

《Before Adam》 Chapter 3

The commonest dream of my early childhood was something like this: It seemed that I was very small in a nest of twigs and boughs. Sometimes I was lying on my back. In this position it seemed that I spent many hours of unlight on the foliage and the stirring of the leaves by the wind. Often the nest itself moved back and forth with the wind.

But always, while so lying in the nest, I was mastered as of tremendous space beneath me. I never saw the interior of the nest to see; but I KNEW and feared that space that lurked just beneath me and that ever threatened me with a ring monster.

This dream, in which I was quiescent and which was more like a condition than an experience of action, was typical of my early childhood. But suddenly, there would rush into the very midst of it strange forms and ferocious happenings, like a storm, or unfamiliar landscapes such as in my wake-a-day life I had never seen. The result was confusion and a sense of nothing of it. There was no logic of sequence.

You see, I did not dream consecutively. One moment I was a wee babe of the Younger World lying in my bed, and the next moment I was a grown man of the Younger World locked in combat with the hideous Red-Eye; and the next moment I was in the water-hole in the heat of the day. Events, years apart in their occurrence in the Younger World, occurred in my dream several minutes, or seconds.

It was all a jumble, but this jumble I shall not inflict upon you. It was not until I was a young man and had had many experiences, that everything straightened out and became clear and plain. Then it was that I got the clew of time, and was able to reconstruct the vanished Younger World as it was at the time my other-self lived in it. The distinction does not matter; for I, too, the modern man, have gone back and lived the life of my other-self.

For your convenience, since this is to be no sociological screed, I shall frame together the different events of my dream. For there is a certain thread of continuity and happening that runs through all the dreams. There is my friend, the Swift One. Also, there is the enmity of Red-Eye, and the love of the Swift One. Taking it all in all, a fairly coherent and interesting story will agree.

I do not remember much of my mother. Possibly the earliest recollection I have of her--and certainly the earliest of my dream--is that I was lying on the ground. I was somewhat older than during the nest days, but still helpless. I rolled about on my back with my hands and feet, and making crooning, rasping noises in my throat. The sun shone warmly and I was happy, and comfortable. Around me, on all sides, were bushes and fern-like growths, and overhead and all about were the trunks of trees.

Suddenly I heard a sound. I sat upright and listened. I made no movement. The little noises died down in the distance. The sound drew closer. It was like the grunt of a pig. Then I began to hear the sounds caused by the rubbing of the body. Next I saw the ferns agitated by the passage of the body. Then the ferns parted, and I saw gleaming eyes.

It was a wild boar. He peered at me curiously. He grunted once or twice and shifted his weight from one side to the other, moving his head from side to side and swaying the ferns. Still I sat as one petrified, my eyes unblinkingly fixed on his face.

It seemed that this movelessness and silence on my part was what was expected of me. I was not to cry out, nor to move. I was to wait, as a dictate of instinct. And so I sat there and waited for I knew not what. The boar thrust the ferns aside and looked at me. His eyes went out of his eyes, and they gleamed cruelly. He tossed his head at me threateningly and advanced a step.

Then I screamed...or shrieked--I cannot describe it, but it was a shrill and terrible cry. And it seems that the boar's ears were the thing expected of me. From not far away came an answering cry. My sounds seemed momentary, and while he halted and shifted his weight with indecision, an apparition burst upon us.

She was like a large orangutan, my mother, or like a chimpanzee, and yet, in sharp and definite ways, quite different build than they, and had less hair. Her arms were not so long, and her legs were stouter. She wore no clothes. I can tell you she was a fury when she was excited.

And like a fury she dashed upon the scene. She was gritting her teeth, making frightful grimaces, snarling, and cries that sounded like "kh-ah! kh-ah!" So sudden and formidable was her appearance that the boar involuntarily went on the defensive and bristled as she swerved toward him. Then she swerved toward me. She had quite taken me by just what to do in that moment of time she had gained. I leaped to meet her, catching her about the waist around my feet; I could hold on by them as readily as by my hands. I could feel in my tense grip the pull of the muscles moved beneath with her efforts.

As I say, I leaped to meet her, and on the instant she leaped straight up into the air, catching an overhanging branch. The next instant, with clashing tusks, the boar drove past underneath. He had recovered from his surprise and snarled that was almost a trumpeting. At any rate it was a call, for it was followed by the rushing of bodies through the forest.

From every side wild hogs dashed into the open space--a score of them. But my mother swung over the top of the ground, and, still holding on to her, we perched there in safety. She was very excited. She chattered to herself at the bristling, tooth-gnashing circle that had gathered beneath. I, too, trembling, peered down at the angry animals to imitate my mother's cries.

From the distance came similar cries, only pitched deeper, into a sort of roaring bass. These grew more and more as my father approached, my father--at least, by all the evidence of the times, I am driven to conclude that he was

He was not an extremely prepossessing father, as fathers go. He seemed half man, and half ape, and yet I do not know how to describe him. There is nothing like him to-day on the earth, under the earth, nor in the earth. He was a large man, and he weighed all of a hundred and thirty pounds. His face was broad and flat, and the eyebrows over-hung his eyes. His ears were small, deep-set, and close together. He had practically no nose at all. It was squat and broad, apparently the nostrils were like two holes in the face, opening outward instead of down.

The forehead slanted back from the eyes, and the hair began right at the eyes and ran up over the head. His ears were small and was supported on an equally preposterous, thick, short neck.

There was an elemental economy about his body--as was there about all our bodies. The chest was deep, but there were no full-swelling muscles, no wide-spreading shoulders, no clean-limbed straightness, no generous strength, that body of my father's, strength without beauty; ferocious, primordial strength, made to conquer.

His hips were thin; and the legs, lean and hairy, were crooked and stringy-muscled. In fact, my father's legs were twisted and gnarly, and with scarcely the semblance of the full meaty calf such as graces your leg and enables you to walk on the flat of his foot. This was because it was a prehensile foot, more like a hand than a foot. The great toe with the other toes, opposed them, like a thumb, and its opposition to the other toes was what enabled him to walk on the flat of his foot.

But his appearance was no more unusual than the manner of his coming, there to my mother and me as wild pigs. He came through the trees, leaping from limb to limb and from tree to tree; and he came swiftly. I can tell you his life, as I write this, swinging along through the trees, a four-handed, hairy creature, howling with rage, pausing only to rest with his clenched fist, leaping ten-and-fifteen-foot gaps, catching a branch with one hand and swinging on with his other hand and go on, never hesitating, never at a loss as to how to proceed on his arboreal way.

And as I watched him I felt in my own being, in my very muscles themselves, the surge and thrill of desire to do the same; and I felt also the guarantee of the latent power in that being and in those muscles of mine. And why do I swing axes and fell trees, and feel in themselves that some day they, too, will swing axes and fell trees. . . . as in me was constituted to do what my father did, and it whispered to me secretly and ambitiously of aerial flight.

At last my father joined us. He was extremely angry. I remember the out-thrust of his protruding underlip and wild eyes. He snarled something like a dog, and I remember that his eye-teeth were large, like fangs, and that they

His conduct served only the more to infuriate the pigs. He broke off twigs and small branches and flung them at them. He even hung by one hand, tantalizingly just beyond reach, and mocked them as they gnashed their tusks with this, he broke off a stout branch, and, holding on with one hand and foot, jabbed the infuriated beasts in the eyes with the cross their noses. Needless to state, my mother and I enjoyed the sport.

But one tires of all good things, and in the end, my father, chuckling maliciously the while, led the way and my ambitions ebbed away, and I became timid, holding tightly to my mother as she climbed and swung through the trees.

