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# the beautiful things

by . . . *Arthur Zirul*

**At the mention of the sacred Gods they bowed their heads in reverence before the names of those who'd made us think.**

LAST spring season, just before the Forest Council was about to disband in search of mates, I introduced a Bill to provide funds for a sanctuary for Man. A place where men would be able to live unmolested, and where they would create beautiful things for us. I have become convinced that we Bears cannot make the beautiful things; we have no feeling for it. Only Man seems to have this divine ability. When I told the Elders of the Council of my thoughts they scoffed and asked what had made a Bruin of my rank even consider such fantastic ideas.

I told them of how I had captured a man last winter near the ruins of the Great City. I had kept him alive, over the objections of my hungry cubs, when I discovered that he could make the beautiful things. I told them of how my family had learned to appreciate the delicate art of my man and had gained great pleasure from it. I was certain that other Bears would also be benefited if they had the opportunity to obtain similar works of art.

The Elders said nothing until I showed them samples of my man's work. They then roared with displeasure and said that Bears had no

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*A roving Radar Tech with the Air Force during the War, Arthur Zirul would hop from one island to the other assuring pilots it was not smart to lighten their ships by dumping the radar. Later a cartoonist, a baby photographer, etc., etc., Zirul now owns and operates a small industrial model shop in N. Y.*

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need for such frivolities. Bears had need only for the stout club and the sharp fang. The things my man had made, they said, were born of the same dark thoughts that had led to the destruction of Mankind by the Thunder Gods.

At the mention of the sacred Gods the Elders bowed their heads reverently. It is written, in the Holy Books found in the Great City, that the Thunder Gods destroyed the cities of men because of their sinful ways. They leveled their cities with the Fires That Burned Forever, the same fires which had given the Bears the ability to think, and to use their paws like hands. This was done so that we might inherit the Earth. The Elders believed that it was the God-given mission of the Bears to destroy the remnants of Mankind and *not* to perpetuate its follies. They could not support my proposal.

Their blind dogmatism, and their refusal to pursue my thoughts any further angered me to a point where I challenged the Council thusly: at the next session of the Council I would present much more conclusive proof that man can create beautiful, important, things for us. If, after due consideration, the Elders found my proof convincing then they must open a state sanctuary; otherwise, if they refused to give me even this opportunity to prove my theory, they must be prepared to meet my wrath in the mating arena.

The Elders of the Council sat in deep thought for a while, rubbing their backs on the thick trees that

ringed the Council clearing. A Prince's challenge, such as mine, cannot be taken lightly. They asked me how I intended to obtain this conclusive proof I spoke of. I told them that I would open a sanctuary, at my own expense, where men would make the beautiful things for me. I was certain that many men working together, under my protection, could create much greater things than my lone slave is able to do. Things that would convince the Elders of Man's ability. The Elders muttered among themselves for some time but they finally agreed to my proposal; with the condition that they should not be expected to reimburse me for my experiments if my proposal was not adopted.

I agreed to their condition and proceeded to carry out my plans the very next day. I unearthed the greater part of my wealth and spent it wildly in a frenzy to have my project begun. First I bought an old den on the property of my neighbor. I ordered it cleared of its bones and refuse and be made ready for habitation. While the cave was being readied I set out to capture a group of humans to occupy it. I organized a hunting party. Beaters were sent out first; they flushed the humans from their holes in the ground and into the open. The men were fleet of foot and soon outran us but we were able to catch one female, too heavy with child to run. We used her as the bait. The beaters prodded her with sharp sticks to make her cry out. Humans are very curious by nature

and after a while some of them returned to see what the noise was about. We captured six men this way quite easily and were forced to kill only one of them, a young one, who had thrown himself like a crazed dog at my head beater. I was sorry to have lost him but I received a good price for his carcass from the butcher.

I had the humans brought to the sanctuary where I managed to explain, using the clumsy pidgin that we speak to humans with, that I wanted them to create beautiful things for me. Things such as their ancestors had created, with skill and feeling, in the old days. Those beautiful things that, in cold materials, had expressed the flaming souls of their creators for all to see, and to admire, and to stand in awe of. . . . The Beautiful Things. I did not let them see samples of my man-slave's work as I did not wish them to blindly copy those things which the Council had not liked in the first; I urged them to use their God-gift to create new and better things.

At first the humans appeared to be frightened at my words. Then they were incredulous, finally they were overjoyed to discover that they were not going to be tortured or eaten but were, instead, to be given an opportunity to preserve themselves and their art under my protection. One of the men explained eagerly that he had been taught to make the beautiful things by his father, who in turn had learned it from his father, who had been a great artist in the days before the wars. I was delighted. The

man claimed to be able to create things much more beautiful than anything I had ever seen. Foolishly, I accepted him at his word and put him in charge.

I ordered that the humans be supplied immediately with all the materials they requested, no matter what the cost. Soon heaps of materials began to be delivered to the den. Most of the things I could not understand the need for. There were fats and oils, color pigments dug from the river bank and squeezed from herbs, logs of wood, and pieces of the hard flint from the mountains. They had even asked for white cloth, but of course, that was unobtainable. When they had all their supplies they asked to be let alone, and be allowed to work without outside distractions. I agreed reluctantly, but I made them promise that they would work as quickly as possible as I was very impatient to prove my theory.

For weeks the men worked in silence, all through the hot, still summer and into the first days of fall. I began to fear that they would have nothing ready to show me before the first snows fell and the Council reconvened. I would not be able to feed them forever. My impatience made me suspect that they were malingering, trying to keep the soft berth I had given them as long as possible. When the first chill winds began to sweep the leaves from the trees, I sent word to the den that I would be kept waiting no longer. I insisted on seeing their creations immediately. They agreed to my de-

mands and I hurried to their cave.

My heart pounded fiercely as I approached the sanctuary. I envisioned a new world opening for my race. A world filled with the beautiful things that Man would create for us. As I entered the den, however, my breath caught in my throat. I could not believe my senses when I saw what the men had done. Those . . . those *thieves* had betrayed me! Their leader, the one who claimed to have had the art in him, stood in the center of the cave, his hands and arms were stained with color. He sneered at me in that simpering way men have of displaying their teeth as he showed me what they had been doing for the past months, at my expense.

The walls were covered with ridiculous scribblings that looked like the outlines of men and bears when seen against the moon and were smeared over with oily colors. They showed me bits of wood that had been hacked with the flint tools they had made so that they looked like the shapes of men and bears, but smaller. They showed me scribblings they had drawn on the inside of sheets of bark. Their leader explained that it was called writing and that it would be very helpful to my people.

I bristled with anger. How could I have made such a disastrous mistake as to have been taken in by that band of cheap charlatans?

"What have you done?" I roared. "What is all this . . . this dung? Where are all the beautiful things you promised me?"

"B-but," the leader whined, his

eyes wide as he held up a piece of the carved wood. "Here they are. We created them for you as our ancestors created them for themselves."

"Leech!" I screamed. "You have the gall to call these knots beautiful?" I flung the statue from me so that it smashed against the wall. I snatched the latest creation of my man-slave from my belt. "Here!" I roared, holding it aloft, "Here is what I want!"

I brought the sharp, singing edge down swiftly into the throat of the trembling fool.

"This is a beautiful thing!" I belted in a voice that shook the cave as I flung the dripping dagger into the center of the room.

The firelight glinted in flashes of beautiful fire from the polished steel blade of the dagger and from its keen, hair-line edge. We Bears simply do not have the ability to match such exquisite workmanship in the clumsy stone things we make.

That is why I plead not to exterminate the few men left in the world. If there was an error in my plan it lay only in incorrect experimentation. I claim what every true scientist knows. One incorrect experiment does not rule out an entire hypothesis. My theory is sound and must not be disregarded. We must seek out those men who can make the beautiful things and we must conserve them and train them to produce those things for us. Things like those lovely, shining knives that are so light to carry and kill so easily—or perhaps something even better.