

The Immortal

By Robert W. Chambers

As everybody knows, the great majority of Americans, upon reaching the age of natural selection, are elected to the American Institute of Arts and Ethics, which is, so to speak, the Ellis Island of the Academy.

Occasionally a general mobilization of the Academy is ordered and, from the teeming population of the Institute, a new Immortal is selected for the American Academy of Moral Endeavor by the simple process of blindfolded selection from *Who's Which*.

The motto of this most stately of earthly institutions is a peculiarly modest, truthful, and unintentional epigram by Tupper:

“Unknown, I became Famous; Famous, I remain Unknown.”

And so I found it to be the case; for, when at last I was privileged to write my name, “Smith, Academician,” I discovered to my surprise that I knew none of my brother Immortals, and, more amazing still, none of them had ever heard of me.

This latter fact became the more astonishing to me as I learned the identity of the other Immortals.

Even the President of our great republic was numbered among these Olympians. I had every right to suppose that he had heard of me. I had happened to hear of him, because his Secretary of State once mentioned him at Chautauqua.

It was a wonderfully meaningless sensation to know nobody and to discover myself equally unknown amid that matchless companionship. We were like a mixed bunch of gods, Greek, Norse, Hindu, Hottentot—all gathered on Olympus, having never heard of each other but taking it for granted that we were all gods together and all members of this club.

My initiation into the Academy had been fixed for April first, and I was much worried concerning the address which I was of course expected to deliver on that occasion before my fellow members.

It had to be an exciting address because slumber was not an infrequent phenomenon among the Immortals on such solemn occasions. Like dozens of dozing Joves a dull discourse always set them nodding.

But always under such circumstances the pretty ushers from Barnard College passed around refreshments; a suffragette orchestra struck up; the ushers uprooted the seated Immortals and foxtrotted them into comparative consciousness.

But I didn't wish to have my inaugural address interrupted, therefore I was at my wits' ends to discover a subject of such exciting scientific interest that my august audience could not choose but listen as attentively as they would listen from the front row to some deathless stunt in vaudeville.

That morning I had left the Bronx rather early, hoping that a long walk might compose my thoughts and enable me to think of some sufficiently entertaining and unusual subject for my inaugural address.

I walked as far as Columbia University, gazed with rapture upon its magnificent architecture until I was as satiated as though I had arisen from a banquet at Childs'.

To aid mental digestion I strolled over to the noble home of the Academy and Institute adjoining Mr. Huntington's Hispano-Moresque Museum.

It was a fine, sunny morning, and the Immortals were being exercised by a number of pretty ushers from Barnard.

I gazed upon the impressive procession with pride unutterable; very soon I also should walk two and two in the sunshine, my dome crowned with figurative laurels, cracking scientific witticisms with my fellow inmates, or, perhaps, squeezing the pretty fingers of some—But let that pass.

I was, as I say, gazing upon this inspiring scene on a beautiful morning in February, when I became aware of a short and visibly vulgar person beside me, plucking persistently at my elbow.

'Are you the great Academician, Perfessor Smith?' he asked, tipping his pearl-coloured and somewhat soiled bowler.

'Yes,' I said condescendingly. 'Your description of me precludes further doubt. What can I do for you, my good man?'

'Are you this here Perfessor Smith of the Department of Anthropology in the Bronx Park Zoological Society?' he persisted.

'What do you desire of me?' I repeated, taking another look at him. He was exceedingly ordinary.

'Prof old sport,' he said cordially, 'I took a slant at the papers yesterday, an I seen all about the big time these guys had when you rode the goat—'

'Rode—*what*?'

'When you was elected. Get me?'

I stared at him. He grinned in a friendly way.

'The privacy of those solemn proceedings should remain sacred. It were unfit to discuss such matters with the world at large,' I said coldly.

'I get you,' he rejoined cheerfully.

'What do you desire of me?' I repeated. 'Why this unseemly apropos?'

'I was comin' to it. Perfessor, I'll be frank. I need money—'

'You need brains!'

'No,' he said good-humoredly, 'I've got 'em; plenty of 'em; I'm overstocked with ideas. What I want to do is to sell *you* a few—'

'Do you know you are impudent!'

'Listen, friend. I seen a piece in the papers as how you was to make the speech of your life when you ride the goat for these here guys on April first—'

'I decline to listen—'

'*One* minute, friend! I want to ask you one thing! *What* are you going to talk about?'

I was already moving away but I stopped and stared at him. 'That's the question,' he nodded with unimpaired cheerfulness, '*what* are you going to talk about on April *the* first? Remember it's the hot-air party of your life. Ree-member that each an' every paper in the United States will print what you say. Now, how about it, friend? Are you up in your lines?'

Swallowing my repulsion for him I said: 'Why are you concerned as to what may be the subject of my approaching address?'

'There you are, Prof!' he exclaimed delightedly; 'I want to do business with you. That's me! I'm frank about it. Say, there ought to be a wad of the joyful in it for us both—'

'What?'

“Sure. We can work it any old way. Take Tyng, Tyng and Company, the typewriter people. I’d be ashamed to tell you what I can get out o’ them if you’ll mention the Tyng-Tyng typewriter in your speech—”

“What you suggest is infamous!” I said haughtily.

“Believe *me* there’s enough in it to make it a financial coup, and I ask you, Prof isn’t a financial coup respectable?”

“You seem to be morally unfitted to comprehend—”

“Pardon *me!* I’m fitted up regardless with all kinds of fixtures. I’m fixed to undertake anything. Now if you’d prefer the Bunsen Baby Biscuit bunch—why old man Bunsen would come across—”

“I won’t do such things!” I said angrily.

“Very well, very well. Don’t get riled, sir. That’s only one way to build on Fifth Avenoo. I’ve got one hundred thousand other ways—”

“I don’t want to talk to you—”

“They’re honest—some of them. Say, if you want a stric’ly honest deal—”

I’ve got the goods. Only it ain’t as easy and the money ain’t as big—”

“I don’t want to talk to you—”

“Yes you do. You don’t reelize it but you do. Why you’re fixin’ to make the holler of your life, ain’t you? What are you goin’ to say? Hey? What you aimin’ to say to make those guys set up? What’s the use of up-stagin’? Ain’t you willing’ to pay me a few plunks if I *dy-vulge* to you the most startlin’ phenomena that has ever electrified civilization sense the era of P T. Barnum!”

I was already hurrying away when the mention of that great scientist’s name halted me once more.

The little flashy man had been tagging along at my heels, talking cheerfully and volubly all the while; and now, as I halted again, he struck an attitude, legs apart, thumbs hooked in his armpits, and his head cocked knowingly on one side.

“Prof” he said, “if you’d work in the Tyng-Tyng Company, or fix it up with Bunsen to mention his Baby Biscuits as the most nootritious of condeements, there’d be more in it for you an’ me. But it’s up to you.”

“Well I won’t!” I retorted.

“Very well, ve-ry well,” he said soothingly. “Then look over another line o’ samples. No trouble to show ’em—none at all, sir! Now if P T. Barnum was alive—”

I said very seriously: “The name of that great discoverer falling from your illiterate lips has halted me a second time. His name alone invests your somewhat suspicious conversation with a dignity and authority heretofore conspicuously absent. If, as you hint, you have any scientific information for sale which P T. Barnum might have considered worth purchasing, you may possibly find in me a client. Proceed, young sir.”

“Say, listen, Bo—I mean, Prof I’ve got the goods. Don’t worry. I’ve got information in my think-box that would make your kick-in speech the event of the century. The question remains, do I get mine?”

“What is this scientific information?”

We had now walked as far as Riverside Drive. There were plenty of unoccupied benches. I sat down and he seated himself beside me.

For a few moments I gazed upon the magnificent view. Even he seemed awed by the proportions of the superb iron gas tank dominating the prospect.

I gazed at the colossal advertisements across the Hudson, at the freight trains below; I gazed upon the lordly Hudson itself, that majestic sewer which drains the Empire State, bearing within its resistless flood millions of tons of insoluble matter from that magic fairyland which we call “up-state,” to the sea. And, thinking of disposal plants, I thought of that sublime paraphrase—“From the Mohawk to the Hudson, from the Hudson to the Sea.”

“Bo,” he said, “I gotta hand it to you. Them guys might have got wise if you had worked in the Tyng-Tyng Company or the Bunsen stuff. There was big money into it, but it might not have went.

I waited curiously.

“But this here dope I’m startin’ in to cook for you is a straight, reelible, an’ hones’ pill. P T. Barnum he would have went a million miles to see what I seen last Janooary down in the Coquina country—”

“Where is that?”

“Say; that’s what costs money to know. When I put you wise I’m due to retire from actyve business. Get me?”

“Go on.”

“Sure. I was down to the Coquina country, a-doin’—well, I was doin’ tubes. I gotta be hones’ with *you*, Prof That’s what I was a-doin’ of—sell-in’ farms under water to suckers. Bee-u-tiful Florida! Own your own orange grove. Seven crops o’ strawberries every winter in Gawd’s own country—get me?”

He bestowed upon me a loathsome wink.

“Well, it went big till I made a break and got in Dutch with the Navy Department what was surveyin’ the Everglades for a safe and sane harbor of refuge for the navy in time o’ war.

“Sir, they was a-dredgin’ up the farms I was sellin’, an’ the suckers heard of it an’ squealed somethin’ fierce, an’ I had to hustle! Yes, sir, I had to git up an’ mosey cross-lots. And what with the Federal Gov’ment chasm’ me one way an’ them tubes an’ the sheriff of Pickalocka County racin’ me t’ other, I got lost for fair-yes, sir.”

He smiled reminiscently, produced from his pockets the cold and offensive remains of a partly consumed cigar, and examined it critically. Then he requested a match.

“I shall now pass over lightly or in subdood silence the painful events of my flight,” he remarked, waving his cigar and expelling a long squirt of smoke from his unshaven lips. “Surfice it to say that I got everythin’ that was comm to me, an’ then some, what with snakes and murskeeters, an’ briers an mud, an’ hunger an’ thirst an’ heat. Wasn’t there a wop named Pizarro or somethin’ what got lost down in Florida? Well, he’s got nothin’ on me. I never want to see the dam’ state again. But I’ll go back if *you* say so!”

His small rat eyes rested musingly upon the river; he sucked thoughtfully at his cigar, hooked one soiled thumb into the armhole of his fancy vest and crossed his legs.

“To resoom,” he said cheerily; “I come out one day, half nood, onto the banks of the Miami River. The rest was a pipe after what I had went through.

“I trimmed a guy at Miami, got clothes and railroad fare, an’ ducked.

“Now the valyble portion of my discourse is this here partial information concernin’ what I seen—or rather what I run onto dutin’ my crool flight from my ree-lentless persecutors.

‘An’ these here is the facts: There is, contrary to maps, Coast Survey guys, an’ general opinion, a range of hills in Florida, made entirely of coquina.

“It’s a good big range, too, fifty miles long an’ anywhere from one to five miles acrost.

‘An’ what I’ve got to say is this: Into them there Coquina hills there still lives the expirin’ remains of the cave-men—”

“What!” I exclaimed incredulously.

“Or,” he continued calmly, “to speak more stric’ly, the few individools of that there expirin’ race is now totally reduced to a few women.”

“Your statement is wild—”

“No; but *they’re* wild. I seen ’em. Bein’ extreemly bee-utiful I approached nearer, but they hove rocks at me, they did, an’ they run into the rocks like squir’ls, they did, an’ I was too much on the blink to stick around whistlin’ for dearie.

“But I seen ’em; they was all dolled up in the skins of wild annermals. When I see the first one she was eatin’ onto a ear of corn, an’ I nearly ketched her, but she run like hellnall—yes, sir. Just like that.

“So next I looked for some cave guy to waltz up an’ paste me, but no. An’ after I had went through them dam’ Coquina mountains I reelized that there was nary a guy left in this here expinin’ race, only women, an’ only about a dozen o’ them.”

He ceased, meditatively expelled a cloud of pungent smoke, and folded his arms.

“Of course,” said I with a sneer, “you have proofs to back your pleasant tale?”

“Sure. I made a map.”

“I see,” said I sarcastically. “You propose to have me pay you for that map?”

“Sure.”

“How much, my confiding friend?”

“Ten thousand plunks.”

I began to laugh. He laughed, too: “You’ll pay ’em if you take my map an go to the Coquina hills,” he said.

I stopped laughing: “Do you mean that I am to go there and investigate before I pay you for this information?”

“Sure. If the goods ain’t up to sample the deal is off.”

“Sample? What sample?” I demanded derisively.

He made a gesture with one soiled hand as though quieting a balky horse.

“I took a snapshot, friend. You wanta take a slant at it?”

“You took a photograph of one of these alleged cave-dwellers?”

“I took ten but when these here cave-ladies hove rocks at me the fillums was put on the blink—all excep’ this one which I dee-veloped an’ printed.”

He drew from his inner coat pocket a photograph and handed it to me—the most amazing photograph I ever gazed upon. Astounded, almost convinced I sat looking at this irrefutable evidence in silence. The smoke of his cigar drifting into my face aroused me from a sort of dazed inertia.

“Listen,” I said, half strangled, “are you willing to wait for payment until I personally have verified the existence of these—er—creatures?”

“You betcher! When you have went there an’ have saw the goods, just let me have mine if they’re up to sample. Is that right?”

“It seems perfectly fair.”

“It is fair. I wouldn’t try to do a scientific guy—no, sir. Me without no eddycation, only brains? Fat chance I’d have to put one over on a Academy sport what’s chuck-a-block with Latin an’ Greek an’ scientific stuff an’ all like that!”

I admitted to myself that he’d stand no chance.

“Is it a go?” he asked.

“Where is the map?” I inquired, trembling internally with excitement.

“Ha—ha!” he said. “Listen to my mirth! The map is inside here, old sport!” and he tapped his retreating forehead with one nicotine-stained finger.

“I see,” said I, trying to speak carelessly; “you desire to pilot me.”

“I don’t desire to but I gotta go with you.

“An accurate map—”

“Can it, old sport! A accurate map is all right when it’s pasted over the front of your head for a face. But I wear the other kind of map *inside* me conk. Get me?”

“I confess that I do not.”

“Well, get *this*, then. It’s a cash deal. If the goods is up to sample you hand me mine then an’ there. I don’t deliver no goods f.o.b. I shows ’em to you. After you have saw them it’s up to you to round ’em up. That’s all, as they say when our great President pulls a gun. There ain’t goin’ to be no shootin’; walk out quietly, ladies!”

After I had sat there for fully ten minutes staring at him I came to the only logical conclusion possible to a scientific mind.

I said: “You are, admittedly, unlettered; you are confessedly a chevalier of industry; personally, you are exceedingly distasteful to me. But it is useless to deny that you are the most extraordinary man I ever saw. . . . How soon can you take me to these Coquina hills?”

“Gimme twenty-four hours to—fix things,” he said gaily. “Is that all?”

“It’s plenty, I guess. An’—say!”

“What?”

“It’s a stric’ly cash deal. Get me?”

“I shall have with me a certified check for ten thousand dollars. Also a pair of automatics.”

He laughed: “Huh!” he said, “I could loco your cabbage palm soup if I was *that* kind! I’m on the level, Perfessor. If I wasn’t I could get you in about a hundred styles while you was blinkin’ at what you was thinkin’ about. But I ain’t no gun-man. You hadn’t oughta pull that stuff on me. I’ve give you your chanst; take it or leave it.”

I pondered profoundly for another ten minutes. And at last my decision was irrevocably reached.

“It’s a bargain,” I said firmly. “What is your name?”

“Sam Mink. Write it Samuel onto that there certyified check—if you can spare the extra seconds from your valooble time.”

II

On Monday, the first day of March, 1915, about 10:30 A.M., we came in sight of something which, until I had met Mink, I never had dreamed existed in southern Florida—a high range of hills. It had been an eventless journey from New York to Miami, from Miami to Fort Coquina; but from there through an absolutely pathless wilderness as far as I could make out, the journey had been exasperating.

Where we went I do not know even now: sawgrass and water, hammock and shell mound, palm forests, swamps, wildernesses of water-oak and live-oak, vast stretches of pine, lagoons, sloughs, branches, muddy creeks, reedy reaches from which wild fowl rose in clouds where alligators lurked or lumbered about after stranded fish, horrible mangrove thickets full of moccasins and water-turkeys, heronry more horrible still, out of which the heat from a vertical

sun distilled the last atom of nauseating effluvia—all these choice spots we visited under the guidance of the wretched Mink. I seemed to be missing nothing that might discourage or disgust me.

He appeared to know the way, somehow, although my compass became mysteriously lost the first day out from Fort Coquina.

Again and again I felt instinctively that we were travelling in a vast circle, but Mink always denied it, and I had no scientific instruments to verify my deepening suspicions.

Another thing bothered me: Mink did not seem to suffer from insects or heat; in fact, to my intense annoyance, he appeared to be having a comfortable time of it, eating and drinking with gusto, sleeping snugly under a mosquito bar, permitting me to do all camp work, the paddling as long as we used a canoe, and all the cooking, too, claiming, on his part, a complete ignorance of culinary art.

Sometimes he condescended to catch a few fish for the common pan; sometimes he bestirred himself to shoot a duck or two. But usually he played on his concertina during his leisure moments which were plentiful.

I began to detest Samuel Mink.

At first I was murderously suspicious of him, and I walked about with my automatic arsenal ostentatiously displayed. But he looked like such a miserable shrimp that I became ashamed of my precautions. Besides, as he cheerfully pointed out, a little koonti soaked in my drinking water, would have done my business for me if he had meant me any physical harm. Also he had a horrid habit of noosing moccasins for sport; and it would have been easy for him to introduce one to me while I slept.

Really what most worried me was the feeling which I could not throw off that somehow or other we were making very little progress in any particular direction.

He even admitted that there was reason for my doubts, but he confided to me that to find these Coquina hills, was like traversing a maze. Doubling to and fro among forests and swamps, he insisted, was the only possible path of access to the undiscovered Coquina hills of Florida. Otherwise, he argued, these Coquina hills would long ago have been discovered.

And it seemed to me that he had been right when at last we came out on the edge of a palm forest and beheld that astounding blue outline of hills in a country which has always been supposed to lie as flat as a flabby flap-jack.

A desert of saw-palmetto stretched away before us to the base of the hills; game trails ran through it in every direction like sheep paths; a few moth-eaten Florida deer trotted away as we appeared.

Into one of these trails stepped Samuel Mink, burdened only with his concertina and a box of cigars. I, loaded with seventy pounds of impedimenta including a moving-picture apparatus, reeled after him.

He walked on jauntily toward the hills, his pearl-coloured bowler hat at an angle. Occasionally he played upon his concertina as he advanced; now and then he cut a pigeon wing. I hated him. At every toilsome step I hated him more deeply. He played “Tipperary” on his concertina.

“See ’em, old top?” he inquired, nodding toward the hills. “I’m a man of my word, I am. Look at ’em! Take ’em in, old sport! An’ reemember, each an every hill is guaranteed to contain one bony fidy cave-lady what is the last vanishin’ traces of a extinc’ an’ dissappeenin’ race!”

We toiled on—that is, I did, bowed under my sweating load of paraphernalia. He skipped in advance like some degenerate twentieth century faun, playing on his pipes the unmitigated melodies of George Cohan.

“Watch your step!” he cried, nimbly avoiding the attentions of a ground-rattler which tried to caress his ankle from under a saw-palmetto.

With a shudder I gave the deadly little reptile room and floundered forward a prey to exhaustion, melancholy, and red-bugs. A few buzzards kept pace with me, their broad, black shadows gliding ominously over the sun-drenched earth; blue-tail lizards went rustling and leaping away on every side; floppy soft-winged butterflies escorted me; a strange bird which seemed to be dressed in a union suit of checked gingham, flew from tree to tree as I plodded on, and squealed at me persistently.

At last I felt the hard coquina under foot; the cool blue shadow of the hills enveloped me; I slipped off my pack, dumped it beside a little till of crystal water which ran sparkling from the hills, and sat down on a soft and fragrant carpet of hound’s-tongue.

After a while I drank my fill at the till, bathed head, neck, face and arms, and, feeling delightfully refreshed, leaned back against the fern-covered slab of coquina.

“What are you doing?” I demanded of Mink who was unpacking the kit and disengaging the moving-picture machine.

“Gettin’ ready,” he replied, fussing busily with the camera.

“You don’t expect to see any cave people here, do you?” I asked with a thrill of reviving excitement.

“Why not?”

“Here?”

“Cert’nly. Why the first one I seen was a-drinkin’ into this brook.”

“Here! Where I’m sitting?” I asked incredulously.

“Yes, sir, right there. It was this way: I was lyin’ down, tryin’ to figure the shortes’ way to Fort Coquina, an’ wishin’ I was nearer Broadway than I was to the Equator, when I heard a voice say, ‘Btub-blub, muck-a-muck!’ an’ then I seen two cave-ladies come softly stealin’ along.”

“W-where?”

“Right there where you are a-sittin’. Say, they was lookers! An’ they come along quiet like two big-eyed deer, kinder nosin’ the air and listenin’.

“ ‘Gee whiz,’ thinks I, ‘Longacre ain’t got so much on them dames!’ An’ at that one o’ them wore a wild-cat’s skin an’ that’s all—an’ a wild-cat ain’t big. And t’other she sported pa’m-leaf pyjamas.

“So when they don’t see nothin’ around to hinder, they just lays down flat and takes a drink into that pool, lookin’ up every swallow like little birds listenin’ and kinder thankin’ God for a good square drink.

“I knowed they was wild girls soon as I seen ’em. Also they sez to one another, ‘Blub-blub!’ Kinder softly. All the same I’ve seen wilder ladies on Broadway so I took a chanst where I was squattin’ behind a rock.

“So sez I, ‘Ah there, sweetie Blub-blub! Have a taxi on me!’ An’ with that they is on their feet, quivenin’ all over an’ nosin’ the wind. So first I took some snapshots at ’em with my Bijoo camera.

“I guess they scented me all right for I seen their eyes grow bigger, an then they give a bound an’ was off over the rocks; an’ me after ’em. Say, that was some steeple-chase until a few more cave-ladies come out on them rocks above us an’ hove chunks of coquina at me.

“An’ with all that dodgin’ an’ duckin’ of them there rocks the cave-girls got away; an’ I seen ’em an’ the other cave-ladies scurryin’ into little caves—one whisked into this hole, another scuttled into that—bing! all over!

‘All I could think of was to light a cigar an’ blow the smoke in after the best-lookin’ cave-girl. But I couldn’t smoke her out, an’ I hadn’t time to starve her out. So that’s all I know about this here preehistoric an’ extinc’ race o’ vanishin’ cave-ladies.’

As his simple and illiterate narrative advanced I became proportionally excited; and, when he ended, I sprang to my feet in an uncontrollable access of scientific enthusiasm:

“Was she really pretty?” I asked.

“Listen, she was that peachy—”

“Enough!” I cried. “Science expects every man to do his duty! Are your films ready to record a scene without precedent in the scientific annals of creation?”

“They sure is!”

“Then place your camera and your person in a strategic position. This is a magnificent spot for an ambush! Come over beside me!”

He came across to where I had taken cover among the ferns behind the parapet of coquina, and with a thrill of pardonable joy I watched him unlimber his photographic artillery and place it in battery where my every posture and action would be recorded for posterity if a cave-lady came down to the water-hole to drink.

“It were futile,” I explained to him in a guarded voice, “for me to attempt to cajole her as you attempted it. Neither playful nor moral suasion could avail, for it is certain that no cave-lady understands English.”

“I thought o’ that, too,” he remarked. “I said, ‘Blub-blub! muck-amuck!’ to ’em when they started to run, but it didn’t do no good.”

I smiled: “Doubtless,” said I, “the spoken language of the cave-dweller is made up of similarly primitive exclamations, and you were quite right in attempting to communicate with the cave-ladies and establish a cordial entente. Professor Garner has done so among the Simian population of Gaboon. Your attempt is most creditable and I shall make it part of my record.

“But the main idea is to capture a living specimen of cave-lady, and corroborate every detail of that pursuit and capture upon the films.

“And believe me, Mr. Mink,” I added, my voice trembling with emotion, “no Academician is likely to go to sleep when I illustrate my address with such pictures as you are now about to take!”

“The police might pull the show,” he suggested.

“No,” said I, “Science is already immune; art is becoming so. Only nature need fear the violence of prejudice; and doubtless she will continue to wear pantalettes and common-sense nighties as long as our great republic endures.”

I unslung my field-glasses, adjusted them and took a penetrating squint at the hillside above.

Nothing stirred up there except a buzzard or two wheeling on tip-curved pinions above the palms.

Presently Mink inquired whether I had “lamped” anything, and I replied that I had not.

“They may be snoozin’ in their caves,” he suggested. “But don’t you fret, old top; you’ll get what’s comin’ to you aid I’ll get mine.”

‘About that check—’ I began and hesitated.

“Sure. What about it?”

“I suppose I’m to give it to you when the first cave-woman appears.”

“That’s what!”

I pondered the matter for a while in silence. I could see no risk in paying him this draft on sight.

‘All right,’ I said. ‘Bring on your cave-dwellers.’

Hour succeeded hour, but no cave-dwellers came down to the pool to drink. We ate luncheon—a bit of cold duck, some koonti-bread, and a dish of palm-cabbage. I smoked an inexpensive cigar; Mink lit a more pretentious one. Afterward he played on his concertina at my suggestion on the chance that the music might lure a cave-girl down the hill. Nymphs were sometimes caught that way, and modern science seems to be reverting more and more closely to the simpler truths of the classics which, in our ignorance and arrogance, we once dismissed as fables unworthy of scientific notice.

However this Broadway faun piped in vain: no white-footed dryad came stealing through the ferns to gaze, perhaps to dance to the concertina’s plaintive melodies.

So after a while he put his concertina into his pocket, cocked his derby hat on one side, gathered his little bandy legs under his person, and squatted there in silence, chewing the wet and bitter end of his extinct cigar.

Toward mid-afternoon I unslung my field-glasses again and surveyed the hill.

At first I noticed nothing, not even a buzzard; then, of a sudden, my attention was attracted to something moving among the fern-covered slabs of coquina just above where we lay concealed—a slim, graceful shape half shadowed under a veil of lustrous hair which glittered like gold in the sun.

“Mink!” I whispered hoarsely. “One of them is coming! This—this indeed is the stupendous and crowning climax of my scientific career!”

His comment was incredibly coarse: “Gimme the dough,” he said without a tremor of surprise. Indeed there was a metallic ring of menace in his low and entirely cold tones as he laid one hand on my arm. “No welchin’ he said, “or I put the whole show on the bum!”

The overwhelming excitement of the approaching crisis neutralized my disgust; I fished out the certified check from my pocket and flung the miserable scrap of paper at him. “Get your machine ready!” I hissed. “Do you understand what these moments mean to the civilized world!”

“I sure do,” he said.

Nearer and nearer came the lithe white figure under its glorious crown of hair, moving warily and gracefully amid the great coquina slabs—nearer, nearer, until I no longer required my glasses.

She was a slender red-lipped thing, blue-eyed, dainty of hand and foot.

The spotted pelt of a wild-cat covered her, or attempted to.

I unfolded a large canvas sack as she approached the pool. For a moment or two she stood gazing around her and her close-set ears seemed to be listening. Then, apparently satisfied, she threw back her beautiful young head and sent a sweet wild call floating back to the sunny hillside.

“Blub-blub!” rang her silvery voice; “blub-blub! Muck-a-muck!” And from the fern-covered hollows above other voices replied joyously to her reassuring call, “Blub-blub-blub!”

The whole bunch was coming down to drink—the entire remnant of a prehistoric and almost extinct race of human creatures was coming to quench its thirst at this water-hole. How I wished for James Barnes at the camera’s crank! He alone could do justice to this golden girl before me.

One by one, clad in their simple yet modest gowns of pelts and garlands, five exquisitely superb specimens of cave-girl came gracefully down to the water-hole to drink.

Almost swooning with scientific excitement I whispered to the unspeakable Mink: “Begin to crank as soon as I move!” And, gathering up my big canvas sack I rose, and, still crouching, stole through the ferns on tip-toe.

They had already begun to drink when they heard me; I must have made some slight sound in the ferns, for their keen ears detected it and they sprang to their feet.

It was a magnificent sight to see them there by the pool, tense, motionless, at gaze, their dainty noses to the wind, their beautiful eyes wide and alert.

For a moment, enchanted, I remained spellbound in the presence of this prehistoric spectacle, then, waving my sack, I sprang out from behind the rock and cantered toward them.

Instead of scattering and flying up the hillside they seemed paralyzed, huddling together as though to get into the picture. Delighted I turned and glanced at Mink; he was cranking furiously.

With an uncontrollable shout of triumph and delight I pranced toward the huddling cave-girls, arms outspread as though heading a horse or concentrating chickens. And, totally forgetting the uselessness of urbanity and civilized speech as I danced around that lovely but terrified group, "Ladies!" I cried, "do not be alarmed, because I mean only kindness and proper respect. Civilization calls you from the wilds! Sentiment, pity, piety propel my legs, not the ruthless desire to injure or enslave you! Ladies! You are under the wing of science. An anthropologist is speaking to you! Fear nothing! Rather rejoice! Your wonderful race shall be rescued from extinction— even if I have to do it myself. Ladies, don't run!" They had suddenly scattered and were now beginning to dodge me. "I come among you bearing the precious promises of education, of religion, of equal franchise, of fashion!"

"Blub-blub!" they whimpered continuing to dodge me.

"Yes!" I cried in an excess of transcendental enthusiasm. "Blub-blub! And though I do not comprehend the exquisite simplicity of your primeval speech, I answer with all my heart, 'Blub-blub!'"

Meanwhile, they were dodging and eluding me as I chased first one, then another, one hand outstretched, the other invitingly clutching the sack.

A hasty glance at Mink now and then revealed him industriously cranking away.

Once I fell into the pool. That section of the film should never be released, I determined, as I blew the water out of my mouth, gasped, and started after a lovely, ruddy-haired cave-girl whose curiosity had led her to linger beside the pool in which I was floundering.

But run as fast as I could and skip hither and thither with all the agility I could muster I did not seem to be able to seize a single cave-girl.

Every few minutes, baffled and breathless, I rested; and they always clustered together uttering their plaintively musical "blub-blub," not apparently very much afraid of me, and even exhibiting curiosity. Now and then they cast glances toward Mink who was grinding away steadily, and I could scarcely retain a shout of joy as I realized what wonderful pictures he was taking. Indeed luck seemed to be with me, so far, for never once did these beautiful prehistoric creatures retire out of photographic range.

But otherwise the problem was becoming serious. I could not catch one of them; they eluded me with maddening swiftness and grace; my pauses to recover my breath became more frequent.

At last, dead beat, I sat down on a slab of coquina. And when I was able to articulate I turned around toward Mink.

"You'll have to drop your camera and come over and help me," I panted. "I'm all in!"

"Not quite," he said.

For a moment I did not understand him; then under my outraged eyes, and within the hearing of my horrified ears a terrible thing occurred.

"Now, ladies!" yelled Mink, "all on for the fineally! Up-stage there, you red-headed little spot-crabber! Mabel! Take the call! Now smile the whole bloomin' bunch of you!"

What was he saying? I did not comprehend. I stared dully at the six cave-girls as they grouped themselves in a semi-circle behind me.

Then, as one of them came up and unfolded a white strip of cloth behind my head, the others drew from concealed pockets in their kilts of cat-fur, little silk flags of all nations and began to wave them.

Paralyzed I turned my head. On the strip of white cloth, which the tallest cave-girl was holding directly behind my head, was printed in large black letters:

SUNSET SOAP

For one cataclysmic instant I gazed upon this hideous spectacle, then with an unearthly cry I collapsed into the arms of the nicest looking one.

There is little more to say. Contrary to my fears the release of this outrageous film did not injure my scientific standing. Modern science, accustomed to proprietary testimonials, has become reconciled to such things.

My appearance upon the films in the movies in behalf of Sunset Soap, oddly enough, seemed to enhance my scientific reputation. Even such austere purists as Guilford, the Cubist poet, congratulated me upon my fearless independence of ethical tradition.

And I had lived to learn a gentler truth than that, for, the pretty girl who had been cast for Cave-girl No. 3—But let that pass. *Adhibenda est in jocando moderatio.*

Sweet are the uses of advertisement.