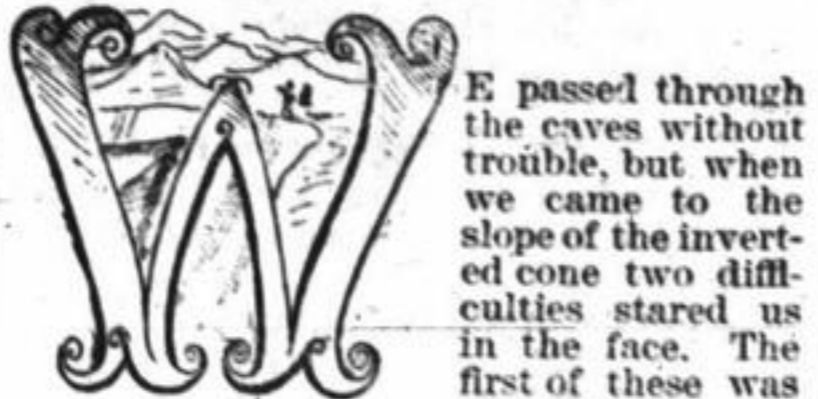


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SHE: A HISTORY OF ADVENTURE.

BY H. RIDER HAGGARD. CHAPTER XXVII.—WE LEAP.



E passed through the caves without noise, but when we came to the slope of the inverted cone two difficulties stared us in the face. The first of these was the laborious nature of the ascent, and the next the extreme difficulty of finding our way.

The fact was I did not expect to live another two minutes. Next I retreated to the far side of the rock, and waited till one of the chopping gusts of wind got behind me, and then commending my soul to God, I ran the length of the huge stone, some three or four and thirty feet, and sprung wildly into the dizzy air.



Next instant I felt Leo seize me by the right wrist with both hands.

ing, and landing well on to the rocky point, he threw himself upon his face, to prevent his pitching off it into the depths. I felt the spur above me shake beneath the shock of his impact, and as it did so I saw the huge rock-stone, that had been violently depressed by him as he sprang, fly back when relieved of his weight, till, for the first time during all the centuries, it got beyond its balance, and fell with a most awful crash right into the rocky chamber which had once served the philosopher Noot for a hermitage, as I have no doubt, forever hermetically sealing the passage that leads to the Place of Life with some hundreds of tons of rock.

All this happened in a second, and curiosity enough, notwithstanding my terrible position, I noted it all involuntarily, as it were. I even remember thinking that no human being would go down that dread path again.

Next instant I felt Leo seize me by the right wrist with both hands. By lying flat upon his stomach on the point of rock he could just reach me.

"You must let go and swing yourself clear," he said, in a calm and collected voice, "and then I will try and pull you up, or we will both go together. Are you ready?"

By way of answer I let go, first with my left hand and then with the right, and swayed out as a consequence clear of the overshadowing rock, my weight hanging upon Leo's arms. It was a dreadful moment. He was a very powerful man, I knew, but would his strength be equal to lifting me up till I could get a hold on the top of the spur, when, owing to his position, he had so little purchase?

For a few seconds I swung to and fro, while he gathered himself for the effort, and then I heard his sinews cracking above me, and felt myself lifted up as though I were a little child, till I got my left arm round the rock, and my chest was resting on it. The rest was easy: in two or three more seconds I was up, and we were lying panting side by side, trembling like leaves, and with the cold perspiration of terror pouring from our skins.

And then, as before, the light went out like a lamp. For some half-hour we lay thus without speaking a word, and then at length began to creep along the great spur as best we might in the dense gloom. As we got toward the face of the cliff, however, from which the spur sprang out like a spike from a wall, the light increased, though only a very little, for it was night overhead. After that the gusts of wind decreased, and we got along rather better, and at last reached the mouth of the first cave or tunnel. But now a fresh terror stared us in the face; our oil was gone, and the lamps were, no doubt, crushed to powder beneath the fallen rock-stone. We were even without a drop of water to stay our thirst, for we had drunk the last in the chamber of Noot. How were we to see to make our way through this last bowlder-strewn tunnel?

strou, and came running up to see what sort of strange animal we were. Hestared, and stared, and then held up his hands in horror, and nearly fell to the ground. Next, he started off as hard as he could for the grove some two hundred yards away. No wonder that he was horrified at our appearance, for we must have been a shocking sight. To begin, Leo with his golden curls turned a snowy white, his clothes nearly rent from his body, his worn face and his hands a mass of bruises, cuts, and blood-incrusted filth—was a sufficiently alarming spectacle, as he painfully dragged himself along the ground, and I have no doubt that it was little better.

Next, I looked at two days afterward when I knook at my face in some water I scarcely knew myself. I have never been famous for beauty, but there was something beside ugliness stamped upon my features that I have never got rid of until this day, something resembling that wild look with which a startled person wakes from deep sleep more than anything that I can think of. And really it is not to be wondered at. What I do wonder at is that we escaped at all with our reason.

Presently to my intense relief I saw old Billal hurrying toward us, and even then I could scarcely help smiling at the expression of consternation on his dignified countenance.

"Oh, my Baboon! my Baboon!" he cried; "my dear son, it is indeed thee and the Lion? Why, his mane that was as ripe as corn is white like the snow. Whence come ye? and where is the Pig, and where too She-who-must-be-obeyed?"

"Dead, both dead," I answered, "but ask no questions; help us, and give us food and water, or we too shall die before thine eyes. Seest thou not that our tongues are black for want of water? How can we talk then?"

"Dead!" he gasped, "impossible! She who never dies—dead, how can it be?" and then perceiving, I think, that his face was being watched by the mutes who had come running up, he checked himself, and motioned to them to carry us to the camp, which they did.

Fortunately when we arrived some broth was boiling on the fire, and with this Billal fed us, for we were too weak to feed ourselves, thereby, I firmly believe, saving us from death by exhaustion. Then he bade the mutes wash the blood and grime from us with wet cloths, and after that we were laid down upon piles of aromatic grass, and instantly fell into the dead sleep of absolute exhaustion of mind and body.

To be continued.

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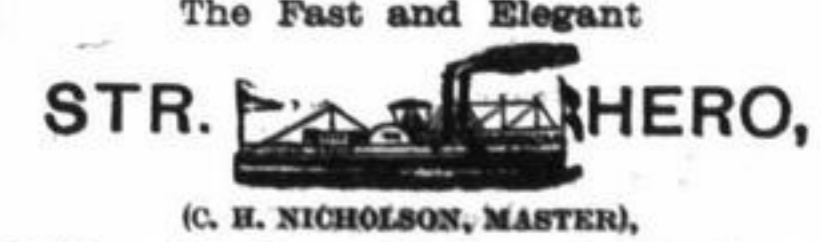
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Most of the above Tickets are good to return until 31st October, and some for a longer period. J. P. GILDERSLEEVE, Ticket Agent C.P.R., 42 Clarence St. Kingston, 11th July, 1887.

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