her time to learn. She could see him smile at her hesitation.

Stung by the thought of his half-contemptuous pity, she caught up a forked stick, and forced herself to enter the tree-cave. The stench met her like a blow. It nauseated and all but overpowered her. She stood for several moments in the center of the cavity, sick and faint. Had it been even the previous day, she would have run out into the open air.

Presently she grew a little more accustomed to the stench, and began to rake over the soft, dry mold of the den floor with her forked stick. Bones!—who had ever dreamed of such a mess of bones?—big bones and little bones and skulls; old bones, dry and almost buried; moldy bones; bones still half-covered with bits of flesh and gristle—the remnants of the leopard family's last meal.

At last all were scraped out and flung in a heap, three or four yards away from the entrance. Miss Leslie looked at the result of her labor with a satisfied glance, followed by a sigh of relief. Between the heat and her unwonted exercise, she was greatly fatigued. She stepped around to a shadowed spot to rest.

With a start she remembered the fire.

When she reached it there were only a few dying embers left. She gathered dead leaves and shreds of fibrous inner bark, and knelt beside the dull coals to blow them into life. She could not bear the thought of having to confess her carelessness to Blake.

The hot ashes flew up in her face and powdered her hair with their gray dust; yet she persisted, blowing steadily until a shred of bark caught the sparks and flared up in a tiny flame. A little more, and she had a strong fire blazing against the tree trunk.

She rested a short time, relaxing both mentally and physically in the satisfying consciousness that Blake never should know how near she had come to falling in her trust.

Soon she became aware of a keen feeling of thirst and hunger. She rose, piled a fresh supply of sticks on the fire, and hastened back through the cleft toward the spring. Around the baobab she came upon Winthrop, working in the shade of the great tree. The three leopard skins had been stretched upon bamboo frames, and he was resignedly scraping at their inner surfaces with a smooth-edged stone. Miss Leslie did not look too closely at the operation.

"Where is—he?" she asked.

Winthrop motioned down the cleft.

"I hope he hasn't gone far. I'm half-finished. Aren't you?"

"Really, Miss Genevieve, it is odd, you know. Not an hour since, the very thought of food—"

"And now you're as hungry as I am. Oh, I do wish he had not gone off just at the wrong time!"

"He went to take a dip in the sea. You know, he got so messed up over the nastiest part of the work, which I positively refused to do—"

"What's that beyond the bamboos? There's something alive!"

"Pray, don't be alarmed. It is—er—it's all right, Miss Genevieve, I assure you."

"But what is it? Such queer noises, and I see something alive!"

"Only the vultures, if you must know. Nothing else, I assure you."

"Oh!"

"It is all out of sight from the spring. You are not to go around the bamboos until the—that is, not to-day."

"Did Mr. Blake say that?"

"Why, yes—to be sure. He also said to tell you that the cutlets were on the top shelf."

"You mean—?"

"His way of ordering you to cook our dinner. Really, Miss Genevieve, I should be pleased to take your place, but I have been told to keep to this. It is hard to take orders from a low fellow—very hard for a gentleman, you know."

Miss Leslie gazed at her shapely hands. Three days since she could not have conceived of their being so rough and scratched and dirty. Yet her disgust at their condition was not entirely unqualified.

"At least I have something to show for them," she murmured.

"I beg pardon," said Winthrop. "Just look at my hands—like a servant's! And yet I am not nearly so ashamed of them as I would have fancied. It is very amusing, but do you know, I actually feel proud that I have done something—something useful, I mean."

"Useful?—I call it shocking, Miss Genevieve. It is simply vile that people of our breeding should be compelled to do such menial work. They write no end of romances about castaways; but I fail to see the romance in scraping skins Indian fashion, as this fellow Blake calls it."

"I suppose, though, we should remember how much Mr. Blake is doing for us, and should try to make the best of the situation."

"It has no best. It is all a beastly muddle," complained Winthrop, and he resumed his nervous scraping at the big leopard skin.

The girl studied his face for a moment, and turned away. She had been trying so hard to forget.

He heard her leave, and called after, without looking up: "Please remember. He said to cook some meat."

She did not answer. Having satisfied her thirst at the spring, she took one of the bamboo rods, with its haggled blackening pieces of flesh, and returned to the fire. After some little experimenting, she contrived a way to support the rod beside the fire so that all the meat would roast without burning.

At first, keen as was her hunger, she turned with disgust from the flabby sun-seared flesh; but as it began to roast, the odor restored her appetite to full vigor. Her mouth fairly watered. It seemed as though Winthrop and Blake would never come. She heard their voices, and took the bamboo spit from the fire for the meat to cool. Still they failed to appear, and, unable to wait longer, she began to eat. The cub meat proved far more tender than that of the old leopard. She had helped herself to the second piece before the two men appeared.

"Hold on, Miss Jenny; fair play!" sang out Blake. "You've set to without tooting the dinner-horn. I don't blame you, though. That smells mighty good."

Both men caught at the hot meat



By Evening She Had Her Tree-Cave in a Habitable Condition.

with eagerness, and Winthrop promptly forgot all else in the animal pleasure of satisfying his hunger. Blake, though no less hungry, only waited to fill his mouth before investigating the condition of the prospective tree ladder. The result of the attempt to burn the trunk did not seem encouraging to the others, and Miss Leslie looked away, that her face might not betray her, should he have an inkling of her neglect. She was relieved by the cheerfulness of his tone.

"Slow work, this fire business—eh? Guess, though, it'll go faster this afternoon. The green wood is killed and is getting dried out. Anyway, we've got to keep at it till the tree goes over. This spring leopard won't last long at the present rate of consumption, and we'll need the eggs to keep us going till we get the hang of our bows."

"What is that smoke back there?" interrupted Miss Leslie. "Can it be that the fire down the cleft has sprung up again?"

"No; it's your fumigation. You had plenty of brush on hand, so I heaved it into the hole and touched it off. There's something alive!"

While it's burning out you can put in time gathering ring grass and leaves for a bed."

"Would you and Mr. Winthrop mind breaking off some bamboos for me?"

"What for?"

Miss Leslie colored and hesitated. "I—I should like to divide off a corner of the place with a wall or screen."

Winthrop tried to catch Blake's eye; but the American was gazing at Miss Leslie's embarrassed face with a puzzled look. Her meaning dawned upon him, and he hastened to reply.

"All right, Miss Jenny. You can build your wall to suit yourself. But there'll be no hurry over it. Until the rains begin, Win and I'll sleep out in the open. We'll have to take turn about on watch at night, anyway. If we don't keep up a fire some other spotted kitty will be sure to come nosing up the gully."

"There must also be lions in the vicinity," added Winthrop.

Miss Leslie said nothing until after the last pieces of meat had been handed around and Blake sprang up to resume work.

"Mr. Blake," she called, in a low tone; "one moment, please. Would it save much bother if a door was made and you and Mr. Winthrop should sleep inside?"

"We'll see about that later," replied Blake, carelessly.

The girl bit her lip, and the tears started to her eyes. Even Winthrop had started off without expressing his appreciation. Yet he at least should have realized how much it had cost her to make such an offer.

By evening she had her tree-cave—house, she preferred to name it to herself—in a habitable condition. When the purifying fire had burnt itself out, leaving the place free from all odors other than the wholesome smell of wood smoke, she had asked Blake how she could rake out the ashes. His advice was to wet them down where they lay.

This was easier said than done. Fortunately the spring was only a few yards distant, and after many trips, with her palm-leaf hat for bowl, the girl carried enough water to sprinkle all the powdery ashes. Over them she strewed the leaves and grass which she had gathered while the fire was burning. The driest of the grass, arranged in a far corner, promised a more comfortable bed than had been her lot for the last three nights.

During this work she had been careful not to forget the fire at the tree. Yet when, near sundown, she called the third meal of leopard meat, Blake grumbled at the tree for being what he termed such a confounded tough proposition.

"Good thing there's lots of wood here, Win," he added. "We'll keep this fire going till the blamed thing topples over, if it takes a year."

"Oh, but you surely will not stay so far from the baobab to-night!" exclaimed Miss Leslie.

"Hold hard!" soothed Blake. "You've no license to get the jumps yet a while. We'll have another fire by the baobab. So you needn't worry."

A few minutes later they went back to the baobab, and Winthrop began helping Miss Leslie to construct a bamboo screen in the narrow entrance of the tree-cave, while Blake built the second fire.

As Winthrop was unable to tell time by the stars, Blake took the first watch. At sunset, following the engineer's advice, Winthrop lay down with his feet to the small watch-fire, and was asleep before twilight had deepened into night. Fagged out by the mental and bodily stress of the day, he slept so soundly that it seemed to him he hardly lost consciousness when he was roused by a rough hand on his forehead.

"What is it?" he mumbled.

"Bout one o'clock," said Blake. "Wake up! I ran overtime, 'cause the morning watch is the toughest. But I can't keep 'wake any longer."

"I say, this is a beastly bore," remarked Winthrop, sitting up.

"Um-m," grunted Blake, who was already on his back.

Winthrop rubbed his eyes, rose wearily, and drew a blazing stick from the fire. With this upraised as a torch he peered around into the darkness and advanced towards the spring.

When, having satisfied his thirst, he returned somewhat hurriedly to the fire, he was startled by the sight of a pale face gazing at him from between the leaves of the bamboo screen.

"My dear Miss Genevieve, what is the matter?" he exclaimed.