

# **A Son of the Ages:** The Reincarnations and Adventures of Scar, the Link

Waterloo

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# A SON OF THE AGES



**“His eyes were flaming and his teeth shone white.... We were alone to fight it out.”**

## INTRODUCTION

A waste of waters heaved sullenly beneath a dismal canopy. Thin, slimy masses floated here and there about the shallows of a little cove or clung to its sodden beach. The cove led into a bay, which opened, in its turn, upon a vast and soundless sea. But a single reach of land, gray, flat, and lifeless and encircling partially the cove, was all of earth there was in sight.

Close above and all about the huge and silent mystery and extending outward far into space, was a steaming world of vapour, condensed into enormous clouds beyond, an enshrouding curtain over all beneath. And ever this was smitten fiercely by the distant sun, whose rays could not yet fairly pierce the tremendous depths, yet shone through wanly here and there upon the sombre scheme, sombre in its awful lifelessness and silence, but with a promise, indefinable and yet assured, of life and light to come in the tremendous future.

And eons followed eons. Man had not yet measured time. The dateless ages passed. The vibrating waves of light, of heat, of electricity, of magnetism, the forces of attraction and repulsion, all the agencies and mysteries of nature's law, laboured ceaselessly within and without the forming world, making for life. The dense exuding vapour became a warm yet ever present mist, through which the sun's rays drove or filtered and reached the earth abundantly. The world had shrunken, yet the outlines of the bay, and even of the little cove, were there, though otherwise the scene had changed. The floating

protoplasmic fragments had developed into a higher and far-extended life. No longer lay the waters flat and motionless; no longer was the land a dead and drear expanse. There were waves upon the seas and movements showing life there, and the land was green with an infant vegetation.

And the new planet rolled through its allotted orbit while upon it were wrought the endless processes of growth and transformation. The constellations of the heavens slowly changed and shifted into the forms and places which were in coming ages to be marked and named by the sons of earth. Suns flamed and faded while this globe strained toward its prime. Life advanced with an overwhelming rush. There might be check but never pause to the plunging growth from the primal cells which had floated by the sea until they had developed a looming vegetation and almost brainless monsters in that lush and growing time.

The warm waters teemed with the myriads of life. Strange creatures swarmed the seas devouringly or nosed and hunted along the shores, and others of other forms ranged and floundered and fought in the depths and glades of the gigantic fernlike forests. It was a time of heat and moisture and of fierce development, terrible, vast, imposing.

The time, uncounted, yet brought relentlessly its transmutations. The mottled, changing ages still trod upon each other's heels, and reaction and condensation came into even the law of life. The warm seas became in area, though not in place, much as they are to-day. On land, the vast fernlike forests lay buried deep beneath the covering surface made by another and different vegetation. The reptilian monsters of the

sea and land had almost gone, and in their place ranged the great creatures of another sort and type, as well of more timid life, the grass-eaters, upon whose bodies fed the savage beasts of the new epoch. At night the leaves rustled beneath the tread of murderous things; the air resounded with the roar of the great cave tiger, the growl of the cave bear or the cries and snarls of hyenas and the yelpings of the wolf packs. The green plains were dotted with herds of little wild horses, the aurochs, the urus, the ancient elk, and a host of other grazing things; wild hogs were in the thickets. All was life, as before, but life of another kind, one of pursuers and pursued, fierce, strenuous, bloody, but with more to the brute intelligence.

There were vast upheavals and fiery rendings, but life insisted, persisted. Gnawed by tooth of glacier, seamed and ridged by abysses and upheavals, the planet reeled through space. Life, animal and vegetable, retreated or advanced as Nature played or laboured with the crust she was fashioning and refashioning into its present shape, even as she still makes and unmakes continents or islands or blots them out at her will.

But life went on. New creatures, tree-climbing, ape-creatures had developed from one of the lower stems of the dim past and had become distinct from all other living things. Without expression, save by scream or roar or chuckle, helpless, as yet, as against the dangerous beasts, they still developed, and one group among them, by some mysterious happening, outstripped the rest. Of all the creatures, those tree-climbers, far from the strongest, possessing not greatly more than instinct, were yet the most perceptive. Mind was in growth, slowly, uncertainly, but still in growth. Reason fluttered within

dull brains; the climbers could think a little. Nature had begun upon her Masterpiece!

# **A SON OF THE AGES**

# CHAPTER I

## THE LINK

I had broken my thumb. It was a long fall and not only was my thumb broken, but the fingers on the same hand were crushed backward and so sprained that they were useless, and when I tried to climb the tree again, to renew the fight, I could not. I do not know what made me slip and fall, for there were few among the treetop people more certain upon a limb than I. But that upon which I had stood was old and it may be that the one to which I clung was rotten, and so I fell, though I was gripping the other hardly with the fingers of both my feet.

The Brown One—I call him that now, to distinguish him, though we had no names—was a strong creature, the biggest ape in all the forest, but it could not have been possible for him to throw me from the limb, even when its slighter upstanding branch which I was clutching with one hand proved weak and faithless as I lurched and slid. I should have clung easily with my other hands—those I now call my feet—and up-twisted myself and grappled him about the legs. Yes, it must be that the bark came away. That was why I fell far, head downward, with arms outreaching to break my fall, and that, so, my thumb was broken and my fingers on one hand bent backward and sprained into hurting uselessness.

It had been the start of a good fight. It was all because of It, as I will call her, the she thing who was the child of an old pair who had a nest in the fork of the tree with the noisy leaves. We both

wanted her, the Brown One and I, and so we fought for her on the big limb while she screamed shrilly in the branches above, and her father and mother crouched chattering together in the nest of sticks and leaves in the great crotch of the tree. He was very old, the father of It, and could no longer climb well for either fruit or nuts. He was forced to eat such ripened things as fell to the ground, and the grasshoppers and the little creatures which came out of holes. But he was most crafty and still could climb the tree with an effort, and so continued to live. He was not quick, though, and, some day, one of the hungry, growling creatures of the forest must catch him on the ground and that, it seemed, must be the end of him.

My own tree, with its nest, was in an open glade of the wood, by the river, not very distant from the tree of the Old One of whom I have told, and before this time I could have taken It, had I but known, for she was full grown, as was I, and once when I had met her in a treetop we had chattered together and she had not appeared to be afraid. I gave her fruit, and she ate. I could have taken her with me then. I wonder why I did not?

Then, days later, I went howling through the treetops toward the home of the father of It, for the hunger for companionship had grown upon me. My own kith and kin were dead and I was grown big and strong and I wanted this one she thing to be mine and in the nest with me.

It was a very good nest. I had made it carefully and solidly with sticks laid across and interwoven with tough withes where big limbs joined the tree trunk until they were quite a platform with a deep hollow in the middle, and I had brought twigs and leaves to cushion the hollow, in which I could curl myself down

and sleep most comfortably, far out of the reach of prowling beasts which came beneath at night. The tree stood alone in the glade, and this was good, for no creature could reach its top save by coming up its trunk. All we feared in the top of a tree which stood by itself, was the rare great serpent, which could climb and could even pass from one tree to another, though not so swiftly as we. But, sometimes, he would surprise one of us asleep, and what happened then was something of which I do not care to tell.

So, my nest was a fine one and the tree was near a great river and in a wood in which were fruit and nuts and many birds and where the roots of weeds in the ground were sweet and tender, and where the wild ducks and geese laid eggs in nests by the water, where all about were many things to eat. But the she thing hunger came upon me and I wanted It. I went through the forest to get her.

I scrambled on all fours from the trunk of my own tree and from the glade and so up into the treetops and swung from limb to limb toward the house of the Old One, where I could find my mate. As I neared the place I checked myself, clinging to a limb and listening, for I had heard from afar that which I did not like. There came from where stood the tree of the Old One sounds which told their story well. There was a combined roaring and whimpering and squalling, and I knew that the squalling came from It. I could not tell where was the roaring. I was in the tree itself before I learned. It was the big Brown One who was roaring in anger because he was baffled in what he sought. My It stood upon a limb of the tree, clinging to a branch beside her, while he clutched another and strove to tear her

away. In the nest the Old One and his mate were crouching whimperingly. The Old One could not fight. He was too weak.

I was strong, very strong. Once when the dun jackal—the half-wolf thing which follows the big tiger and bear and leopard and gnaws the red bones after they have killed and eaten, went mad, as he sometimes does, fearing nothing, though a coward at other times—sprang at me when I was on the ground, I caught him by the throat as he leaped and, with the other hand gripped on him, tore away one of his forelegs, shoulder and all, clear from his body. He raged no more, and it was good for all of the creatures of the forest, since all feared him when he went mad. Yes, I was strong, but I was not stronger than the Brown One. I did not know that yet.

The rage which came upon me when I saw the Brown One trying to carry away the she thing I wanted is something of which I do not know how to tell. I would have her myself and I would kill him! I roared and bellowed, and clambered downward until I dropped upon the limb whereon he and It were struggling. He turned in a second and came snarlingly toward me, while It, still squalling for a moment, then chattering wildly, fled upward among the branches and then into another tree and so out of sight deep into the forest. We were alone to fight it out.

We did not wait. His eyes were flaming and his teeth shone white and whetting as he swung toward me, and we met each with one hand grasping the nearest branch for support and the other free with which to fence and clutch and tear. I caught him fairly by the skin on the back of his neck, at last, and pulled his head toward me and with my teeth tore away one ear and a

strip of skin and flesh, though he bit me deeply and tore me on the shoulder. I should have rent at his neck and killed him before he could have hurt me had all gone as it should have done. But the slight limb clutched by my supporting hand broke at its base and I was swirled off and hanging by my unprotected feet. In an instant he was down upon the limb, biting and tearing at them. They were slipping and I could not lift myself and it was beyond endurance. My grip relaxed in agony and I fell far to the ground—fell to tear a deep gash in my face from eye to jaw, to leave a ghastly, lasting scar, to crush my arms beneath me and lie there stunned and with the fingers of one hand helpless, as I have told, and the thumb so broken that it lay flat and distorted across the palm of my hand.

The Brown One did not come down to finish me. He scarcely looked at me. He clambered higher up the tree and leaped into the next one and was off into the forest crying out triumphantly. He was in the chase of It.

I lay helpless for a long time. The Old One and his mate paid no attention to me, but crouched there, frightened and gibbering foolishly in their nest. At last I tried to rise, and got to my feet with many liftings and stood by a little tree, supporting myself with my uninjured hand. Then it came to me that I must get back to my own tree and nest at once, and I tried to climb, so that I might travel through the treetops, but I could not do it. My injured hand was still so weak and lame that I could not use the fingers. The blood flowed through the great gash in my cheek. But I must get to my own tree, somehow, else I might be killed. I started on my hind legs, bending and supporting myself by my well arm and hand, but it was not easy, for I was

sorely bruised and, though all of my kind walked sometimes upright, or even ran for a distance leapingly, it was not our common mode of travel. Through the treetops we could pass most easily and swiftly. I do not know why it was, but I think that I had somehow acquired the habit of walking erect more frequently than any other ape I knew, though forelegs and clasping feet—or arms and hands as I call them now—were sure and the treetops were a splendid highway, while upon the ground it was rarely safe.

I reached my tree at last, almost crawling, and weak and sore, and tried again to climb, but it was useless. I could not grasp the trunk and lift myself, though at other times it had been but play to clamber up to where the great limbs and my nest were. I became afraid. Any of the fierce beasts of the night might find me lying there and kill and eat me. I crawled to the shore of the river and crouched beside it and let my maimed hand dangle in the cold water. That seemed to make the pain less. Then the darkness came, and with it I was more afraid. I crawled to where there uprose a mighty heap of tumbled, broken rocks and wedged myself in one of the deep, narrow hollows, where I could not well be seen from the outside, and where none of the great devouring things could reach me save the big serpent and, it might be, the slender leopard. A bear came smelling about and growled in his hunger, but the passage between the rocks was too narrow for his huge bulk. Finally, tired and suffering, I went to sleep.

I must have been near to death from exhaustion, for when I awoke the sun was shining and the birds were singing. There were many birds. The prowling night things must have gone

away, I knew, and I crept out into the light and stretched myself. I was very sore, but my hand did not pain me so much, and, after I had drunk deeply and held my hand in the water again, I felt a little of my strength come back. I started slowly toward my tree and on my way found berries, which I ate. I tried to climb the tree again, but failed at first. I waited and then I growled and crunched my teeth together and forced myself to use the fingers of my injured hand, though it hurt sickeningly, and gained my nest at last. I was safe, but I could not rest nor lie still in my refuge. My broken thumb was throbbing and full of pain. It still lay crushed across my palm and was swollen and distorted. I licked it carefully and tried to press it back into its place, but it would not go. I sat upright in my nest and was afraid and suffering and weak—I, who had been so strong!

My ears were strained for any sound. There was little to fear, for only the great snake or the Brown One, should he seek me, could harm me where I was. But all the time I listened, and it seemed to me that there were many things about. I think now that I may have heard sounds that were not, for my head was queer. Still, I listened all the while, and at last I heard that which I knew was real. There was a rustle among the leaves and the breaking of a twig in a treetop across the glade. I peered forth anxiously to see what could have made the noise. I did not like it. I did not know what it might be. At last I saw something. A face was looking at me from between the leaves. It had big eyes.

Then the face disappeared and I waited long and watched for it and, at last, it came again, and in another place. The light

reached it more clearly now and I could see the face of It. Then something happened that was very strange. I forgot my aching thumb, my head was clearer and I was no longer afraid of anything. I was suddenly glad and brave and almost like myself again. I do not know why that feeling came.

I called aloud to It, making the sound we all did when we wanted another one to come. She did not answer at first, but stayed where she was, peering upward and backward through the wood. Then she called softly but still clung to her safe place, still looking and searching back and above and all about her. At last she seemed assured, and then the slim creature swung from her perch and slipped to the ground and ran across to my tree and was in the top so swiftly that it was wonderful. I could not climb like that. There was no other ape in all the woods who could catch her in the treetops, where the slender branches intermingled.

She was there in my own tree and near me, but she did not come to the nest. She ran up and peered down at me from a great limb above. I tried to climb to her and could not, and crawled back into my nest again and licked my swollen thumb and mumbled sickly. She sat perched there and looked down at me and said nothing, but her eyes—they seemed so much larger than the eyes of others of us—opened more widely still. Then she made sounds like those I had been making and went back slowly to the body of the tree and came down to the limbs where my nest was, and raised herself and stood there with one hand on the tree and looking at me where I lay so nearly helpless.

It came but dimly to me, but I knew then, more than ever, that in all the forest and in all the hills there was no other she thing ape like her. I had never thought of that before. Her hair was short, but brown and glossy, and she was oddly slender, with a less protruding stomach than had we other apes. It was her head, though, which was most unlike the others. Her ears were not much outstanding nor were they ever twitching and turning, her under jaw did not protrude so much, and her upper lip was not a bank of a thing extending downward from almost no nose at all. My own big jaw did not protrude so much as did the jaws of many of my kind, and my upper lip was not so huge and wide, but I was a monster compared with It, and my upturned face, I think, more like the glaring countenances which we saw when the big swimming beasts in the river sometimes thrust their nozzles out of the water.

And her eyes, the big eyes, were as dark and deep, I thought, as the water in the spring with ferns about it behind a rock where I often drank, and, when she chuckled and chattered at anything, there came lights and twinkles in them, just as there came to the deep spring water when the breeze blew upon it and made it ripple and change in the sunlight. Of course I did not dream this out very clearly—I did not know enough—but, even before this, the eyes of It had made me think of the spring by the rock. I do not know why this was so. Our eyes were not like the water. I once saw an ape poke a sharp stick into the eye of another and the eye went away. But I had poked sticks into the water and it did not go away. Why should the eyes of It make me think of the deep spring by the rock?

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