

INTO THE PRIMITIVE

BY ROBERT AMES BENNET
ILLUSTRATIONS BY RAY WALTERS

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 wanted 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. Blake attacked them. Blake was compelled to carry Miss Leslie on account of weariness. He fainted. 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 huts 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 carver's magnifying glass, thus insuring fire. He started a jungle fire, killing a large leopard and smothering several cubs.

CHAPTER X.—In the leopard's cavern they built a small home. They gained the cliffs by burning the bottom of a tree until it fell against the heights.

CHAPTER XI.—The trio secured eggs from the cliffs. Miss Leslie's white skirt was decided upon as a signal.

CHAPTER XII.—Miss Leslie made a dress from the leopard skin. Blake's efforts to kill antelopes failed.

CHAPTER XIII.—Overhearing a conversation between Blake and Winthrop, Miss Leslie became jealous.

CHAPTER XIV.—Blake was poisoned by a fish. Jackals attacked the camp that night, but were driven off by Genevieve. Blake returned, after nearly dying.

CHAPTER XV.—Blake constructed an animal trap. It killed a hyena.

CHAPTER XVI.—On a tour the trio discovered honey and oysters.

CHAPTER XVII.—Miss Leslie was attacked by a poisonous snake. Blake killed it and saved its poison to kill gems.

CHAPTER XVIII.—For the second time Winthrop was attacked by fever. He and Blake disagreed.

CHAPTER XIX.

An Ominous Lull.

THE three saw nothing more of each other that day. Miss Leslie had withdrawn into the baobab and Blake had gone off down the cleft for more salt. He did not return until after the others were asleep. Miss Leslie had gone without her supper, or had eaten some of the food stored within the tree.

When, late the next morning, she finally left her seclusion Blake was nowhere in sight. Ignoring Winthrop's attempts to start a conversation, she hurried through her breakfast, and, having gathered a supply of food and water, went to spend the day on the headland.

Evening forced her to return to the cleft. She had emptied the water flask by noon, and was thirsting. Winthrop was dozing beneath his canopy, which Blake had moved some yards down towards the barricade. Blake was cooking supper.

He did not look up, and met her attempt at a pleasant greeting with an unarticulate grunt. When she turned to enter the baobab, she found the opening littered with bamboos and green creepers and pieces of large branches with charred ends. On either side, midway through the entrance, a vertical row of holes had been sunk through the bark of the tree into the soft wood.

"What is this?" she asked. "Are you planning a porch?"

"Maybe," he replied.

"But why should you make the holes so far in? I know so little about these matters, but I should have fancied the holes would come on the front of the tree."

"You'll see in a day or two."

"How did you make the holes? They look black, as though—"

"Burnt 'em, of course—hot stones."

"That was so clever of you!"

He made no response.

Supper was eaten in silence. Even Winthrop's presence would have been a relief to the girl; yet she could not so to waken him, or even suggest that her companion do so. Blake sat throughout the meal sullen and stolid, and carefully avoided meeting her gaze. Before they had finished, twilight had come and gone, and night was upon them. Yet she lingered for a last attempt.

"Good-night, friend!" she whispered. He sprang up as though she had struck him and blundered away into the darkness.

In the morning it was as before. He had gone off before she wakened. She lingered over breakfast; but he did not appear, and she could not endure Winthrop's suave drawl. She went for another day on the headland.

She returned somewhat earlier than on the previous day. As before, Winthrop was dozing in the shade. But Blake was under the baobab, raking together a heap of rubbish. His hands

were scratched and bleeding. To the girl's surprise, he met her with a cheerful grin and a clear, direct glance. "Look here," he called.

She stepped around the baobab and stood staring. The entrance, from the ground to the height of 12 feet, was

walled up with a mass of thorny branches, interwoven with yet thornier creepers.

"How's that for a front door?" he demanded.

"Door?"

"Yes."

"But it's so big. I could never move it."

"A child could. Look." He grasped a projecting handle near the bottom of the thorny mass. The lower half of the door swung up and outward, the upper half in and downward. "See, it's balanced on a crossbar in the middle. Come on in."

She walked after him in under the now horizontal door. He gave the inner end a light upward thrust, and the door swung back in its vertical circle until it again stood upright in the opening. From the inside the girl could see the strong framework to which was lashed the facing of the thorns. It was made of bamboo and strong pieces of branches, bound together with tough creepers.

"Pretty good grating, eh?" remarked Blake. "When those green creepers dry, they'll shrink and hold tight as iron clamps. Even now nothing short of a rhinoceros could walk through when the bars are fast. See here."

He stepped up to the novel door and slid several socketed crossbars until their outer ends were deep in the holes in the tree trunk, three on each side.

"How's that for a set of bolts?" he demanded.

"Wonderful! Really, you are very, very clever! But why should you go to all this trouble, when the barricade—"

"Well, you see, it's best to be on the safe side."

"But it's absurd for you to go to all this needless work. Not that I do not appreciate your kind thought for my safety. Yet look at your hands!"

Blake hastened to put his bleeding hands behind him.

"Go and wash them at once, and I'll put on a dressing."

"No, thank you, Miss Jenny. You needn't bother. They'll do all right."

"You must! It would please me."

"Why, then, of course—But first, I want to make sure you understand fastening the door. Try the bars yourself."

She obeyed, sliding the bars in and out until he nodded his satisfaction.

"Good!" he said. "Now promise me you'll slide 'em fast every night."

"If you ask it. But why?"

"I want to make you perfectly safe."

"Safe? But am I not secure with—"

"Look here, Miss Leslie; I'm not going to say anything about anybody."

"Perhaps you had better say no more, Mr. Blake."

"That's right. But whatever happens, you'll believe I've done my best, won't you?—even if I'm not a—Promise me straight, you'll lock up tight every night."

"Very well, I promise," responded the girl, not a little troubled by the strangeness of his expression.

That night Miss Leslie dutifully fastened herself in with all six bars. She wakened at dawn, and hastened out to prepare Blake's breakfast, but she found herself too late. There were evidences that he had eaten and gone off before dawn. The stretching frame of one of the antelope skins had been moved around by the fire, and on the smooth inner surface of the hide was a laconic note, written with charcoal in a firm, bold hand:

"Exploring inland. Back by night, if can."

She bit her lip in her disappointment, for she had planned to show him how much she appreciated his absurd but well-meant concern for her safety. As it was, he had gone off without a word and left her to the questionable pleasure of a tete-a-tete with Winthrop. Hoping to avoid this, she hurried her preparations for a day on the cliff. But before she could get off, Winthrop sauntered up, hiding his yawns behind a hand which had regained most of its normal plumpness. His eye was at once caught by the charcoal note.

"Ah! he drawled; 'really now, this is too kind of him to give us the pleasure of his absence all day!'"

"Ye-es?" murmured Miss Leslie.

"Permit me to add that you will also have the pleasure of my absence. I am going now."

Winthrop looked down, and began to speak very rapidly: "Miss Genevieve, I—I wish to apologize. I've thought it over, I've made a mistake—I—I mean, my conduct the other day was vile, utterly vile! Permit me to appeal to your consideration for a man who has been unfortunate—who, I mean, has been—er—was carried away by his feelings. Your favoring of that bloom—er—that—er—boulder so angered me that I—that I—"

"Mr. Winthrop!" interrupted the girl, "I will have you to understand that you do not advance yourself in

my esteem by such references to Mr. Blake."

"Aye! aye, that Blake!" panted Winthrop. "Don't you see? It's 'im, an' that blossom! W'en a man's daffy—w'en 'e's in love!—"

Miss Leslie burst into a nervous laugh, but checked herself on the instant.

"Really, Mr. Winthrop!" she exclaimed, "you must pardon me. I—I never knew that cultured Englishmen ever dropped their 's. As it happens, you know, I never saw one excited before this."

"Ah, yes; to be sure—to be sure!" murmured Winthrop, in an odd tone. The girl threw out her hand in a little gesture of protest.

"Really, I'm sorry to have hurt—to have been so thoughtless!"

Winthrop stood silent. She spoke again: "I'll do what you ask. I'll make allowances for you—for your feelings towards me and try to forget all you said the other day. Let me begin by asking a favor of you."

"Ah, Miss Genevieve, anything, to be sure, that I may do!"

"It is that I wish your opinion. When Mr. Blake finished that absurd door last evening, he would not tell me why he had built it—only a vague statement about my safety."

"Ah! He did not go into particulars?" drawled Winthrop.

"No, not even a hint; and he looked so—odd."

Winthrop slowly rubbed his soft palms one upon the other.

"Do you—er—really desire to know his—the motive which actuated him?" he murmured.

"I should not have mentioned it to you if I did not," she answered.

"Well—er—" He hesitated and paused for a full minute. "You see, it is a rather difficult undertaking to intimate such a matter to a lady—just the right touch of delicacy, you know. But I will begin by explaining that I have known it since the first—"

"Known what?"

"Of that bound—of—er—Blake's trouble."

"Trouble?"

"Ah! Perhaps I should have said affliction; yes, that is the better word. To own the truth, the fellow has some good qualities. It was no doubt because he realized, when in his better moments—"

"Better moments? Mr. Winthrop, I am not a child. In justice both to myself and to Mr. Blake, I must ask you to speak out plainly."

"My dear Miss Leslie, may I first ask if you have not observed how strangely at times the fellow acts—looks odd, as you put it—how he falls into melancholia or senseless rages? I may truthfully state that he has three times threatened my life."

"I—thought his anger quite natural, after I had so rudely—and so many people are given to brooding— But if he was violent to you—"

"My dear Miss Genevieve, I hold nothing against the miserable fellow. At such times he is not—er—responsive, you know. Let us give the fellow full credit—that is why he himself built your door."

"Oh, but I can't believe it! I can't believe it!" cried the girl. "It's not possible! He's so strong, so true and manly, so kind, for all his gruffness!"

"Ah, my dear!" soothed Winthrop, "that is the pity of it. But when a man must needs be his worst enemy, when he must needs lead a certain kind of life, he must take the consequences. To put it as delicately as possible, yet explain all, I need only say one word—paranoia."

Miss Leslie gathered up her day's outfit with trembling fingers and went to mount the cliff.

After waiting a few minutes Winthrop walked hurriedly through the cleft and climbed the tree-ladder with an agility that would have amazed his companions. But he did not draw himself up on the cliff. Having satisfied himself that Miss Leslie was well out toward the signal, he returned to the baobab and proceeded to examine Blake's door with minute scrutiny.

That evening, shortly before dark, Blake came in almost exhausted by his journey. Few men could have covered the same ground in twice the time. It had been one continuous round of grass jungle, thorn scrub, rocks and swamp. And for all his

until, having eaten his fill, he suddenly observed Miss Leslie's frigid politeness.

"What's up now?" he demanded. "You're not mad 'cause I boked off this morning without notice?"

"No, of course, not, Mr. Blake. Nothing of the kind. But I—"

"Well, what?" he broke in, as she hesitated. "I can't, for the world, think of anything else I've done—"

"You've done! Perhaps I might suggest that it is a question of what you haven't done." The girl was trembling on the verge of hysterics. "Yes, what you've not done! All these weeks, and not a single attempt to get us away from here, except that miserable signal, and I as good as put that up! You call yourself a man! But I—"

"She stopped short, white with a sudden overpowering fear.

Winthrop looked from her to Blake with a sidelong glance, his lips drawn up in an odd twist.

There followed several moments of tense silence; then Blake mumbled apologetically: "Well, I suppose I might have done more. I was so dead anxious to make sure of food and shelter. But this trip to-day—"

"Mr.—Mr. Blake, pray do not get excited—I—I mean, please excuse me, I'm—"

"You're coming down sick!" he said.

"No, no! I have no fever."

"Then it's the sun. Yet you ought to keep up there where the air is freshest. I'll make you a shade."

She protested, and withdrew, somewhat hurriedly, to her tree.

In the morning Blake was gone again; but instead of a note, beside the fire stood the smaller antelope skin converted into a great bamboo-ribbed sunshade.

She spent the day as usual on the headland. There was no wind, and the sun was scorching hot. But with her big sunshade to protect her from the direct rays, the heat was at least endurable. She even found energy to work at a basket which she was attempting to weave out of long, coarse grass; yet there were frequent intervals when her hands sank idle in her lap, and she gazed away over the shimmering glassy expanse of the ocean.

In the afternoon the heat became oppressively sultry, and a long slow swell began to roll shoreward from beyond the distant horizon, showing no trace of white along its oily crests until they broke over the coral reefs. There was not a breath of air stirring, and for a time the reefs—so checked the rollers that they lacked force to drive on in and break upon the beach.

Steadily, however, the swell grew heavier, though not so much as a cat's-paw ruffled the dead surfaces of the waxy lilylocks. By sunset they were rolling high over both lines of reefs and racing shoreward to break upon the beach and the cliff foot in furious surf. The still air reverberated with the booming of the breakers. Yet the girl, inland bred and unversed in weather lore, sat heedless and indifferent, her eyes fixed upon the horizon in a vacant stare.

Her reverie was at last disturbed by the peculiar behavior of the seaweed. Those in the air circled around in a manner strange to her, while their mates on the ledges waddled restlessly about over and between their nests. There was a shriller note than usual in their discordant clamor.

Yet even when she gave heed to the birds, the girl failed to realize their alarm or to sense the impending danger. It was only that a feeling of disquiet had broken the spell of her reverie; it did not obtrude upon the field of her conscious thought. She sighed and rose to return to the cleft, idly wondering that the air should seem more sultry than at mid-day.

The peculiar appearance of the sun and the western sky meant nothing more to her than an odd effect of color and light. She smilingly compared it with an attempt at a sunset painted by an artist friend of the impressionist school.

Neither Winthrop nor Blake was in sight when she reached the baobab, and neither appeared, though she delayed supper until dark. It was quite possible that they had eaten before her return and had gone off again, the Englishman to doze and Blake on an evening hunt.

At last, tired of waiting, she covered the fire and retired into her tree-cave. The air in the cleft was still more stifling than on the headland. She paused, with her hand upraised to close the swinging door. She had propped it open when she came out in the morning. After a moment's hesitation, she went on across the hollow, leaving the door wide open.

"I will rest a little, and close it later," she sighed. She was feeling weary and depressed.

An hour passed. An ominous stillness lay upon the cleft. Even the cicadas had hushed their shrill note. The only sound was a muffled reverberating echo of the surf roaring upon the seashore. Beneath the giant spread of the baobab all was blackness.

Something moved in a bush a little way down the cleft. A crouching figure appeared, dimly outlined in the starlight. The figure crept stealthily across into the denser night of the baobab. The darkness closed about it like a shroud.

A blinding flash of light pierced the blackness. The figure halted and crouched lower, though the flash had gone again in a fraction of a second. A dull rumbling mingled with the ceaseless boom of the surf.

A second flash lighted the cleft with its dazzling coruscation. This time the crouching figure did not halt.

Again and again the forked lightning streaked across the sky, every stroke more vivid than the one before. The rumble of the distant thunder deepened to a heavy rolling which dominated the dull roar of the break-

ers. The storm was coming with the on-rush of a tornado. Yet the leaves hung motionless in the still air, and there was no sound other than the thunder and the booming of the surf.

The lightning flared, one stroke upon the other, with a brilliancy that lit up the cave's interior brighter than at mid-day.

In the white glare the girl saw Winthrop, crouched beneath her upswung door; and his face was as the face of a beast.

CHAPTER XX.

The Hurricane Blast.

FOR a moment that seemed a moment of eternity she lay on her bed staring into the blank darkness. The storm burst with a crashing uproar that brought her to her feet with a shriek. Her giant tree creaked and strained under the impact of the terrific hurricane blasts that came howling through the cleft like a rout of shrieking fiends. The peals of thunder merged into one continuous roar, beneath which the solid ledges of rocks jarred and quivered. The sky was a pall of black clouds, meshed with a dazzling network of forked lightning.

The girl stood motionless, stunned by the uproar, appalled by the blinding glare of the thunderbolts; yet even more fearful of the figure which every flash showed her still lurking beneath the door. A gust-borne bough struck with numbing force against her upraised arm. But she took no heed. She was unaware of the swirl of rain and sticks and leaves that was driving in through the open entrance.

On a sudden the door shook free from its props and whirled violently around on its balance-bar. There was a shriek that pierced above the shrilling of the cyclone—a single human shriek.

The girl sprang across the cave. The heavy door swished up before her and down again, its lower edge all but grazing her face. For a moment it stopped in a vertical position and hung quivering, like a beast about to leap upon its prey. Too excited to comprehend the danger of the act, the girl sprang forward and shot one of the thick bars into its socket.

A fierce gust leaped against the outer face of the door and thrust in upon it, striving to burst it bodily from its bearings. The top and the free side of the bottom bowed in. But the branches were still green and tough, the bamboo like whalebone and the shrunken creepers held the frame together as though the joints were lashed with wire rope. Falling to smash in the elastic structure or to snap the crossbar it were as if the blast flung itself alternately against the top and bottom in a fierce attempt to again whirl the frame about. The white glare streaming in through the interstices showed the girl her opportunity. She grasped another bar and shot it into its socket as the lower part of the door gave back with the shifting of the pressure to the top. It was then a simple matter to slide the remaining bars into the deep-sunk holes. Within half a minute she had made the door fast from the first bar to the sixth.

A heavy spray was beating in upon her through the chinks of the framework. She drew back and sought shelter in a niche at the side. Narrow as was the slit above the top of the door, it let in a torrent of water, which spouted clear across and against the far wall of the cave. It gushed down upon her bed and was already flooding the cave floor.

She piled higher, the coconut stored in her niche, and perched herself upon the heap to keep above the water. But even in her sheltered corner the eddying wind whirled her with spray. She waded across for her skin-covered sunshade, and returned to huddle beneath it, in the still misery and terror of a hunted animal that had crept wounded into a hole.

During the first hurricane there had been companions to whom she could look for help and comfort, and she had been to a degree unaware of the greatness of the danger. But in the few short weeks since she had caught more than one glimpse of Primitive Nature—she of the bloody fang, blind, remorseless, insensate, destroying, ever destroying.

True, this was on solid land, while before there had been the peril of the sea. But now the girl was alone. Outside the straining walls of her refuge, the hurricane yelled and shrieked and roared—a headless, formless monster, furious to burst in upon her, to overthrow her stanch old tree giant, that in his fall his shattered trunk might crush and mangle her. Or at any instant a thunder-bolt might rend open the great tower of living wood, and hurl her blackened body into the pool on the cave floor.

Once she fancied that she heard Blake shouting outside the door; but when she screamed a shrill response, the blast mocked her with echoing shrieks, and she dared not venture to free the door. If it were Blake, he did not shout again. After a time she began to think that the sound had been no more than a freak of the shifting wind. Yet the thought of him out in the full fury of the cyclone served to turn her thoughts from her own danger. She prayed aloud for his safety, beseeching God that he be spared. She sought to pray even for Winthrop. But the vision of that beately face rose up before her, and she could not—then.

Presently she became aware of a change in the storm. The terrific gusts blew with yet greater violence, the thunder crashed heavier, the lightning filled the air with a flame of dazzling white light. But the rain

no longer gushed across on the spot where her bed had been. It was entering at a different angle, and its force was broken by the bend in the thick wall of the entrance. After a time the deluge dashed against the entrance, gushing down the door in a cataract of foam.

Another interval, and the driving downpour no longer struck even the edge of the opening. The wind was veering rapidly as the cyclone center moved past on one side. The area of the hurricane was little more than three times that of a tornado, and it was advancing along its course at great speed. An hour more, and the outermost rim of the huge whirl was passing over the cleft.

Quickly the hurricane gusts fell away to a gale; the gale became a breeze; the breeze lulled and died away, stifled by the torrential rain.

Within the baobab all was again dark and silent. Utterly exhausted, the girl had sunk back against the friendly wall of the tree, and fallen asleep. She was wakened by a hoarse call:

"Miss Jenny! Miss Jenny, answer me! Are you all right?"

She started up, barely saving herself from a fall as the big unhusked nuts rolled beneath her feet. The morning sunlight was streaming in over her door. She sprang down ankle-deep into the mire of the cave floor, and ran to loosen the bars. As the door swung up, she darted out, with a cry of delight: "You are safe—safe! Oh, I was so afraid for you! But you're drenched! You must build a fire—dry yourself—at once!"

"Wait," said Blake. "I've got to tell you something."

He caught her outstretched hands, and pushed them down with gentle force. His face was grave, almost solemn.

"Think you can stand bad news—a shock?"

"I— What is it? You look so strange!"

"It's about Winthrop—something very bad—"

She turned, with a gasp, and hid her face in her hands, shuddering with horror and loathing.

"Oh! oh!" she cried. "I know already—I know all!"

"All?" demanded Blake, staring blankly.

"Yes; all! And—and he made me think it was you!" She gasped, and fell silent.

Blake's face went white. He spoke in a clear, vibrant voice, tense as an overstrained violin string: "I am

speaking about Winthrop— understand me?—Winthrop. He has been badly hurt."

"The door swung down and struck him, when he was creeping in."

"God!" roared Blake. "I picked him up like a sick baby—the beast!—stead of grinding my heel in his face! God! I!"

"Tom! don't—don't even speak of it! Tom!"

"God! When a helpless girl—when a—!" He choked, beside himself with rage.

She sprang to him, and caught his sleeve in a convulsive grasp. "Hush, for mercy's sake! Tom Blake, remember—you're a man!"

He calmed like a ferocious dog at the voice of its master; but it was several minutes before he could bring himself to obey her insistent urging that he should return to the injured man.

"I'll go," he at last growled. "Wouldn't do it even for you, but he's good as dead—lucky for him!"

"Dead!"

"Dying. You stay away."

He went around the baobab and a few paces along the cleft to the place where a limp form lay huddled on the ledges, out of the mind. Slowly, as though drawn by the fascination of horror, the girl crept after him. When she saw the broken, storm-beaten thing that had been Winthrop, she stopped, and would have turned back. After all, as Blake had said, he was dying—

When she stood at the feet of the writhing figure, and looked down into the battered face, it required all her will-power to keep from fainting. Blake frowned up at her for an instant, but said nothing.

Winthrop was speaking, feebly and brokenly, yet distinctly: "Really, I did not mean any harm—at first—you know. But a man does not always have control—"

"Not a beast like you!" growled Blake.

"Ow! Don't 'it me! I say now, I'm

Continued on Seventh page