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# FANTASTIC

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# THE THROW-BACK

By  
**L. R. Sherman**

**A** LOG fire roared in the fireplace, its fitful light playing over the strong face of my companion. Outside, the shrieking wind, the crash of thunder, the flare of lightning, the chill rain beating on roof and window pane, as though daring us to face its fury, served to accentuate the warmth within. Around the log walls the mounted heads, trophies of peak and forest, seemed in the uncertain light to lift and listen as though the wings of the storm had reborn in them the spirit of the wild.

As I watched my companion's face a change came over it. Something out of the storm seemed to have taken possession of him. He no longer gazed reflectively into the fire's heart. His eyes glowed fiercely, his hands gripped the chair until the knuckles gleamed white through the tan, his dark, seamed face showed tense beneath his white hair. He was living over again some long past adventure.

My mind turned back over the fifteen years I had known him, and I recalled that never a spring had passed that the call of the wild did not claim him; that he did not leave the easy, comfortable club life of the city and wander off alone into the mountains.

*Born to one century, child of another, he wandered lost, until a weird summons came to him across the ages, and his soul leaped, exultant, to meet the most ancient challenge of all. . . .*

He was nearly seventy years old, and during his youth this wanderlust must have led him into far places and shown him strange sights.

The storm passed, leaving behind a gentle rain pattering on the roof, as though to make amends, to soothe the storm-strained nerves. The old man relaxed; the light in his eyes died down, and, becoming conscious of my scrutiny, he turned to me and smilingly answered my unspoken question.

"Yes, Bob, I have been living in the past. The shrieking wind and driving rain took me back over twoscore years and brought before my eyes a picture of bygone days. I was in a wild country of deep canyons and towering mountains, and another battle of the elements was on. I saw the fighting blood of my partner—as queer a partner as man ever had—rising to meet the challenge of the storm. I felt the portent of a strange adventure coming with the night, and for a moment the chill dread of the unknown took strong hold of me. Bob, I am minded to tell you a tale of my youth, so wild, so weird, so unbelievable as to appear almost the ravings of a madman.

"It is a story that for nearly half a century I have never mentioned, for fear of being considered either mad or a liar."

He paused, and again his eyes sought the glowing coals.

"Another lightning flash, and I saw him raise his club to strike. . . ."



"Tell me; I will not misunderstand," I said softly, hardly daring to breathe, lest the spell be broken and he lose the impulse to unlock his secret.

He nodded slowly, but sat silent for so long I was afraid he had again given up to reverie. Then—

**T**HE spring of 1873 found me prospecting for gold in the Sierra Madre, in as wild and rugged a country as it has ever been my experience to travel.

About a month prior to the main events of this story I had come upon Bull, lying in a canyon with one leg broken, and several ribs cracked. He had been trying to climb the almost perpendicular wall when a brush to which he had trusted his weight gave way, giving him a nasty fall. It was not until some time later he confided to me that he had heard me coming and, wanting to be let alone, had endeavored to take the quickest way out.

I managed to set his leg, and brought him around in good shape, and from that time until his death I never had a friend more staunchly true. Whence he came and where he was going I never knew. He attached himself to me, saying simply that I had been good to him and he would go with me. He said his name was Bull, and if he ever had another he never said so.

I never did know who he was, and not until years later—after some delving as an amateur into anthropology and some of its allied sciences—did I begin to understand him, to appreciate the fact that I had had as a partner one of nature's rarest abnormalities—a throw-back, a reversion to type, a man born fifteen thousand years after his time.

Imagine a man with the long arms, the deep, thick chest, and the enormous strength of one of the larger anthropoids. Add to this an indescribable restlessness, an overpowering urge to physical action during a storm, increasing in direct proportion to its violence, and you have a brief mental picture of Bull, the fruit of atavism.

I have watched him by the camp fire grow uneasy at the approach of a storm and with the first crash of thunder and downpour of rain disappear in the dark and remain until its fury was spent. I remember one night in particular, when one of the worst electric storms I have ever witnessed caught us in the mountains. With the thunder ceaselessly crashing and reverberating through the canyons, and the lightning playing incessantly over the

sky, I saw Bull grasp a sapling, wrench it out by the roots, and break off the top. Gripping the base as one would a club, he disappeared beyond the firelight to return some hours later covered with blood and with the skin of one arm torn almost to ribbons. The next day about half a mile from camp we passed a dead grizzly with his skull crushed in.

Day by day we wandered deeper into the mountains, following no trail, but travelling generally to the southwest. Occasionally we would spend a day or two examining a likely-looking ledge or panning the gravel along a promising stream. We were content to take our time, varying our diet of pay-streak bacon and bannock with an occasional feast of venison or grouse.

One evening, supper over and our horses hobbled for the night, I was smoking my last pipe, and Bull, in a characteristic attitude, squatted just beyond the firelight with his head on his knees, gazing into the coals. Knocking out the ashes, I looked up, about to suggest that we turn in, but Bull was not there. I had heard no sound, nor seen any movement, yet he had disappeared almost before my eyes. He had heard something I had not, and had gone to investigate. So I thought as I rose to go to my blankets.

A twig snapped behind me, and instinctively I whirled. Advancing into the firelight with right hand over his head, palm toward me, was a young Yaqui. Behind him, just at the edge of the fire-glow, Bull squatted on the ground as though he had never moved. The lad stoically accepted the tobacco I offered him, and we smoked for some minutes. Finally he said:

"Me, I hate greaser—white man kill greaser, me friend of white man. White man not go farther this way. Bad!"

Bull looked at him queerly.

"Why bad?" he asked.

"Evil spirits. Bad, much bad, enemy all living things. All time kill. Indian, white man, all animal—go into valley, never come back. Me friend of white man. See fire, white man's fire. Come tell not go."

I tried to find out the location of this hidden valley, but he either could not or would not say. He said sometimes one could hear the "call", that one who heard it, unless he wore a charm, would have to follow. He had never heard it, but his grandfather, who had worn the snake charm, had heard it, and had saved himself by running many miles. He had that charm, he said.

To make light of his superstition would have wounded his pride, for he sincerely believed in it and had gone out of his way to warn us. My companion seemed strangely impressed with the tale, and his eyes never left the youth. I persuaded the lad to stay with us that night with the promise of much bacon and coffee for breakfast, and so we stretched out, feet to the fire, and were soon dead to the world.

You know, Bob, that a man living in the wilds for months at a time will instinctively awaken some time between twelve and two o'clock, possibly stir up the fire a bit, or maybe just look around, dimly realizing that everything is still for the moment, and then turn over and go to sleep again. This night I awakened suddenly from a sound sleep to full consciousness and found myself sitting up. The fire had died down to a small bed of coals. The stars gleamed coldly overhead, enhancing the blackness of the tall pines rising in battalions above us on the mountainsides. No breath of air stirred; no living thing moved; the silence was absolute.

And yet—was that a sound—or was it but an impression on some supersensitive auditory nerve? I cannot describe the sensation.

I can only say that it gave to me the impression of an exhaled breath in a long-drawn rising and falling cadence. I felt a chill, a nameless fear, take hold of me, and become conscious that I was bathed in cold perspiration. Then I looked across at Bull, and knew it was not imagination. He had heard what I had not.

He stood, half-crouched, his long arms half crooked and extended slightly forward, with his hands clawlike, his eyes staring straight ahead. My own muscles involuntarily contracted at the sight of his tense, strained position. Then he relaxed, shook himself as though throwing off a noxious covering, glanced at me, and lay down again to sleep. I looked to where our visitor slept, but he had chosen a spot a little apart, and in the darkness I could not pick him out.

**I**T WAS some time before I finally composed myself and dropped off to sleep. I slept fitfully and rested but little. Once or twice during those moments of half wakefulness I seemed dimly to realize that Bull, lying just on the other side of the dead fire, was tossing and muttering in his sleep. Finally I dropped into the sound, dreamless slumber of a healthy man and did not awaken until it was quite light.

Bull already had the fire going and was cooking breakfast.

Daylight put an entirely different aspect on the matter, and I was convinced that I had had a particularly vivid nightmare. Then I discovered that our Indian had departed some time during the night, and his tracks on the bank of the creek showed that he had been running *hard*.

Breakfast was eaten slowly and in silence. The ponies were packed and everything was in readiness to move, yet I hesitated. Something held me—an indescribable feeling made me long to turn back; that most potent of fears, the fear of the unknown, gripped me and told me that ahead was a danger such as no man of our time had ever known. With a start I came out of my day dream and, cursing myself for a superstitious young fool, swung into the saddle and gave the word to start.

Bull, already mounted, had been watching me closely, for he seemed to understand better than I did what was going on inside of me, and when I gave the word to start he touched the lead horse lightly and we went on up the valley without a word. I was lost in thought and paid but subconscious attention to the surroundings as I travelled.

Gradually I became conscious that all was not right with our little cavalcade, and then I noticed that Bull was not himself. He rode slumped forward with his head upon his chest, his whole being seeming to give off a kind of despair. Even his broncho seemed affected by the attitude of its master and plodded along with head down. I pulled up alongside of him and asked if he were ill. He gave me a queer look out of the corners of his eyes and shook his head.

"No," he said; "but this will be my last ride. I know. I have much to think about, and it is sometimes hard to think."

Then my nerves snapped, and I berated him for a fool.

"Are you going to believe the superstitious nonsense of a savage?" I concluded. "Do you actually believe that wild tale of an evil spirit, a 'call' which brings living things to it to be devoured? I credited you with more sense."

"This is not a spirit," he said. "I can almost tell you what it is. I have strange dreams at night, of other lands and other people like myself and yet not like me, and of animals not like any you ever knew. I have been thinking. I must have lived before, some time long ago, and the dreams

are my memories. So I know what we go to, and I will not come back."

This was the longest speech I had ever heard Bull make, and, after all, might there not be something in what he said about his dreams? I was silent. Inconceivable as it was that his dreams of a prehistoric existence could have anything to do with our present experience, he believed them, and it was not for me to scoff at his beliefs. It was significant that neither of us mentioned the experience of the night.

We had camped at the entrance to a valley and, continuing up this valley as the morning wore on, the character of the country gradually changed. The sides of the valley steepened and the floor narrowed until it assumed the aspect of a deep canyon. Mountains rose on all sides, towering above us like mighty sentinels of that wild, untamable land. Their dim, pine-clad slopes showed darkly; their forests pregnant with the mystery of unknown wild life that thrived in their dim aisles. The canyon continued to narrow until it seemed as though it must soon end in the convergence of its two walls.

About nine o'clock Bull, who was ahead, dismounted and beckoned me to come forward. I went to where he knelt looking at something on the ground, and saw him examining, in the soft loam near a little spring, the largest grizzly track I have ever seen.

"Made yesterday," said Bull, after noting for a moment the condition of the water which had settled in the heel impressions.

The hunting instinct was aroused in both of us, and Bull, who was never more happy than when on a game trail, started forward on foot. We travelled for some distance, when I saw light through the trees, as though the floor and walls of the valley had been cut off, leaving nothing but empty space ahead of us. When we came to this point I saw that such was indeed the case.

**A**LMOST directly at our feet, about five hundred feet below, was as beautiful a little pocket in the mountains as I have ever beheld. It was about two miles square. Covered with rich grass and thickly dotted with groves of willow and cottonwoods, with a little stream winding in and out among the groves, and disappearing almost directly below us into some underground cavern, it looked like a veritable paradise surrounded by great, forbidding cliffs. At our feet was a trail leading to our

right across the face of the cliff. It was little more than a narrow ledge, but it led to the valley and must have been used by our quarry.

Bull stood looking down into the little cuplike pocket. His actions and his expression seemed to speak of a shrinking, stomach chilling fear as he drew back from the edge.

Turning to me, he said in a low, half choking voice:

"It lives here. This is the place."

"Well, go ahead then. What are you afraid of? We need that skin for moc-casins," I cried impatiently.

"I mean the Yaqui's evil spirit," he replied.

"Rot—if you're afraid, stay here. I'm going down to get that bear."

I started forward, but Bull gripped me by the shoulder.

"If you go, I go, and I go first," he said simply.

Shaking himself, as I had seen him do that night, he bent his eyes to the trail once more and started on the perilous descent. Leading my horse, and with the packhorses last, I cautiously negotiated the first hundred yards of the trail and found that it gradually widened a little so that, though there was little chance of falling over the edge, there was danger of falling under the horses' hoofs. Bull was already down, and, unable to stop had I wanted to, I finally reached the bottom amid an avalanche of gravel from the feet of the sliding horses behind me.

"Bear's not far off. We'd better make camp now," said Bull.

His attitude of assuming the leadership did not annoy me. Instead, for once I was glad to shift the responsibility. For some unaccountable reason a change had come over me. I was not so sure of myself, now that I was down. I did not like this little pocket: it was too inviting; the sun shone too brightly on, too luxuriant vegetation; the forbidding walls hemming it in gave me the feeling of being trapped, and I was already beginning to regret the impulse that made me ignore the warnings I had received. Had it not been for a foolish, boyish pride, I should have suggested we leave the place immediately.

Mounting his horse, Bull followed the left wall searching for a suitable place to camp. There were several spots with springs and excellent forage for the horses, which seemed ideal to me, but none of these got a second look from him. Keeping close to the cliffs, we had travelled for

perhaps a mile when we came to where a slight break in them formed a little pocket about twenty feet square. In a corner of this pocket a spring of clear, cold water boiled in the sandy bottom of a little depression. Here Bull chose to camp. He unsaddled the horses and threw the packs into the far end of the break.

A thick growth of scrub oak grew along the base of the cliffs, and while I unpacked and started to make a lunch he took the axe and cut wood. He stopped only when I called him to eat. The meal over, he directed me to take an axe and help. I started to protest that more than enough was already cut; but with a curt, "It's my party now; we need it all," he started to cut more wood. We did not stop for an hour, and then only when he had cut enough to last a week—so it seemed to me.

Not content with this, he directed me to help him cut down a grove of large cottonwoods which grew a short way from camp. Without trimming them, we dragged them in with the aid of the horses, and at Bull's direction formed such an impenetrable barrier around our camp as would have defied an elephant to break through.

Bull, seeming to work against time, did feats of strength that day which I firmly believe will never be equaled by any man. Leaving me to handle the horses, he would lift great trunks and pile them high up overhead, bracing them with other trees placed at right angles. Only when the entrance to our camp was completely surrounded and a small entrance cut through the barrier, low down, did he quit.

The afternoon was well advanced when we finished, but Bull, taking his rifle, suggested we see what had become of the grizzly. Tying the horses outside the barrier and close to the cliff, we proceeded on foot and were soon on the trail. We had travelled about a mile when we came upon the scene of what must have been such a battle of great beasts as this earth has not witnessed since that far off time when the giant saurians fought amid the slime and ooze of some long covered marsh of the Jurassic period.

Blood covered everything, blood and now and again a strip of flesh with the long brown, silver-tipped hair of the grizzly clinging to it. The sod was torn up over a strip a hundred yards long. From what could be made out of the tracks the bear must have been trying to flee, but was overtaken time and again and forced to fight. And such a battle as he must have put up!

But his conqueror—what sort of a monster must it have been to cause a grizzly, the most fearless of wild animals, to take flight, force him to turn and fighting in desperation for his life, to be conquered!

There were two inexplicable facts to be read from the spoor. One was the tracks of the conqueror, great five-toed tracks, not ending in sharp claws like a large bear's foot, but blunt with a likeness to the toes of an elephant. The other astonishing fact was our failure to find the grizzly. The tracks of the bear ended in a fifty square foot piece of torn sod and blood, but those of the monster kept on unbroken.

The obvious deduction was that the unknown must have carried the body with him. What manner of animal must it be that would carry an animal as heavy as a grizzly to its lair rather than feed on it where it lay? Surely some night-seeing beast who dreaded the light more than the tremendous effort of carrying a ton of meat several miles.

COMING to the end of the battleground, Bull stood for a few moments, gazing at the cliffs toward which the tracks led, then turning, he said, "Come back," and hurried toward camp.

Arriving at the latter he displayed one the few signs of affection I had ever seen him show. Unfastening the horses he took off the ropes which held them, and then going up to his own, a wiry buckskin bronco, a marvel of strength and endurance, he caught its head in his hands and looked into its eyes, saying nothing. Yet understanding seemed to be there, for the bronco, with a soft whinny, stretched its head forward and softly caressed Bull's cheek with its lips.

We left the horses outside and entered our inclosure. Telling me to start a fire and cook supper, Bull took an axe and disappeared. In half an hour he was back again with an enormous oak club which would have taxed my strength to swing around my head a minute.

"What's the matter with your rifle?" I asked.

"Gun's not worth a damn now," was all he would say.

After supper he raked the coals together and proceeded to case-harden the club by turning it over and over in the coals. By the time it was thoroughly blackened and hardened to his liking, it was quite dark and, rising, he threw wood on the fire until a blaze was built which drove me back into our retreat.

I realized now why he had cut such a mountain of wood and built such an impenetrable barricade, but I never understood, nor ever can understand, how he had the foresight to prepare for what I never imagined, even in my wildest dreams, could exist. That there would be no sleep this night I well knew. The fire must be kept roaring at all costs, for no wild animal ever existed that would come into firelight at night. They would be attracted to it and watch it from without the sphere of its glow, but they would never enter that glow.

Tired as I was, a nervous excitement drove all thoughts of sleep from my mind. The night was clear and cold, and the warmth of the large fire not unwelcome. From where I sat I could see above us, miles away, three snow-capped peaks gleaming coldly in the starlight, and the thought came to me that this was not our earth we were on, but some far distant planet where life, still in its youth, was slowly evolving from broad generic types. This thought grew on me as I looked at Bull squatting on the ground, gazing into the fire, and I did not have to stretch my imagination much to picture in him the direct precursor of man.

Seated thus before his protecting fire, in a long lost day, he saw pictures in the flames, seeming oblivious to all around him, yet his senses recording accurately the faintest taint in the breeze, the most minute sound out of the night. Would I be privileged to witness one of those most decisive battles of a new world, when man in the making, with the crudest of artificial weapons, fought the brutes of his time?

When we know that some of our reptiles, such as certain of the lizards, the great marine turtles, and the crocodiles, have come down to us, with but little change, from the middle of the Secondary Era, would it be stretching the imagination too much to believe that in unexplored portions of the earth some of nature's first mammals had managed to adapt themselves to the slowly changing conditions and to come down through the ages from the latter part of that same period?

Then my thoughts turned to my old acquaintances who so little understood my restlessness. How immeasurably far off were the streets of the great cities with their brilliantly lighted cafes, their crowded theaters, and their beautifully gowned and bejeweled women, and suave, well-dressed men. How many among them, in their hectic hunt for excitement, could

have pictured two such strangely contrasted beings facing such a situation as now confronted us?

Gradually the pictures faded; I became conscious of a feeling of unrest, and then I noticed that Bull no longer resumed his meditative gazing into the flames each time he had added fuel to the fire, but was constantly shifting his eyes from one point of the barrier to another. He, too, was growing restless. I looked at my watch and found it was after eleven. Could it be I dreaded the approach of that hour, which the night before had ushered in the new day, and with it that strange feeling of an unheard call? Had the call emanated from this little pocket in the bowels of the mountains? Would we hear it again this night and learn its source? My companion's attitude told me that he expected it and I had good cause to believe his instincts to be accurate.

Shortly before twelve a faint breeze blew toward us from up the valley and he slowly arose, head thrust forward into the breeze. You have seen a dog testing the wind, nose thrust out, inhaling in a series of short, sharp breaths and exhaling with a soft snort. That is what Bull was doing. Turning to me, he said shortly:

"It's coming."

He threw more wood on the fire and came back into the recess beside me. As the flames leaped up we could see the horses growing restless and finally they wheeled and galloped up the valley, all but one. We could just see Bull's buckskin stand trembling in every limb, staring terror-stricken into the dark. Then with a snort he wheeled and leaped straight toward us. He came down in the midst of the barrier and after a good deal of threshing and plunging he managed to extricate himself and turned, trying to follow the others. Something in his gait, as he disappeared in the dark, showed us that he had hurt himself and could go no faster than a slow hobble.

Hardly had he disappeared when the soft padding of some heavy animal came to us.

Suddenly this was drowned by the high, piercing scream of a horse in mortal terror. You may have heard it from one caught in a burning stable. This was cut short and there followed such a call of the kill as I could never have imagined possible to come out of any animal's throat.

Starting so low as to be almost unheard, it rose in pitch and volume until it overflowed the valley, echoing and re-echoing



from the cliffs, beating in the ear drums, and finally, decreasing as slowly as it increased, it died away in a whisper.

For myself, I shrank back paralyzed, unable to shut out the terrible sound had I thought of trying. Bull crouched tense, as he had done the night before, and where the firelight played over his hairy shoulders—he had torn off his shirt while working on the barrier—I saw the hair rise as it does along the neck of a wolf at bay.

**W**ITH the end of the call Bull reached for his club and started for the barrier. Divining his intention, I got into action at the same time, and running forward, I grasped him about the waist, determined to keep him from going to certain death. He unclasped my hands and threw me from him as easily as you could handle a child. He seemed out of his mind and kept repeating:

"It killed him; it killed him."

I grasped my rifle and, having him at a disadvantage as he tried to crawl through the exit, I caught him by the foot and dragged him back to the farthest end of our retreat, and leaping back trained the gun on him as he rose.

"Bull," I said, "I'll shoot if you move. If you go out now you will surely be killed. You cannot kill that beast in the open with a club."

He wavered a moment and then I knew I had lost. The wild light was returning to his eyes.

"Damn you," I yelled, "are you going to leave me alone? Are you going to quit me?"

He hesitated and I saw that what I had said had penetrated his befogged brain; that the light of reason was returning; that I had won. With a sigh he sat down.

I was determined that as soon as it was light we should make our way out of that accursed pit.

"We don't need a big fire now. It won't come back tonight. Get some sleep. I'll watch for a while." Bull spoke as though nothing had happened.

Sleep was far from my mind, but I knew a rest would do me good if I could get it, and so I stretched out on the ground. My last recollection was a hazy picture of Bull, squatting on his haunches, his head on his knees, gazing into the coals.

I must have slept soundly for some hours, for when I sat up I saw it was quite light. Bull had made coffee and prepared a breakfast by boiling a piece of venison

from a large steak which, a couple of days before, we had partly grilled to carry with us. The hot coffee tasted good, but the meat was little more than heated through. Bull was always a wretched cook, especially of meats, forever preparing them half-raw. This was one instance when his cooking served more than the purpose of satisfying hunger, for the half raw meat put stamina and strength into us, which proved to be sorely needed before the day was done.

While we were busy eating, the rumble of thunder came to us from the west, and looking up we saw one of those storms which rise so suddenly and rage so fiercely in the mountains, spreading over the sky. Knowing the effect of a tempest upon my companion, I gave up all thought of trying to induce him to leave the valley. The few moments I had left I employed in filling my pockets with shells and seeing that my gun was clean and in perfect working order.

The black clouds, which were just beginning to show on the skyline when we heard the thunder, spread quickly, covering the whole western sky, blotting out the distant mountain tops and darkening the heavens. Bull, at the first warning, looked up, and then seeming to know what he would do when the storm struck, made queer preparations. He stripped to the skin, and taking a knife, cut off the legs of his trousers. Making of them a pair of coarse running trunks he put them back on. Picking up his club, he swung it around his head and threw it out into the open, and with a running leap swarmed up the barrier.

Then I noticed something about him I had never known before. He used his feet to grasp the branches as you and I would use our hands. His feet were prehensile. Truly he was a throw-back. A swing from the first branch and he passed to the butt of a tree where it stuck out over the top; a short run down the trunk, a leap, and he was outside. Running for his club, he took it up and carrying it in one hand at the balance started up the valley at a sort of shuffling trot which he could keep up for miles.

I caught up with him where he had stopped beside a great pool of blood. The tracks of a horse ended here, and the great five-toed tracks of that other inhabitant of this pocket led off toward the opposite cliffs. Letting out a savage curse, Bull whirled the club around his head and swung at an imaginary enemy. Well could

I understand his preference for this weapon to a rifle at close range. Had the blow landed on the skull of an ox, it would have crushed it in like an eggshell.

Taking the trail, he started on, and though with the swing of his massive sloping shoulders and long arms the gait seemed slow, it was all I could do to keep up with him without exhausting and winding myself.

Blackness now almost covered the sky. Lightning flashed more and more often and the thunder rolled and crashed louder and louder. I could hear Bull muttering to himself and now and again I could catch what I thought was a distinct word, but in a language I had never heard. The intonations were harsh and guttural. He was indeed harking back to a long dead past. I have no doubt that could a student of the ancient Gallic languages have heard all he said, he could have added a fund of knowledge to what little is already known of prehistoric speech.

We had reached the western end of the valley and found that the trail led down a narrow, twisting canyon. Here the walls were so weathered and worn that it seemed dangerous to travel down the narrow defile. Great cracks cut out large blocks, and their very height gave them the appearance of slanting outward. It seemed as though the slightest jar would bring them tumbling down upon us in spite of the fact that they must have stood thus for ages. Just beyond the entrance to this gorge Bull stopped and throwing back his head, sent a long call rolling down the canyon. I have never heard a bull ape roar, but I believe I should recognize it from that challenge of Bull's.

It seemed as though the hush prevailing as the challenge was called out, was the silence of the elements awaiting the signal to break loose, for hardly had the last echo died before the storm broke. The rain came down in torrents, the lightning shot back and forth across the sky continuously and the thunder rolled and boomed, reverberating among the cliffs. Its fierceness seemed to threaten to bring the very mountains down upon us.

**B**ULL was in his fighting glory. Grasping his club in both hands, reckless of what lay beyond, he sprang ahead of me around a turn. As I made the latter I saw that the canyon ended about a hundred yards ahead, and in the face of the intersecting cliff I perceived an entrance to what must have been a series of enormous

underground caverns, formed long ago by a faulting of a stratum of rock. Bull was nearly halfway to the opening when, as a flash of lightning more brilliant than the others played across the sky, I saw a movement back of the cave's entrance.

Again the flash—and through the torrents of rain I caught a brief glimpse of that which made the blood run cold within me.

Shuffling toward us at a clumsy rapid trot was the most monstrous creature man, in his wildest nightmares, ever saw. It was impossible to see clearly through the heavy downpour of rain, even in the glaring lightning flashes, but during the few chances I had I received the impression of a great, four-footed, short-legged, hairless, slate colored body, behind a massive head and broad toadlike face; truly a remnant of nature's first experiments with mammals, before, in her ruthlessness toward her failures, she threw aside the great reptiles as rulers of the earth.

Well did I know the futility of trying to pierce that massive skull with a rifle ball.

No rifle made in those days could so much as crack it, let alone enter the brain. Yet before Bull got in the way of my sights I did manage to get in one shot, which if it landed, did not even cause the brute to hesitate.

On he charged in the same shuffling, awkward trot, head down, wide jaws open. Bull had stopped and, in the successive flashes of lightning, I could see him standing in the middle of the trail, feet wide apart, toes gripping the ground, water running from the hairy head and shoulders, the very picture of prehistoric brute man.

A streak of lightning showed the monster almost upon him and he stood unmoved—then darkness. At the same time I caught a further movement back in the mouth of the cave and a succeeding flash showed two more of the monsters coming out.

"My God," I thought, "how many more are there? Can this be our world I am on?"

"Am I awake? Who, what, where am I? What chance have I—and poor faithful, storm-racked Bull—what chance has he? How can this all end?"

Another flash and I saw his club raised high and come down with crushing force upon that broad massive head, and again darkness.

How I prayed for another streak of

lightning. Had the blow stopped the animal, or was Bull crushed to earth and that nightmare monster already towering over me?

In the continuous roll and crash of thunder, ears were useless and it seemed ages before the earth was again lighted. Actually it must have been but seconds, for the next picture showed the animal upon his knees stunned—but poor Bull was underneath and his unnatural position and stillness told me that the fight was over for him.

Not until then did I notice a steady rumble above the tumult of the storm, which, as I listened, grew to a roar. I looked up and in the second of light that followed, it seemed as though a whole mountainside were coming down, rushing upon me.

Some boulder, far up the cliffside, loosened from its insecure perch by the torrents of falling water, had started down, gathering headway and accumulating rocks and trees as it came, until an irresistible avalanche tore down. I turned and ran, stumbling, falling, but always going on.

In the continuous crash of falling cliffs, as they were struck by the avalanche, I expected each moment to be my last, but

I must have gone some distance before something struck me on the head and I fell forward on my face, everything turning black.

I do not know how long I lay unconscious but when I finally awoke, the clouds had disappeared and the sun shone warmly.

It all seemed now like an evil dream, yet the lump on my head and the throbbing ache were real enough. I finally arose and turned back. The entrance to the canyon was there, but that was all. The mass of rock and earth, rolling over the edge of the cliffs, had indeed jarred loose those massive blocks of weathered stone and they had crashed down, burying Bull and those great survivors out of the past under thousands of tons of debris and closing the cave with its nightmare inhabitants forever.

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The fire in the grate had burned down to a mass of red coals. I sat silent, knowing that nature, working through the fury of the tempest, had given me a tale which could at no other time, nor in any other way, have been provoked—a tale of her mysterious workings, which would have died untold with my companion. I was thankful.