

《Before Adam》 Chapter 1

Pictures! Pictures! Pictures! Often, before I learned, did I wonder whence came the multitudes of pictures or they were pictures the like of which I had never seen in real wake-a-day life. They tormented my childhood with a succession of nightmares and a little later convincing me that I was different from my kind, a creature unnatural and alien.

In my days only did I attain any measure of happiness. My nights marked the reign of fear--and such fear as no man of all the men who walk the earth with me ever suffer fear of like kind and degree. For my fear is the same as that rampant in the Younger World, and in the youth of the Younger World. In short, the fear that reigned supreme in the Mid-Pleistocene.

What do I mean? I see explanation is necessary before I can tell you of the substance of my dreams. Other than the meaning of the things I know so well. As I write this, all the beings and happenings of that other world are a chaos, a smagoria, and I know that to you they would be rhymeless and reasonless.

What to you the friendship of Lop-Ear, the warm lure of the Swift One, the lust and the atavism of Red-Ear, and no more. And a screaming incoherence, likewise, the doings of the Fire People and the Tree People, and the order. For you know not the peace of the cool caves in the cliffs, the circus of the drinking-places at the end of the day, nor the bite of the morning wind in the tree-tops, nor is the taste of young bark sweet in your mouth.

It would be better, I dare say, for you to make your approach, as I made mine, through my childhood. A dream--in my waking hours. It was in my sleep that I was different. From my earliest recollection my sleep was filled with my dreams tinged with happiness. As a rule, they were stuffed with fear--and with a fear so strange and a quality. No fear that I experienced in my waking life resembled the fear that possessed me in my sleep. It was a fear that ended all my experiences.

For instance, I was a city boy, a city child, rather, to whom the country was an unexplored domain. Yet I never did a house ever occur in any of my dreams. Nor, for that matter, did any of my human kind ever break through. I had seen trees only in parks and illustrated books, wandered in my sleep through interminable forests. And they were not a mere blur on my vision. They were sharp and distinct. I was on terms of practised intimacy with them; I saw and knew every different leaf.

Well do I remember the first time in my waking life that I saw an oak tree. As I looked at the leaves and the bark, I came to me with distressing vividness that I had seen that same kind of tree many and countless times in my sleep. So that when I awoke in my life, to recognize instantly, the first time I saw them, trees such as the spruce, the yew, the birch, and the pine, I was as if I had seen them all before, and was seeing them even then, every night, in my sleep.

This, as you have already discerned, violates the first law of dreaming, namely, that in one's dreams one sees only things that are in his waking life, or combinations of the things he has seen in his waking life. But all my dreams violated this law. I saw NOTHING of which I had knowledge in my waking life. My dream life and my waking life were lives apart, and I was the connecting link that somehow lived both lives.

Early in my childhood I learned that nuts came from the grocer, berries from the fruit man; but before even I was born in my dreams I picked nuts from trees, or gathered them and ate them from the ground underneath trees, and from vines and bushes. This was beyond any experience of mine.

I shall never forget the first time I saw blueberries served on the table. I had never seen blueberries before, but there leaped up in my mind memories of dreams wherein I had wandered through swampy land eating my fill of them. I had never before seen a dish of the berries. I filled my spoon, but before I raised it to my mouth I knew just how they would taste. It was the same tang that I had tasted a thousand times in my sleep.

Snakes? Long before I had heard of the existence of snakes, I was tormented by them in my sleep. They were there, leaping up, striking, under my feet; squirmed off through the dry grass or across naked patches of rock; and

s, encircling the trunks with their great shining bodies, driving me higher and higher or farther and farther outches, the ground a dizzy distance beneath me. Snakes!--with their forked tongues, their beady eyes and glittering rattling--did I not already know them far too well on that day of my first circus when I saw the snake-charmer?

They were old friends of mine, enemies rather, that peopled my nights with fear.

Ah, those endless forests, and their horror-haunted gloom! For what eternities have I wandered through them, starting at the least sound, frightened of my own shadow, keyed-up, ever alert and vigilant, ready on the instant for my life. For I was the prey of all manner of fierce life that dwelt in the forest, and it was in ecstasies of fighting monsters.

When I was five years old I went to my first circus. I came home from it sick--but not from peanuts and nuts. As we entered the animal tent, a hoarse roaring shook the air. I tore my hand loose from my father's and dashed into the entrance. I collided with people, fell down; and all the time I was screaming with terror. My father caught me in the crowd of people, all careless of the roaring, and cheered me with assurances of safety.

Nevertheless, it was in fear and trembling, and with much encouragement on his part, that I at last approached him on the instant. The beast! The terrible one! And on my inner vision flashed the memories of my dream of a wild grass, the wild bull grazing quietly, the sudden parting of the grass before the swift rush of the tawny one, the crashing and the bellowing, and the crunch crunch of bones; or again, the cool quiet of the water-hole, the tawny one drinking softly, and then the tawny one--always the tawny one!-- the leap, the screaming and the splashing crunch of bones; and yet again, the sombre twilight and the sad silence of the end of day, and then the great full moon of doom, and swift upon it the insane shrieking and chattering among the trees, and I, too, am trembling among any shrieking and chattering among the trees.

At the sight of him, helpless, within the bars of his cage, I became enraged. I gritted my teeth at him, dashed in incoherent mockery and making antic faces. He responded, rushing against the bars and roaring back at me, and the sounds I made were the sounds of old time and intelligible to him.

My parents were frightened. "The child is ill," said my mother. "He is hysterical," said my father. I never knew. Already had I developed reticence concerning this quality of mine, this semi-disassociation of personality and its effects.

I saw the snake-charmer, and no more of the circus did I see that night. I was taken home, nervous and disoriented by that other life of my dreams.

I have mentioned my reticence. Only once did I confide the strangeness of it all to another. He was a boy ten years old. From my dreams I reconstructed for him pictures of that vanished world in which I do believe I existed. I told him of the days of that early time, of Lop-Ear and the pranks we played, of the gibbering councils, and of the Fire People.

He laughed at me, and jeered, and told me tales of ghosts and of the dead that walk at night. But mostly I told him of my own life. I told him more, and he laughed the harder. I swore in all earnestness that these things were so, and he began to believe so, he gave amazing garblings of my tales to our playmates, until all began to look upon me queerly.