

《Before Adam》 Chapter 7

Broken-Tooth was another youngster who lived by himself. His mother lived in the caves, but two months he had been thrust out to shift for himself. We had witnessed the performance during the several preceding titles. Broken-Tooth did not want to go, and every time his mother left the cave he sneaked back into it. When there her rages were delightful. Half the horde made a practice of watching for these moments. First, from her scolding and shrieking. Then we could hear sounds of the thrashing and the yelling of Broken-Tooth. About a dozen joined in. And finally, like the eruption of a miniature volcano, Broken-Tooth would come flying out.

At the end of several days his leaving home was accomplished. He wailed his grief, unheeded, for the at least half an hour, and then came to live with Lop-Ear and me. Our cave was small, but with squeezing there is no recollection of Broken-Tooth spending more than one night with us, so the accident must have happened right

It came in the middle of the day. In the morning we had eaten our fill of the carrots, and then, made heed on to the big trees just beyond. I cannot understand how Lop-Ear got over his habitual caution, but it must have been a great time playing tree tag. And such tag! We leaped ten or fifteen-foot gaps as a matter of course. And a liberate drop clear down to the ground was nothing to us. In fact, I am almost afraid to say the great distance and heavier we found we had to be more cautious in dropping, but at that age our bodies were all strings; anything.

Broken-Tooth displayed remarkable agility in the game. He was "It" less frequently than any of us, and it covered one difficult "slip" that neither Lop-Ear nor I was able to accomplish. To be truthful, we were afraid to

When we were "It," Broken-Tooth always ran out to the end of a lofty branch in a certain tree. From the end it must have been seventy feet, and nothing intervened to break a fall. But about twenty feet lower down, a perpendicular, was the thick branch of another tree.

As we ran out the limb, Broken-Tooth, facing us, would begin teetering. This naturally impeded our progress more than that. He teetered with his back to the jump he was to make. Just as we nearly reached him he reached the end of the limb was like a spring-board. It threw him far out, backward, as he fell. And as he fell he turned around sideways into which he was falling. This branch bent far down under the impact, and sometimes there was a crack. The branch ever broke, and out of the leaves was always to be seen the face of Broken-Tooth grinning triumphantly up at

I was "It" the last time Broken-Tooth tried this. He had gained the end of the branch and begun his teetering. Just as he reached the end of the limb, when suddenly there came a low warning cry from Lop-Ear. I looked down and saw him in the main forest against the trunk. Instinctively I crouched down upon the thick limb. Broken-Tooth stopped teetering, but still his body continued bobbing up and down with the rustling leaves.

I heard the crackle of a dry twig, and looking down saw my first Fire-Man. He was creeping stealthily along up into the tree. At first I thought he was a wild animal, because he wore around his waist and over his shoulders a hairy skin. And then I saw his hands and feet, and more clearly his features. He was very much like my kind, except that his feet were less like hands than ours. In fact, he and his people, as I was later to know, were far less hairy than the Tree People.

It came to me instantly, as I looked at him. This was the terror of the northeast, of which the mystery of the forest was puzzled. Certainly he was nothing; of which to be afraid. Red-Eye or any of our strong men would have been able to catch him. He was old, too, wizened with age, and the hair on his face was gray. Also, he limped badly with one leg. But we could out-run him and out-climb him. He could never catch us, that was certain.

But he carried something in his hand that I had never seen before. It was a bow and arrow. But at that time I was not thinking for me. How was I to know that death lurked in that bent piece of wood? But Lop-Ear knew. He had ever seen before and knew something of their ways. The Fire-Man peered up at him and circled around the tree. And around



k Lop-Ear circled too, keeping always the trunk between himself and the Fire-Man.

The latter abruptly reversed his circling. Lop-Ear, caught unawares, also hastily reversed, but did not withdraw after the Fire-Man had twanged the bow.

I saw the arrow leap up, miss Lop-Ear, glance against a limb, and fall back to the ground. I danced up at his delight. It was a game! The Fire-Man was throwing things at Lop-Ear as we sometimes threw things at one another.

The game continued a little longer, but Lop-Ear did not expose himself a second time. Then the Fire-Man raised my horizontal limb and chattered down at him. I wanted to play. I wanted to have him try to hit me with the arrow, turning his attention to Broken-Tooth, who was still teetering slightly and involuntarily on the end of the branch.

The first arrow leaped upward. Broken-Tooth yelled with fright and pain. It had reached its mark. This particular arrow. I no longer cared to play, but crouched trembling close to my limb. A second arrow and a third soared upward, cutting the leaves as they passed through, arching in their flight and returning to earth.

The Fire-Man stretched his bow again. He shifted his position, walking away several steps, then shifted his feet. The arrow twanged, the arrow leaped upward, and Broken-Tooth, uttering a terrible scream, fell off the branch. I saw him go over and over, all arms and legs as it seemed, the shaft of the arrow projecting from his chest and appearing as a part of his body.

Sheer down, screaming, seventy feet he fell, smashing to the earth with an audible thud and crunch, his body rattling down again. Still he lived, for he moved and squirmed, clawing with his hands and feet. I remember the sound of a stone and hammering him on the head...and then I remember no more.

Always, during my childhood, at this stage of the dream, did I wake up screaming with fright--to find, once I was conscious and startled, by my bedside, passing soothing hands through my hair and telling me that they were there to comfort me.

My next dream, in the order of succession, begins always with the flight of Lop-Ear and myself through the forest. Broken-Tooth and the tree of the tragedy are gone. Lop-Ear and I, in a cautious panic, are fleeing through the trees. The arrow pain; and from the flesh, protruding head and shaft from either side, is an arrow of the Fire-Man. Not only does it hurt me severely, but it bothered my movements and made it impossible for me to keep up with Lop-Ear.

At last I gave up, crouching in the secure fork of a tree. Lop-Ear went right on. I called to him--most plaintively--he stopped and looked back. Then he returned to me, climbing into the fork and examining the arrow. He tried to pull it out, but it resisted the barbed lead, and the other way it resisted the feathered shaft. Also, it hurt grievously, and I stopped.

For some time we crouched there, Lop-Ear nervous and anxious to be gone, perpetually and apprehensively. I myself whimpering softly and sobbing. Lop-Ear was plainly in a funk, and yet his conduct in remaining by my side was as a foreshadowing of the altruism and comradeship that have helped make man the mightiest of the animals.

Once again Lop-Ear tried to drag the arrow through the flesh, and I angrily stopped him. Then he bent down and bit the arrow with his teeth. As he did so he held the arrow firmly in both hands so that it would not play about.