Tomorrow

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About Zagat:

Arthur Leo Zagat was an American lawyer and writer of pulp fiction and science fiction. Trained in the law, he gave it up to write professionally. Zagat is noted for his collaborations with fellow lawyer Nat Schachner. Zagat wrote about 500 stories that appeared in a variety of pulp magazines including Thrilling Wonder Stories, Argosy and Astounding. His novel, Seven Out of Time, was published by Fantasy Press in 1949.

Also available on Feedbooks for Zagat:

- *Children of Tomorrow* (1939)
- *Seven Out of Time* (1939)
- *The Lanson Screen* (1936)
- *The Great Dome on Mercury* (1932)
- *When the Sleepers Woke* (1932)

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Chapter 1

THE LOST ONES

Dikar was on his knees, his head bowed against the side of his cot, his hands palm to palm. The fragrance of the dried grass with which his mattress was stuffed was in his nostrils, the rabbit fur of his blanket soft and warm against his forehead. Behind him there were two long rows of cots, eleven in each, separated by a wide space. At every cot knelt one of the Bunch, but the only sound was a low drone.

Dikar's own murmur was a part of that drone. "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep. And should I die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take." Dikar used, as all of them did, the prayer they had learned before the terror had come. They had never been taught another.

Dikar stayed on his knees as behind him there was a rustle of lifting bodies, a chatter of voices. One cried out, loud above the others, "Hey, fellers!" Jimlane it was. "Who took my bow and arrows an' didn't bring 'em back?" His changing voice, deep at first, broke into a high squeal. "If I ketch the guy—"

"They're out by the Fire Stone, foolish." That was Tomball. "I seen you leave 'em there yourself. You'll be leavin' your head somewhere one these days, an' forget where. You're sure the prize dumby of the Bunch."

The other Boys laughed, tauntingly. Dikar heard them, and he didn't quite hear them.

He was waiting for a soft hand to stroke his hair, for sweet, low tones to say, "The good Lord bless you, my son, and give you pleasant dreams." He knew they would not come. Hand and voice were vanished in the mists of Long-Ago, curtained from Dikar by the dark Time of Fear before which, as he very dimly recalled, everything had been different from what it was now. But always, when he had said his "now-I-lay-me," he waited for them…

"Quit callin' me a dumby," Jimlane squealed. "You gotta quit it."

"Who's gonna make me, dumby? You?"

Dikar rose to his feet, sighing, the burden of his leadership once more heavy upon him.

From the blaze on the Fire Stone, a wavering light came in through the unglazed, oblong openings in the wall of the long narrow Boys' House. It bathed with red the stalwart, naked bodies; nut-brown skin under which flat muscles moved smoothly.

Tomball was out in the space between the cots, his bulging arms hanging loose at his sides, his adolescent, chunky jaw black-stubbled, his eyes, too closely set, glittering between slitted lids.

Jimlane faced him and was little more than half his size. Puny, his hairless countenance rashed with small pimples, the kid's upper lip trembled but he stood his ground in mid-aisle as the other advanced, slow and threatening.

"Yes, me," Jimlane answered him bravely. "I ain't scared uh you, you big bully."

"You ain't, huh," Tomball grunted, closing the distance between them as Dikar got into motion. "Then I'll teach you to be."

Tomball had hold of Jimlane's wrist and was twisting it, his shadowed lip curling. The smaller lad's face went white with pain. His free hand twisted, batted at his tormentor's hairy belly. Tomball grinned and kept on twisting. His victim bent almost double, agonized, but still there was no whimper from the youngster…

Dikar's fingers closed on Tomball's arm and dug into the hard muscle. "No fair," Dikar said. "Break!"

Tomball loosed Jimlane, jerked free of Dikar's hold and swung around. "Says who?" he growled, a redness in his black, small eyes that was not put there by the light. He was a quarter-head taller than Dikar and broader across the shaggy chest, and his thighs were twice the span of Dikar's. "Oh, it's you!"

"It's me," Dikar said quietly. "And I'm orderin' you to quit pickin' on Jimlane an' on the other little fellows who don't take your guff." Dikar was lean-flanked and lithe-limbed, his hair and his silken beard yellow as the other's was black, his eyes a deep, shining blue.

"There will be no bullyin' here, so long as I'm Boss of the Bunch."

Their code, like their talk, had been preserved unchanged from their young childhood, back before the Days of Fear. Isolated, they had no adult models to copy as they grew to young manhood.

"Yeah?" Tomball said through lips thin and straight beneath their sparse covering of sprouting hairs, and somehow Dikar knew what he was going to say next. It had been coming for a long time and now it was here and Dikar was not altogether sorry.

Tomball said it: "As long as you're Boss." Two gray spots pitted the skin at the corners of his flat nose. "Maybe. But it's time you made room for someone else, Dikar. For me."

By Tomball's increasing unwillingness to obey orders, by his sulking and his endless whisperings with those of the Boys who had to be watched lest they shirk their share of work, Dikar had known the challenge was coming.

He had thought out his answer and was ready with it. "All right," he said, low voiced and very calm. "I'll call a Full Council tomorrow, of the Boys an' the Girls. I'll tell 'em why I think I should keep on being Boss an' you'll tell 'em why you think I should not, an' then the Bunch will decide."

A murmur ran around the ring of Boys that had close-packed about Dikar and Tomball.

"No!" Tomball refused. "It wasn't the Bunch decided you should be Boss in the first place. It was the Old Ones." He paused, and a meaningful grin widened his mouth. "Or so *you* say."

"Maybe," Dikar smiled, surprised he could smile. "Maybe, Tomball, you'd like to ask the Old Ones if they picked me to be Boss when they brought us here and left us. Maybe you'd like to climb down the Drop an' ask 'em whether you or I should be Boss from now on."

The Boys gasped in the ring around them, and Dikar's own skin crawled at the back of his neck.

* * * *

Down, down as far as the Mountain upon which the Bunch lived was high, fell the great Drop that fully circled its base. Straight up and down was the Drop's riven rock, and so barren of foothold that no living thing could hope to scale it.

Below, for a space twice as wide across as the tallest of the trees in the forest that robed the Mountain, were tumbled stones as big as the Boy's

House and bigger. White and angry waters fumed beneath the stones, and beneath stones and waters were the Old Ones.

Dikar himself had seen these things, from the topmost branch of a certain tree that gave a view of them, but not even Dikar had ever gone out from the concealing curtain of the forest to the brink of the Drop, for of all the Must-Nots the Old Ones had left behind, this was the most fearful; *"You must not go out of the woods. You must not go near the edge of the Drop."*

Thinking of all this as he stared into the red hate in Tomball's eyes, Dikar asked, "Do you dare, Tomball, climb down the Drop an' talk to the Old Ones?"

"Smart," Tomball sneered. "You think you're smart, don't you? You want me to go down there an' that way be rid of me. Well, it don't work, see? I'm just as smart as you are."

Dikar spread his hands. "You will not let the Bunch decide between us, an' you will not ask the Old Ones. How, then, do you want this thing settled?"

"How? How have you yourself ordered scraps between the Boys settled? Dikar! I dare you to fight out with me, fists, or sticks or knives even, who's gonna be Boss of the Bunch—you or me."

"No fair," Jimlane cried out at that. "I say it's no fair. Tomball's bigger than Dikar an' heavier."

"No fair," Steveland yelped. Billthomas yelled, "We cry the dare no fair." But others were shouting, "Fight!" Fredalton and Halross and rabbit-faced Carlberger. "They gotta fight it out. It's Dikar's own Rule an' he's gotta stick by it."

Most of the Boys shouted, "Fight!"

"Shut up!" Dikar bellowed. "Shut up, all of you," and at once the yelling stopped. But the ring had shrunk till he could feel their breaths on his back and heard little whimpers in the Boys' throats and read their eyes, shining in the changing light of the Fire. "You dare me fight to decide who'll be Boss," Dikar said to Tomball, taking up the ritual he himself had set. "Do you cry a fight between us two fair?"

A cord in Tomball's short neck twitched. "I cry us equal-matched." (By the Rule, Dikar had a right to appeal to the Bunch from Tomball's lying response.) "If you refuse my dare, Dikar, I will cry you yellow, an' claim the right about which we scrap." Reading the eyes in the ring, Dikar saw that if he appealed and the Bunch said he and Tomball were not equal

matched, he might remain Boss in name, but Boss in truth he would be no longer. "That is the Rule you yourself have made." Tomball abandoned the ritual. "And you gotta stick by it."

Dikar's lips still smiled. "That is the Rule I have made, Tomball. But this over which we scrap is no bird brought down by an unmarked arrow nor question of whose turn it is to bring water from the spring. Who shall be Boss affects not only you an' me, but the whole Bunch. Is it right that it be decided in the way such small scraps are decided?" Dikar pretended to ask that of Tomball, but his eyes asked the question of all the eyes in the crowded circle, and the eyes had already answered him when Tomball spoke again.

"It is right," Tomball voiced the verdict of the eyes. "It is the only way that is right. You gotta fight me or crawl." There was triumph in his voice, and triumph in his swagger. Tomball had weight on his side, and reach and strength, and he knew he was already as good as Boss.

Dikar knew it too, and his heart was heavy, but he smiled still. "All right," he said. "We fight, Tomball. With bare fists."

The Boys hurrahed, the sound like the bay of the dogpack when they've brought down their prey under the trees. Even Steveland and Billthomas hurrahed, and though Jimlane was silent his pale eyes danced with the dancing red light of the Fire.

Dikar listened, thinking what Tomball would do as Boss of the Bunch; whether he would let his pals shirk work, whether he would see that the corn patches were weeded, and the water tank cleaned, and the roofs of the Boys' House and the Girls' House kept patched against the rains and the snows and the cold.

It was worry about these things and others like them that weighted Dikar's heart. He knew how painfully he had learned, in the long years since the Bunch had come to the Mountain, all the many little irksome tasks that must be done for the good of the Bunch; and he remembered that Tomball had always scoffed at them.

For himself Dikar would be happy to be no longer Boss. It meant being lonely—for the Boss must have no pal, lest he be accused of favoring his friend over any other. It meant carrying a heavy freight of care through the day, and lying sleepless through the night, and never knowing rest. It meant assigning the hunters to the chase, whose joys he never knew; to judging the games and never playing them; to punish when Rules were broken but never breaking Rules just for the fun of it and finding the punishment worth it.

"What are we waiting for?" Tomball's growl broke into Dikar's thoughts. "Come on outside an' let's go."

"No," Dikar said. "We fight tomorrow, before the whole Bunch. Tonight, now, we sleep. Already it is Bed-Time, an' long past."

"I want to fight now," Tomball insisted, standing his ground. "I don't want to wait till tomorrow."

The smile faded from Dikar's lips, and he felt tiny muscles knot along the ridge of his jaw, beneath his yellow beard. "Bed-Time is not my Rule, but a Rule of the Old Ones. Perhaps, when you are Boss, Tomball, you will let the Bunch break it, but I am still Boss, an' I do not. To bed, Tomball. To bed, all of you. Right away!"

Dikar's eyes locked with Tomball's, and blue eyes and black held for a long minute and there was no sound in the Boys' House, and no movement at all. Then the black eyes fell, and Tomball muttered, "It's the Old Ones I obey, Dikar, not you," and the ring broke up into Boys hurrying to their cots.

Dikar stood spread-legged, the firelight playing on his tall, well-knit form, his chest moving quietly with his slow breathing, the taut hollow of his belly heaving, his eyes somber as he watched the Boys obey him—perhaps for the last time.

He didn't feel Jimlane's fingers squeeze his. He didn't hear Jimlane's whisper, "I hope you win tomorrow, Dikar. Gee, how I hope you win."

Dikar stood there while the curtains woven from slender withes were dropped over the window-openings, shutting out the red light of the Fire that the Girls tended tonight.

He stood there, unmoving, till the excited whisperings along the walls of the Boys' House had faded, and the scrape of the fur blankets along skin had ended, and there were no more creakings. Then he turned and padded to his own cot, and knelt beside it.

Dikar's lips moved, but the words came. He was sending them out through the wall, past the leaping flames on the great, flat Fire Stone, past the Girls' House into the night-darkened woods.

He was speaking to a Presence there, a Someone he had never seen and never heard, but had always known to be there, because He showed His work in the carpet of the leaves underfoot, in the tall and stately trees, in the wind that rustled through the woods' green roof and the sunlight that shimmered through it.

"I don't care what happens to me tomorrow, Sir," Dikar told Him. "I don't care how much Tomball hurts me, or what he does to me if he wins. It's the Bunch I ask you to take care of. Please, Sir. If Tomball is too strong for me, tomorrow, an' he licks me, please make it all right for him to be Boss. Please make him smart enough to be a good Boss. Please make him be a better Boss for the Bunch than me. They're good kids, Sir, the Boys an' the Girls, an' mostly they obey the Rules the Old Ones left, an' You ought to take care of them. You will take care of them, Sir, won't you?"

Dikar's lips stopped moving, but he stayed on his knees a little while longer, his head bent as if he were listening.

He heard nothing but the soft breathing sounds, and the wind's tree-top whisper, and the insect chorus of the night.

When at last he stirred and climbed into his cot and drew his fur blanket up over him, he was comforted.

Chapter 2

THE NIGHTMARE THAT WAS TRUE

Sleep's deep emptiness claimed Dikar swiftly and wholly, as always it claims one whose weariness is clean and physical.

A voice came into the nothingness, the voice for which Dikar waited each Bed-Time after he'd said his Now-I-lay-me.

… Mom's voice it was that came through the open door of the dark room where Dick Carr had awakened. Something in Mom's voice made Dick afraid: tears, and a trying hard to hide the tears, and a smile that he somehow knew hurt Morn more than the tears.

"Take care of yourself," Mom was saying, "and come back soon."

Who was going away? There was only Mom and Dick in the flat, and Henry who was twelve, four years older than Dick, and who took up more than his half of their bed. Dick pushed out to wake Henry, and his hand found only bunched sheets.

Henry wasn't there!

The next minute Dick heard Henry out in the hall. "Sure, I'll come back soon. Don't you worry. This thing will be over in a jiffy, you'll see. We're just being called out because—because the last big drive is on, an' they need us in the rear lines so's all the real soldiers can be free to do the fightin'. There ain't nothin' to worry about, Mom. They can't lick us. Maybe they've licked the rest uh the world but they can't lick the good old U.S.A. We've won every war we were ever in an' we'll win this one—

"Look Mom, I got to run. The radio said for my unit to be at the Eighth Street Armory at eleven o'clock, an' it's four of, now. Goo'bye, Mom."

There was a kiss, and the flat-door slamming shut, and then there wasn't any sound coming in through the door at all and the flat seemed awful empty.

In through the window rang the clatter of feet running in the street. Dick heard it every night, listening to the big boys who didn't have to go

to bed early and could play in the street after supper. But Dick knew they weren't playing now, because they all ran the one way and after a little while he didn't hear them any more.

Then Dick lay listening to the thunder that had been in the sky so long he usually didn't hear it. The thunder seemed a little louder tonight, and a little nearer, and more scary. The glass in the window kept rattling and that made Dick look at the window and at the square gold-starred flag that hung in the window.

The star was for Pop. It was to show everybody how proud we were that Pop was a hero. Only Dick didn't quite understand why we should be proud when every window in the block had a flag with a gold star, a lot of them even with two or three gold stars.

What was there to be proud about in your pop being a hero when all the other kids' fathers were heroes too, and their big brothers, and a lot of their sisters too, being Red Cross nurses and working in ammunishun plants that was blown up and all?

Dick wished Pop would stop being a hero and come home.

Mom and Henry said Pop wasn't ever going to come home, but Dick didn't believe that. Dick didn't believe Pop would go away from them forever and ever.

Now Henry was gone away too. But he was coming back soon. He had told Mom he was, hadn't he? He wouldn't lie to Mom, would he?

Dick heard the sound of feet again, coming down the street. The feet weren't running now. They were marching. Dick knew what feet sounded like when they were marching. He'd heard them before Pop went away, when you could hardly hear them for the crowds shouting and the bands braying soldier-music.

He'd heard the feet marching when Pop went away; there were no bands then, and no hurrahs, and there were hardly anybody in the street, only in the windows a lot of women, waving handkerchiefs, and then holding them up to their faces.

Yes, Dick had heard a lot of marching feet, but they had never sounded quite like these. The sound of them feet wasn't nearly as loud as the others.

Dick pushed back the covers and got to the window. The tops of the street lights were painted black, and the bottoms were blue; so that the gutter was like blue water, deep and awful, and across the street was only a black and dreadful wall.

Down the street came the marchers.

They were boys like Henry, some of them bigger and some smaller, but none of them very much bigger or very much smaller. Each had a gun slanted across his shoulder. Not one was in uniform. They were dressed in their everyday clothes, caps and jackets and pants. Some of the boys wore longies, most wore knickers or shorts, and a lot were bare-legged down to the socks folded over the tops of their shoes. They were like a bunch of boys marching out of school on a fire-drill.

They were not playing soldiers. They *were* soldiers, real soldiers. The way they marched showed that, straight-backed, not talking or laughing. Their chins were lifted. Their eyes looked far ahead, to the end of the street and the end of the city and farther still, to the dark night out of which came the sound of thunder that never stopped.

Four abreast they marched, four and four and four, as far as Dick Carr could see. And alongside each tenth four marched a man in uniform; a man with one empty sleeve pinned to the breast of his coat: a man whose leg swung stiff so that Dick knew it was not a leg at all: a man whose face was broken so it was ugly and terrible as a Hallowe'en mask.

For a long time the boys and the broken men marched by, to where the thunder rolled and the black sky flickered with a lightning whose flashes Dick Carr could not see…

(And Dikar's dream faded into sleep's nothingness.)

… And into sleep's nothingness came a crash of thunder, shaking the ground. It shook Mom's arms that were tight around Dick Carr, and her body against which Dick's face was pressed. Out of the corner of his eye Dick could see the pin on Mom's black breast. The pin was oblong, and it had a blue border, and on the white inside the border there were two gold stars. There were two on the flag in the window now.

Dick was scared, but he wasn't bawling. He hadn't bawled when the siren waked him up, screaming in through the window, nor when Mom and he had jumped out of bed, all dressed like the radio said they should be. He hadn't bawled when, the siren screaming like a great devil in the black sky, they ran in the dark street, and then stopped running because all the women and kids were carrying them along in a rush faster than Dick could run.

No, Dick hadn't bawled even when he and Mom had fallen down the station steps and the old man had dragged them through the big, stiff curtains into the station.

The station was crowded with women and kids, and it was like an ogre's cave. A couple of electric lights made light enough to see them by, but not enough to keep back the shadows that reached out of the enormous black holes at each end of the station, like black arms pawing out to drag the women and the kids into a night that would never end.

The faces he saw were a queer white, and the eyes were too big; and they were sort of hunched, as if they were waiting for something terrible to pounce on them out of the dark.

It came!

Thunder! Thunder louder than before, thunder so loud that when it stopped Dick couldn't hear himself say, "Don't be scared, Mom. I'll take care of you." But Mom must have heard him, because she squeezed him tighter to her and kissed him on top of his head. Then Dick could hear again. He could hear a woman say, "That must have been one them half-ton bombs. They tell me they can go right down through a ten-story building, and they don't blow up till they hit the cellar, and after they blow up there ain't nothin' left of the building or anyone was in it. Nothin' at all."

The old man, who stood by the brown curtain that hung over where the station steps came in, laughed. His laugh was like the cackle of the hens Dick used to hear when pop used to drive him and Henry and Mom out into the country.

"Yeah," the old man cackled, his eyes kind of wild. "That's right. Ef'n one o' them things hits overhead here they won't even be little pieces of us left ter pick up."

He had on a uniform, but it wasn't like Pop's uniform. It was very faded but you could see it had once been blue. It was ragged and much too big.

There was thunder again, not so loud. "Well," said a woman sitting with a suckling baby in her heavy arms. "I wish one would hit right over us. That would be God's mercy."

"There ain't no God," someone said. "God is dead." Then whoever it was laughed, and Dick's insides cringed from the laughter. It was a woman in the middle of the platform, and she was standing as still as a rock—her mouth didn't move, and the eyes behind the hair that was down all over her face saw nothing at all. "The End of the World is come and it is too late to repent. We are doomed, doomed—"

Thunder again shattering the laughter, but far away now. The woman who sat next to Mom, with a little girl on her lap and another, brown-haired and brown-eyed and pretty, on the floor alongside of her whispered: "Poor thing, I hear tell she escaped from Philadelphia after it was surrendered. She got through the lines somehow. Did you hear how they went through all the houses that was left and dragged out-?"

"Hush," Mom begged. "Hush. The children—"

The little girl's mother laughed quietly. "The children will know all about it soon. Yours too, girls or boys, it don't make no difference to those fiends."

"Not mine," Mom said, very low, and she moved a little to show the other woman what was in her hand. It was a carving knife from their kitchen—

"Attention!" A loud voice shouted out of the place where you used to get your change before the subways stopped running. *"Attention, all shelters!"* Dick looked and he saw there was a radio behind the little hole where your money used to be pushed out. *"The raid is over! The raid is over—"*

"It's over," the old man cackled. "And I'm still alive. Eighty-three years old and not dead yet. I allus said I was born ter be hanged."

"—where you are. Remain where you are. Gas-tests are being made. Remain where you are until gas-tests determine that it is safe to leave. Stand by."

"The Government should of gave us all gas masks," grumbled a fat lady whom Dick knew. "Like they did in England." She was Tom Ball's mother and Tom was behind her, hiding his face in her skirts.

"Much good that did England," the woman with the baby said. "Much good anything did England—"

"Attention!" the radio shouted. *"Attention all shelters. Important. An important announcement is about to be made. Stand by."*

"Mom," Dick asked. "What is an important annou—what the radio said?"

"News, son. Big news."

"Good news, Mom?"

"Maybe. Maybe we've won the battle. Maybe we're driving Them—"

"Attention! Attention, all shelters. The next voice you hear will be that of General Edward Albright, provost-marshal-general for this area."

"That's Ed Albright," the old man cackled. "I remember when he was a buck private along o' me, the both of us down with dysentery at Key West. In the Spanish War that was, an—"

"Hush. Hush, you old fool."

The voice Dick heard now, coming into a quiet so deep he could hear Mom's heart beating in his ear, was thin and tired, awful tired. "Our lines are crumbling. Enemy infantry has already penetrated to the outskirts of the city, south and east. The boys, the young women, who have fought so heroically, are still fighting, but there is no longer any hope. Word has come that the columns that were marching to our aid have been completely wiped out by a phalanx of enemy planes."

Chapter 3

AFTER ARMAGEDDON

The voice stopped, and there wasn't any sound at all. "We are beaten," the voice began again. "But we shall not surrender. We shall not give over the mothers and the children of this city to the horror that has overtaken the other municipalities that have surrendered.

"My people, when our lines finally break, when the enemy hordes swarm in, I shall press a button on the desk before me to set off mines that have been laid underneath the streets. Every soul in the city will perish in that cataclysm; I, and you, and with us some thousands of those who have made this world of ours a hell."

"Good!" yelled the woman with the babe at her breast. "Good!"

Mom's arms were tight around Dick, and she was crying, but her eyes were shining. "We're going to see Henry soon, son, and your father," she whispered. "Isn't that wonderful?"

And then everyone was quiet again, and the tired voice was still talking.

"To die like that will be, I know, no sacrifice to you who have laid fathers and husbands, sons and daughters, on the altar of your country. But there is one more sacrifice I must ask of you, for your country.

"Somehow, in the maneuvering of the past few hours, a gap has opened in the enemy lines, to the north. It is already being closed, but the terrain is such that a small and determined force may be able to keep it open long enough for a few to escape.

"No troops can be moved from their present positions. We have some arms, some ammunition, available, but no one to use them. No one—except you women who hear me. You mothers."

"That's funny," Mrs. Ball sniffed. "We can escape through a hole if we get ourselves killed keepin' the hole open. The man must be crazy."

"If you mothers can keep that gap open long enough, we may be able to take your children out through it, the tots who are all you have left.

"We may—the possibility is infinitesimal—be able to get them away to the hills north of the city. The chances are that they will die on the way. Even if they do not, it is possible that they will be hunted down and exterminated, that Nature, though less cruel than these hordes that have come out of the East and across the continent from the West and up from the South, will finish the work of our foes.

"But there is a million-to-one chance that the children will come through, and it rests with you to choose whether we shall give them that chance.

"I know that it is a bitter choice to make. I know, mothers, that you would rather that your little daughter, your little son, when I press this button on my desk, go with you into the Outer Darkness where there is peace at last.

"I know how dreadful it would be for you to die not knowing what fate awaits your children, and I should not ask you to make the choice save for this one thing.

"This is the dusk of our day, the dusk of democracy, of liberty, of all that has been the America we lived for, and die for. If there is to be any hope of a tomorrow, it must rest in them, in your sons and daughters.

"If they perish, America shall have perished. If through your sacrifice they survive, then, in some tomorrow we cannot foresee, America will live again and democracy, liberty, freedom shall reconquer the green and pleasant fields that tonight lie devastated.

"If you choose to give America this faint hope, if you decide to make this sacrifice, leave your children in charge of the warden of the shelter where you are, and come at once to headquarters to receive your weapons and your orders.

"We have no way of telling what your decision is until and unless enough of you come here to make the attempt we contemplate feasible. We wait for you. Will you come? Mothers, the choice is yours."

The voice stopped, and for a long time nobody moved, nobody said a thing. Then, all of a sudden, all the women were standing up. All the women were kissing their kids, and then they were going toward the curtain that hung over the bottom of the steps from the station.

They were pushing aside the brown curtain. They were going up the steps.

They were going fast, fast, and their faces were shining as Dick once had seen a bride's face shine as she walked, all in white, up the aisle.

They were all gone, and in the station there were only the kids, and the old, old man in the uniform of faded blue that was too big for him.

It seemed darker here in the ogre's cave. The dark reached out from the great black holes at the ends of the platform. A small, cold hand took hold of Dick's hand. "I'm frightened," the little brown-haired girl whimpered.

"Aw," Dick said, squeezing her hand. "There ain't nothin' to be frightened about. I'll take care of you."

"Will you," she asked in a very little voice. "Do you promise?"

"Cross my heart," Dick said, "I'll take care of you, always and always," and somehow he wasn't quite so frightened any more. "What's your name?"

"Mary Lee. What's yours?"

"Dick Carr."

"Dikar," she murmured, and moved close to Dick, and her head dropped sleepily on his shoulder.

He liked the way she said it: "Dikar," so he didn't bother to tell her it was two names. He said "Marilee" in his head, making one name out of her two, and he liked the sound of that…

And a shadow moved across Dick Carr … A shadow moved across Dikar, and he stirred and came fully awake out of his dream, and it seemed to him that someone had passed him, moving silently in the night.

Chapter 4

WE MEET IN THE NIGHT

Dikar lay in his cot, alert. The soughing of the wind came to him, and the shrilling of the insects of the night and the breathing of the sleeping boys. There was no sound at all out of tune with the harmony of the dark forest.

Yet Dikar was troubled with an uneasy sense of something wrong.

He tried to quiet himself, tried to find sleep again, sleep and the dream out of which he had wakened. Dikar was desperate to find his dream again, for he knew it was one he had dreamed many times. But always before it had slipped from him in the instant of wakening and tonight it was still as vivid in his mind as yesterday.

The small boy of the dream, Dick Carr, was himself in the Long-Ago that had been only a mist of gray half-memories as shapeless as the dawn-haze that drifts in the waking forest. The dream had told Dikar something of himself and something of that Long-Ago, and if he could find it again it would tell him more.

But Dikar could not find sleep again, nor the dream, because his eagerness barred the way, and his sense of something wrong with the night. So he sighed and rose from his cot, making no sound.

He groped for his apron of woven leaves and tied it about his waist, and stole to the curtain of twined withes that closed the door, moving it a little to peer out.

The leafy boughs of a great oak made a roof that joined the roofs of the Boys' House and the Girls' House, at the end where they came nearest the woods. Beneath it the Fire was burning low on its Stone, and a little distance away from its heat Dikar saw the two Girls whose task it was tonight to tend the Fire.

The two Girls drowsed, arms about each other's waists. They had undone their braids, and the hair that cloaked one was black as the night, and the hair that cloaked the other was brown and shining. The black

hair swallowed the light, but tiny red glints from the Fire danced merrily on the wavy fall of the brown.

The Girls wore short skirts of plaited grasses, and circlets of woven leaves covered their deepening breasts; but through their cloaks of long hair a shoulder peeped shyly, and a rounded knee, and curve of a thigh.

Now as long as he could recall Dikar had seen the brown bodies of the Girls as they busied themselves with their tasks or tried to outdo the Boys in the Games, and so it was strange that tonight these small glimpses should set a pulse throbbing in his temples, and stir his breast with a not unpleasant pain.

It was to the Girl whose hair was brown that his eyes clung, to her knee and the soft swell of her throat, and the pale oval of her face.

As he looked out at her, he seemed to feel a small hand in his, to hear a very little voice asking, "Will you take care of me? Promise?" For this was Marilee, the little Girl of his dream. Dikar had forgotten his promise, "I'll take care of you always and always," but now he remembered it.

Remembering, he wanted to hold out his arms to Marilee, wanted to call her to him. He almost did, and for fear that he might, looking at her, not longer be able to hold her name in his throat, he tore his eyes from her and turned them to the Fire. Little flames, blue and yellow and red, licked along the sides of a single log that lay across a great heap of orange glowing embers. That log will not last much longer, Dikar thought. I should wake the Girls and tell them to put more on.

Then he thought, no. Let them sleep. I'll do it myself, and with the thought his look went to the pile of logs at the base of the oak.

… To the place where the pile ought to be! There was only one split log there.

Queer, Dikar thought. I sent up enough for the night from where we were cutting them in the woods yesterday—A hand slid past the trunk of the oak, out of the blackness behind! The hand took hold of the one log that was left of the pile and drew it back into the blackness.

A muscle twitched in Dikar's cheek, under his beard.

"Oh," Bessalton exclaimed, the black-haired Girl. "Marilee! We've been sleepin' an' the Fire's almost out. Quick."

They were running to the Fire, and past it to the oak, and they were looking, dismayed at the base of the oak. "There isn't any," Marilee said, her small face puckered in puzzlement. "You must have put on the last."

"I did no such thing," Bessalton denied. "It was you. You were the last one to put wood on. Remember?"

"Yes," Marilee said slowly. "Yes, I was the last. But there was more here then. I'm sure there was."

"Looks like it," the black-haired Girl came back, "Don't it? If I did something like that—"

"Oh what's the use of scrapping about it? We've got to get more up from the place where the Boys were cutting, before the Fire burns out."

"We?"

"I'll do it, Bessalton. I know where they were," Marilee said, and before Dikar could move or cry out, she had gone past the oak and the night had swallowed her. The night out of which a hand had slid to draw away the logs from the base of the oak!

Dikar sprang to his cot, snatched up his bow and quiver of arrows, was back to the door and out through it. Bessalton stared at the Fire; she neither saw nor heard Dikar flitting by. Then the damp, fragrant dark of the woods was about him, and the cool softness of its carpet of leaves was under his noiseless feet, and he was a shadow slipping through the forest.

All the Bunch was taught to move in the woods with the silence of its creatures, but Dikar's ears, trained to keenness, caught the barely audible sound of Marilee's progress ahead of him, the flick of underbrush against her legs.

He did not call to warn her, because he needed to know who had lured her into the forest, and why. This was a thing that never before had been done by one of the Bunch and Dikar must find out why it was being done.

Moonlight filtered through the foliage overhead and flecked the night with silver. A small beast scuttered away from beneath Dikar's feet. Marilee was well away from the Houses now. She was almost to the place where the Boys had been cutting—

"Oh!" he heard her exclaim, and then there was another voice ahead there. "Hello, Marilee." Tomball's voice. "I've been waitin' for you."

Dikar froze, as motionless as the tree trunks about him.

"You've been waitin'—" Marilee was puzzled. "Why? Why should you be here, waitin' for me?"

"I wanted to see you alone."

"But—but why do you want to see me alone?"

"Marilee." Tomball's voice was curiously thick. "Do you like me?"

"Of course I like you. I like all the Boys."

"Not that way. Do you like me—like this?" Dikar heard the sound of flesh, and he sprang into the little clearing ahead, and Tomball's hands had hold of Marilee's arms, and he was pulling her to him.

"Stop!" Dikar said, low-voiced, and somehow there was an arrow hooked in the string of his bow, and the string was tight, and the arrow was pointed at Tomball's back. The bow was long almost as Dikar was tall, and the arrow sharp-pointed with stone. Loosed, it could go clear through a deer—or a Boy. "Let go of her."

Tomball turned on Dikar. Crouched knee-deep in fern there was something about him more animal than Boy. The curling thickness of his lips; the feral look of his black eyes, and the way his neck was tense and corded.

"You—" Tomball grunted. "You again!"

"Me," Dikar said, heavy-tongued with anger. "The Boss. Tomball, you have left your cot before day. You have laid hands on a Girl. For breakin' these Must-Nots you are subject to seven days in the punishment cave, with only water an' dried corn to eat. What's your excuse?"

Tomball licked his lips, and straightened. "Nothin'," he said. "Because you won't give me the punishment."

"Won't I? An' why not?"

"Because I'm not here, that's why. Because I'm in my cot, asleep. Halross will say so at the Council, an' Carlberger."

"They will lie?" Dikar's brow wrinkled. He could not understand. "They will lie, at a Council?"

"Sure, they will. What are you goin to do about it?"

"But Marilee here will say different, an' I."

"Course you will," Tomball grinned. "Why shouldn't you, the Boss of the Bunch an' the Boss of the Girls? Why shouldn't you say that I left my cot, an' that I laid hands on her, when seven days in the punishment cave on water an' dried corn will leave me so weak you'll be sure to lick me, an' stay Boss? Will the Bunch believe you, Dikar, when I remind 'em of that, or will they believe me an' Halross an' Carlberger?"

Dikar felt sick. That any should lie at a Council, that any should talk as he was hearing Tomball talk, was a new and dreadful thing. "Tomball," he cried. "You're foolin'. You wouldn't really say those things."

"Wouldn't I?" Tomball grinned, licking his lips. "Just try me. You're licked, Dikar, an' you know it."

Dikar knew it, and he knew that a terrible thing had come among them, and he could not think how to fight it. He was licked—

"Dikar!" Marilee's fingers touched his arm. "Dikar. Hold him here with your arrow while I run an' call the Bunch. When they see Tomball here in the woods, he an' his pals cannot say that he is in his cot, asleep." She started away.

"Wait!" Tomball's command halted Marilee. "You can call the Bunch, Marilee," he said. "But when they get here I'll tell 'em that Dikar drew his arrow on me an' forced me to come here. An' Halross will say that, wakin' from sleep in his cot next mine, he saw this, an' that Dikar said he would kill him if he did not keep quiet."

Marilee and Dikar stared at Tomball.

"You can't win," Tomball sneered. "I'm too smart for you, see. An' tomorrow you'll find out I'm too strong for you, Dikar. An' here's somethin' else for you to remember, Marilee. When I'm Boss, you better like me the way I want you to like me!"

He laughed, then, and turning his back on Dikar's arrow, and swaggered away; they heard his laugh coming out of the dark woods.

"What did he mean?" Marilee whispered, coming close to Dikar. "He said, 'When I'm Boss.' What did he mean, Dikar?"

Dikar wanted to put his arms around her.

"He meant that we're gunna fight who should be Boss, Marilee. In the mornin, right after Brekfes, you will call a Full Council of the Bunch, an' Tomball an' I will fight who shall be Boss."

Marilee's eyes were upturned to his eyes, her lips were moist and red. "You must win, Dikar," she whispered. "You heard what he said. You *must* win."

The wanting to take her in his arms, the wanting to hold her close to him, was a great ache in Dikar's arms and in his breast, and a weakness in his legs.

"I heard him, Marilee," he said, deep-throated. "I will win."

And then Dikar turned and ran off through the woods, but he looked back over his shoulder at Marilee once and saw the way she stood looking after him, mantled in her brown hair, and he saw the look in her face.

Chapter 5

THE OLD ONES

When Dikar got back to the Boys' House and slipped inside, all was dark there, and quiet, and Tomball was in his cot. Dikar put down his bow and arrow, and took off his apron. He lay down again, and pulled up the blanket of rabbit's fur.

He lay staring up at the black roof of the house, trembling a little. It seemed to him that he saw Tomball's face there, black-stubbled and small-eyed and sneering. And then it was Marilee's face he saw, the red lips moist, the brown eyes holding his, telling something her lips could not. And looking into Marilee's eyes, Dikar's eyes closed and the nothingness of sleep received him … And out of sleep's nothingness formed a sky that flared with blue light, and with red, and was streaked with bright yellow that shimmered and faded; and the sky was filled with rolling, endless thunder. Against that terrible sky loomed monstrous black bulks, huge and ominous, hills that overhung a road and a big truck in which Dick Carr was riding.

In the truck kids were jammed so tight they could not lie down, and just could move a very little. Dick was in a corner so that his back was jammed against the iron sides of the truck, and Marilee was jammed against his side, and her head was on Dick's shoulder, and she slept.

Most of the kids were asleep, in spite of the terrible lights in the sky and the awful thunder. But the old man who was driving the truck wasn't asleep, nor the old woman who sat next to him. Ahead of them on the road were a lot of trucks, and behind them were a lot more trucks, but Dick could tell this only by the noise they made, because none of the trucks had any lights.

Dick knew some of the trucks were loaded high with boxes and boxes of things, but most of them were jammed tight with kids like this one.

"Tom," Dick heard the old woman ask. "Do you think we'll get through?"

"I don't know, Helen," the old man answered. "Only God knows. So you had better pray to God to take us through."

"I can't, Tom. I can't pray any more. I'm all prayed out. God cannot hear our prayers. He has forgotten us, Tom. He has turned His face from us."

"Pray, Helen. Not for you or for me, but for the children in our charge. Pray to God's Son. It was God's Son who once said, 'Suffer ye the little children to come unto Me.'"

"All right, Tom. I'll try."

They didn't say anything more. The truck bounced along, and the red and blue lights flared in the sky, and yellow streaked it, and thunder rolled.

Once the road got steep, climbing up into the sky to what looked like the Jumping-Off Place, and up there against the sky Dick saw things that stuck up out of the top of the black hill. They were just a Bunch of broken poles, black against the blazing sky, but Dick knew that once they had been trees. And to one side there was a chimney sticking up, and Dick knew that was all that was left of a house that the trees used to shade.

Dick started to get sleepy. His eyes closed. The old woman woke him up, yelling something.

"Tom!" she yelled. "Tom! Turn into this side road. Quick!"

Dick's head banged against the truck side, and the kids fell against him, and Marilee woke up, screaming, "Dikar! Dikar!" Dick grabbed hold of her, telling her it was all right, and then the truck wasn't going any longer, and Dick could bear the other trucks going past, somewhere behind.

"You caught me off guard, Helen, and I did it," the old man said. "But why?"

"I don't know, Tom," she answered, talking slow. "I saw the side road ahead and something told me we must turn off into it. It was like a voice in my ear. No. It was more like a voice in my brain."

"You're all worked up, Helen. You're excited." Tom's back moved, and there was a noise of grinding metal. "Watch out behind. I'm backing up to the highway. As soon as you see a clear space you tell me, so that I can back out and get into line again. If we lose the others we won't know where to—" And then there was a white light in the sky a light bright as the sun floating down out of the sky.

And there was a new sound in the sky, like a bee, like a giant bee, and it became a roar. An enormous black shape came down under the light, and there was a rattling noise, like a lot of Boys were running sticks along a lot of picket fences, but louder, and there were screams and crashes and the rattling noise kept on.

The rattling noise cut off, and the roar faded and became a bee-buzz again and the bee-buzz died away in the sky. There were no more crashes, and no more screams. There was only the rolling thunder overhead, that never stopped.

Old Tom got down from his seat, and went away into the dark. The old woman sat very still, and all the kids sat very still, and nobody moved. After awhile the old man was back, and he was climbing up again to the truck driver's seat.

"Well?" Helen asked, so low Dick could hardly hear her.

"None," Tom said. "Not one of them all. We're the only ones left. If we hadn't turned in here—" He didn't finish.

"I guess," Helen said. "I guess God is still listening, up there above the sound of the guns." And then she said, "Where do we go from here?"

"There's a smashed signpost back there, where this road turns off. One of the boards on it reads, 'To Johnson's Quarry.' Do you remember, Helen, my heading a committee once that tried to stop the Johnson Granite Company from cutting down a Mountain? They were defacing the landscape, you recall, and we wanted to preserve the beauties of Nature for posterity."

He laughed. It wasn't pretty, that laugh. "We failed. Recently I heard that they had blasted away almost the entire base of the Mountain, leaving only a narrow ramp by which their trucks could reach their camp at the top. There are probably quarters for the laborers up there, perhaps some supplies. The Mountain, as I remember, is thickly wooded and there's a possibility we may be safely enough concealed there, at least for a time."

"If only we can get through to it."

"We can try. This is a State Park we are in. There are woods almost all the way, and nothing to attract enemy patrols." The truck started running again.

(Dikar's dream blurred.)

The thunder faded out of it, and the dark, and there was sunlight, with green trees, and a wide cleared space with two long houses each side of

it, with cots and a warless house at one end in which there were big stoves, and a lot of tables. There were a Bunch of little kids and there were the two Old Ones.

The Old Ones made the kids work. Helen made the Girls make beds and cook and things like that. Tom made the Boys go down the road up which the truck came that first night and hammer deep holes into the hill of rock on top of which the road climbed up to where the trees were. When Tom thought the holes were deep enough he would put fat white sticks into them that he got out of a big red box they had found where the road started to climb up, and little, silvery things on top of the sticks.

When it would begin to get dark, they would all eat, and then the Old Ones would make the Bunch all sit around and they would tell them things.

They called this a Council. At the first Council the two Old Ones told the Bunch a lot of things they should do, and they should not do, and these were the Rules. The Old Ones said Marilee should be Boss of the Girls, and they said Dick should be Boss of the Boys, and of the whole Bunch.

Every morning one of the Boys would climb up high in a tree and watch all day if anybody would come out of the woods on the other side of the fields down there, where Tom and the Boys were working.

The Boys took turns doing this. One day (and this is where Dikar's dream got clear again) Dikar was sitting on top of the tree. The Boys had got through making the holes yesterday, and they weren't down there any more. They were in the front of the house where they slept, and Tom was teaching them how to make bows and arrows. The Girls were in front of their house and Helen was teaching them how to make baskets out of twigs from the bushes in the woods.

Dick was looking at the black smoke, way far off in the sky, that had been there all the time since they came here. He thought about a new Rule the Old Ones had made at Council last night, a Rule they said was most important of all. "You must not go out of the woods," the Rule said. "You must not go near the edge of the Drop."

Wondering why the Old Ones had made that rule, Dick looked down at the edge of the Drop, and at the place where the road climbed up and over it. His eyes went along the road, and across the fields, and he saw someone come out of the woods across there.

The someone looked very little, way down there, but Dick could see he had a kind of dark-green uniform on, and that his face was yellow. Then another one and another one came out of the woods. These were in green too, but their faces were black, and they had guns. All of a sudden there were a lot of them.

Dick yelled down, "Coo-eee! Coo-eee!" and when Tom looked up at him Dick pointed down at the men in the green uniforms and held up his spread fingers and wagged them to show Tom how many there were.

Tom started running into the woods, and then he came out on the other side of them, where the road came up over the edge of the Drop, and he was running down the road. And then Helen was running after him, and Tom saw her. Tom yelled something and she stopped, but she didn't go back.

Tom had a little hammer in his hand.

Dick heard a crack, like a twig breaking, and he looked down and down, and across the fields, and he saw that the men in green had their guns up to their shoulders, and he saw a little white puff of smoke floating away from one of them. Then he saw white puffs come out of all the guns.

Dick looked back at Tom, and just then Tom fell down, but he didn't stop. He was crawling down the road, and Helen was running down it now, running fast.

A lot of cracks came to Dick's ear, and across the fields the air was full of the little white puffs. On the road Helen caught up with Tom and was lifting him up, and then he was leaning on her and the two of them were running down again.

The men in green started running across the fields, stopping every couple of steps to shoot at Tom and Helen, but the Old Ones got down to the bottom of the road, and around inside of where the road started to climb up out of the fields, and the men in green stopped shooting because they couldn't see them any more, but they kept on running.

Dick could see the Old Ones. They were standing near the rocky wall of the hill the road climbed on, Helen's arm around Tom, and the first of the men in green came around to where he could see them.

Tom lifted his little hammer and hit the rock with it. A cloud of dust hid the Old Ones, and Dick heard a boom, and then there was another boom, and another, and one so loud it filled the whole world. The hill

the road climbed on leaned away from the rest of the Mountain, and it started to fall.

It fell slowly at first, and then faster and faster, down on where the Old Ones were, and on the men in green, and the noise was so loud Dick couldn't hear any noise at all, and the air was so full of dust it was like night.

The whole Mountain shook, and the tree shook so hard Dick had to grab hold of it to keep from being shaken and his hands started to slip, and…

(Dikar woke.)

Chapter 6

SHADOWS AT SUNRISE

Dikar lay in his cot, his eyes still closed, remembering his dream, fitting the things it had shown him into the things he knew, seeing how it explained a lot that had always puzzled him.

It explained the Rule that no fire must ever be made except with wood so dry that it would burn without smoke, and the Rule that no fire must ever burn at night except the big Fire on the Fire Stone, and why the big Fire was set not in the center of the space between the Boys' House and the Girls' House but at one end, where it was hidden from the sky by the spreading leafy top of the giant oak. It explained the Rule that when there was a noise in the sky like a bee buzzing, everyone must run into the Houses or into the woods and stay very still until the sound was gone.

But most of all it explained the Must-Not about going out of the edge of the woods, about going to the edge of the Drop.

They were down there, in the woods across the space of tumbled stones at the bottom of the Drop, beneath which the Old Ones lay. Dressed in green, with black faces and yellow faces. They were in the woods, and in all the far country Dikar could see when he climbed the tall tree, if They saw any of the Bunch come to the top of the Drop and so found out that the Bunch lived on the Mountain, They would come and do to the Bunch what, in his dream, They did to all the kids on that terrible night in the Long-Ago.

Dikar knew now how the Bunch had come to the Mountain, and he knew now that the Bunch could not always stay here on the Mountain. Some day he must lead the Bunch down the Drop, down into the far, green country that stretched away, fold on fold, to meet the sky. And now Dikar was glad that he was Boss of the Bunch, so that he would lead them—

But after this morning he might be no longer Boss!

Dikar remembered that he must fight Tomball over who should be Boss, and he remembered what Tomball had done and what Tomball had said last night, between dream and dream. Dikar threw off his blanket and leaped from his cot, and all down the length of the Boys' House bronzed forms leaped from the cots, and curtains were raised, and the sun streamed in.

But the Boys did not laugh in the sun, and they did not laugh and play jokes on one another as they ran, behind Dikar, out through the door in the wall away from the Girls' House, and through the woods to where a stream leaped from a ledge overhead into a pool below, and ran brawling out of the pool as if eager to reach the edge of the Drop and leap again over it, and smash itself on the tumbled rocks below.

The Boys did not shout as they sprang after Dikar into the icy pool, and none swam near him, and none joined him when he climbed on the stone where the stream came down, and stood there, letting the stream batter him.

But when tingling with the cold of the waters, with the lash of the spray, Dikar ran back through the woods to the Boys' House, little Jimlane came up to run beside him.

"Dikar," Jimlane panted. "Oh, Dikar. They're sayin Tomball is sure to beat you. They're sayin he's too strong for you. An' a lot are sayin it's a good thing, that they're tired of you being Boss, and that when Tomball is Boss we won't have to work all the time, an' we'll have more time for Games, an' for—an' for playin' with the Girls."

Dikar ran along, and from his lithe limbs the drops spattered, shining in the sun, and under his yellow beard his jaw muscles hardened, but he did not speak.

"An' Tomball says he's goin' to fix me when he's Boss," Jimlane whimpered. "An' I'm afraid, Dikar. I'm awful afraid."

Dikar looked down at the little fellow, and he saw the frightened eyes in the pimply face, and the gray, quivering lips.

"Don't worry, kid," he grunted. "Tomball won't win." But Dikar wasn't sure.

Somehow Brekfes was over, and the Bunch was gathered in a circle in the space between the Houses, the Girls on one side and the Boys on the other, and Marilee sat in the Boss's Seat beneath the giant oak, her brown hair still unbraided, mantling her, her small face color-drained. Dikar

stood before her, and Tomball stood by his side, and Marilee was speaking.

"You fight," Marilee's clear, sweet voice said, "over who shall be Boss of the Bunch, an' the Bunch will obey as Boss the one who wins. You fight with bare fists, an' you fight fair. You begin when I say the word, you end when one is beaten." Her brown eyes were on Dikar's, and her eyes told Dikar that he must not be beaten. "That is all."

Dikar turned away and walked toward one end of the cleared space about which the Bunch stood murmuring. The grass was cool under his bare feet, and springy.

Marilee had ordered it carefully raked, so that there would be no branches to trip the fighters, and no small stones to bruise them if they fell. Many twigs and leaves and small stones had been raked out of the grass, and so calm was Dikar that he even noted how the stones had been put in a great circle to mark the bounds of the space in which he must fight, and how just beyond the circle the Boys and Girls stood tight-packed.

Dikar came to the end of the space, and turned, and across the space he saw Tomball turning. Fredalton was whispering something in Tomball's ear, and Tomball nodded, grinning with his thick lips.

"Fight!" Marilee cried out.

Dikar started going back toward Tomball, and Tomball came to meet him, half-crouched, his black-stubbled countenance scowling fiercely, great pads of muscle across his shaggy chest, his hairy belly indrawn.

Dikar moved lithely across the raked grass, his beard shining yellow in the sunlight, his limbs dusted with yellow hair.

All at once Tomball was very close, and Tomball's fist struck Dikar's cheek, and Dikar's cheek knotted with the pain of the blow, and his head rocked.

But Dikar's arm jarred with the blow he had landed on Tomball's chest, and then Dikar no longer felt any pain. He stood breast to breast with his enemy, his fisted arms were clubs that pounded the dark face and the hairy body he hated. There was a salt taste in his mouth that was very pleasant, and there was joy in the blows he gave, and joy even in the blows he received.

He made no effort to guard himself from Tomball's blows, nor did Tomball try to guard himself from Dikar's. They fought like the beasts fight, eager only to hurt, eager only to pound the other to submission.

And over them washed the shouts and the screams of the Bunch.

Into a red haze that was all that was left of his vision, Dikar flung arms so heavy he barely could lift them. Somewhere in the haze was a darker bulk that moved about, and it was at this Dikar flung his arms. Sometimes Dikar found it, more often not, and when he missed the weight of his arms pulled him off balance, and he would start to fall, and somehow not fall.

Sometimes Dikar would be struck, out of the haze, and he would sway on his legs that had no strength in them, and almost go down; but he did not let himself because he must not, though he no longer knew why.

And out of the haze came an endless thunder of shouting.

Dikar pawed once again at the vague bulk that was his enemy, and missed, and swayed, and in that instant the bulk struck him, and Dikar's legs folded, and he sank. His sight cleared, and lurching at him came Tomball's red-bathed body, Tomball's distorted face. Somehow Dikar threw a heavy arm at Tomball and struck him, so that as Dikar settled to the ground Tomball staggered back.

Tomball did not fall, but was steadying. Dikar, sprawled on the grass, knew that when Tomball had steadied he would come in again to finish Dikar, and Dikar did not care—

"Dikar!" he heard a high, clear voice above the endless roar. "No!" *Marilee!* "No, Dikar. No!" And suddenly Dikar cared desperately that Tomball was beating him, and his fallen body trembled as he tried to get up, but he had no strength—

"Oh up, Dikar," a voice squeaked, and Jimlane's pimpled face swam over Dikar, close to Dikar's face, and Jimlane's hand was tugging at Dikar's hand to pull him up. "You can lick him now, Dikar." Dikar came up with the pull of Jimlane's hand, Jimlane's fingers closing Dikar's hand into a fist. And Tomball, grinning through the red that masked him, lurched in to beat Dikar down again.

Dikar lifted a heavy arm and flung it at Tomball, and Dikar's fist fell on Tomball's brow. Tomball crumpled and lay, a still heap on the grass, with Dikar swaying above him, arms hanging by his sides, in his ears a deafening roar.

And out of the roar came Marilee, her cheeks rosy, her eyes alight. "Oh, Dikar."

That was all she said, but Dikar straightened, feeling the strength flow back into him, hearing the hurrays of the Bunch clear in his ears, knowing the hurrays were for him.

Marilee took hold of Dikar's wrist to lift his arm and cry him the winner.

The color fled from her cheeks and from her lips, and the light went from her eyes as they fell to Dikar's still-fisted hand.

Dikar's eyes went down to where Marilee's eyes looked, and they saw what Marilee's eyes saw. In his fist that had pounded Tomball down was clenched a stone, and there was blood on the stone, Tomball's blood.

Dikar knew now why Jimlane had closed that hand into a fist, why Jimlane, tugging him up, had said, "You can lick him now." Jimlane had—

"Dikar," Marilee sobbed. "Oh, Dikar," and then Marilee was lifting Dikar's arm so that all might see what was in Dikar's fist, and the hurrays stopped, and there was a throbbing hush.

Marilee's voice was loud and clear in that terrible hush. "I cry Dikar no fair. I cry Tomball the winner of the fight. I cry Tomball Boss of the Bunch."

Marilee threw Dikar's arm from her, and it was as if she threw Dikar from her, and she turned away. Dikar thought he heard Marilee sob, but she walked away from him head high, back proud. Dikar's mouth moved but no words came out of it, and he knew there was no use of his saying that he had not known the stone was in his fist.

A strange, low sound came from the throats of the Bunch, and it grew louder. A stone struck Dikar on the shoulder, and another, and Dikar saw that all the Bunch was bending to pick up stones, lifting them to throw them at him.

"Run!" Jimlane screamed. "Run, Dikar," and Dikar turned and ran, the stones falling about him; ran, staggering, straight at the hating faces of the Bunch, and the Bunch opened a path for him, and Dikar ran into the woods, the stones spattering about him.

Dikar ran in the dim woods till he fell, and he crawled till he could crawl no longer, and he lay still in the woods, and a sick nothingness took him.

Chapter 7

THE FAR GREEN LAND

Dikar lived in the woods as the beasts live, and as the beasts' hurts heal so did his. He set snares for the rabbits and the birds that were so plentiful in the woods, and cooked them over his little fires. He found sharp-edged stones, and used them as knives to make a bow for himself, twisting and drying the gut of the rabbit for string, and he made arrows, feathering them, and a quiver out of the bark of a birch.

He hunted with his bow and arrows, and he lay long hours on the mossy floor of a clearing near the top of the Mountain, waiting the little creatures of the forest play, looking sometimes into the great, beautiful eyes of the deer peering out at him from the brush, watching the birds chirp on the tree boughs above him.

It was spring and always the small woods creatures played two by two, and the deer went two by two, and the birds; and seeing this, Dikar would think of Marilee.

Yes, Dikar's hurts healed but the ache within him did not heal.

Sometimes Dikar would climb to the topmost branch of a tall tree that stood on the very top of the Mountain. He would stay there till dark, gazing at the far green land that stretched, fold on fold, away to where the sky came down to meet it. He would think of what he had dreamed the last night he was Boss, and of his thought that some day he would lead the Bunch down into that pleasant land, and his heart would be heavy within him.

Spring warmed into summer, and summer deepened.

Every night Dikar would slip through the woods till he came to where the trees were black against the red glow of the Fire, and he could crouch behind the trunk of some tree and look out into the space between the Houses. He dared not do this till just before Bed-Time, when he knew most of the Bunch were in the Houses and there was little danger of one coming upon him.

Dikar would hear the drone of their Now-I-lay-mes, and he would kneel and say his own with them. With his palms together and his eyes closed, it was almost as if he knelt by his own cot in the Boys' House, almost as if he were still one of the Bunch.

After his Now-I-lay-me was said, Dikar would stay there, listening to the talk of the Boys or the Girls whose turn it was to tend the Fire.

What Dikar heard made his heart heavy. As he had feared, Tomball was letting the Bunch break Rule after Rule, was favoring his pals and laying double work on those he did not like, was shirking many of the little things that Dikar knew were needed if the Bunch was to be warm and comfortable and safe when the cold came, and the snow.

One of the Rules Tomball allowed to be broken was the Rule that none must leave his cot after Bed-Time. Dikar would see Girls come out of the Girls' House and slip off into the woods, and he would see Boys do the same. Often they had not yet come back when Dikar tired of watching had gone back to the shelter he had woven for himself out of twigs. One thing troubled Dikar above all others. He never saw Marilee tending the Fire. That she was never one of those who went into the woods after Bed-Time pleased him, but it was strange that her turn never came to tend the Fire.

One night Dikar heard the reason. He'd heard that, the day he was stoned, Marilee had said that she no longer would be Boss of the Girls, that she had made Bessalton Boss in her place on the promise that she would free Marilee of the duty of tending to the Fire, or of any other duty that would take her away from the other Girls. And that this was because Tomball wanted Marilee to go into the woods with him, and Marilee feared him.

Dikar's throat grew thick when he heard this. Growling, he rose from his haunches to stride out into the light of the Fire and call out Tomball to fight him, not with fists, but with bows and arrows, and knives, in a fight to the death. His rage blinding him, Dikar was caught in a bush he did not see, and before he could get free he heard something else from the tongue of Jimlane, who was tending the Fire with Billthomas and had spoken of Marilee and Tomball.

"If Dikar was Boss again, things would be different, but there's no chance of that, because the minute he shows up the Bunch will stone him again, the way Tomball was ordered, and he would not get away again."

Dikar went cold, remembering the way the stones had spattered about him, and was very still in the bush.

"The Bunch wouldn't stone Dikar," Billthomas said, very low and looking about with frightened eyes, "if you spoke out. Tomball's orders or no, they would not stone Dikar if they knew that it wasn't Dikar's fault he fought no fair."

"I dare not tell them." Jimlane's eyes went big in his white face. "You remember how I told you, an' how you said yourself the Bunch would stone me if I told."

"Yes, I remember."

"Well, I couldn't rest, an' I went to Tomball an' told him, an' Tomball beat me till I could hardly walk. That was the time I said I fell into a hole in the woods, you remember. An' after Tomball beat me, he told me that if I said a word to anyone else he would kill me, an' he would kill anyone I told."

"He did!" Now there was fear in Billthomas's eyes, too, and in his face. "You should not have told me, Jimlane—If Tomball finds out I know—" His voice was still low, but there was a scream in it.

"If only," Jimlane sobbed, "Dikar could some way come back and protect me while I told the Bunch—"

"What's the use of all the ifs?" Billthomas broke in. "Tomball's made sure Dikar would be killed before you had a chance to say anythin'. The best thing we can do is forget about Dikar, like everyone else has."

"Yes," Jimlane whispered. "I guess so. Dikar isn't one of the Bunch any more an' he will never be again."

"Never again," Billthomas agreed.

Now indeed Dikar, rigid in the dark, knew that he was disowned by his kind. He must live out his life alone, a wild beast in the woods—

And then, perhaps from Some unseen Presence in the close-crowding dark, perhaps from within Dikar, a thought came to him. He was no longer one of the Bunch, and so he was not bound by the Rules of the Bunch. He was not bound by the Must-Nots that the Bunch must obey. There was something for him to do, and no Rule to say that he must not.

He drifted off into the darkness, silent as a shadow. But there was no sleep for Dikar that night.

All that night, and all the next day, Dikar was busy, cutting down long vines from the trees, testing each one for strength. He plaited the vines, never stopping, never resting, till by nightfall he had made a rope long enough for his need.

When dark came Dikar hung his quiver of arrows over one shoulder, and he hung the great coil of green rope over the other shoulder, and he followed the sound of a stream through the black forest till he came to where the woods ended and there was a little space between the edge of the woods and the edge of the Drop, where the stream leaped out into the night.

Here Dikar paused, and laid the rope down, and passed its end around the great trunk of a tree that grew beside the stream, and fastened the rope with many knots, and pulled on it with all his strength to make certain that the knots would hold.

Dikar bent, then, and lifted the coil of rope that he had made from the vines, and carried it to the edge of the Drop, and let it fall into the dark.

At his feet the rope tautened, and quivered, and below him there was the sound of its unwinding coil thumping against the high, sheer rock of the Drop, and the sound of the stream's waters, falling down and down into sightless blackness. And then the rope at Dikar's feet was no longer quivering, so that he knew the coil was all unwound.

Dikar bent again, and lifted the rope, and moved it over so that it lay in the water where the stream leaped out over the Drop, so that when the sun rose again, all the length of the rope that hung down the Drop would be hidden behind the falling waters.

Then, without pause, Dikar had hold of the rope with his hands, and he was over the edge of the Drop, and the icy waters were rushing about him, were battering him, were fighting to break loose his hold and send him hurtling down into the dizzy dark to smash on the rocks below.

Dikar could not see and he could not breathe, and his hands were slipping on the wet rope. He caught a leg around the rope, and slid. He could breathe again because he hung between the rushing waters and the rocky face of the Drop.

Dikar went down and down, endlessly, down into the black and dizzy darkness, down to where the great stones lay tumbled, and the waters raged between them, and the Old Ones slept.

The sun was high in the sky, but Dikar was concealed in the leafy shadow of a treetop where he lay outstretched along a thick bough. He was peering at a sight that made of his skin an icy, prickling sheath for his body.

The tree was at the other end of the woods through which Dikar had loped after finally crossing the belt of immense stones that lay about the Mountain where the Bunch lived. Some time in the night, sounds ahead, and moving lights, had alarmed him, and he had climbed the tree to wait for what the day would show him.

Dikar, as comfortable there as on his mossy bed in the Mountain forest, had slept longer than he intended. Into his ears had come the sound of marching feet, and he had thought himself back in his dream of the night before his fight with Tomball. But his eyes had opened and the marching feet had still sounded in his ears, and then Dikar had seen those whose feet made the sound.

The tree in which Dikar wakened was at the edge of the woods and the edge of a great, flat field. Not far from the tree wires stretched, one above the other, twice Dikar's height. Fastened to thin poles, the wires ran away on either hand as far as Dikar could see, and the wires were thick with long, sharp thorns that would tear a Boy's flesh to bits.

Beyond this set of wires was another set just like them, as high and as wickedly barbed, and between the two sets of wires stood, far apart, figures out of Dikar's dream.

They were dressed in green like the men in the dream who had run across the fields that now were covered with great stones, shooting at the Old Ones. Like those, their faces and their hands were black, and like those they carried the shiny sticks that Dikar now remembered were called "guns."

But the sound of marching feet came from inside the second fence. A great crowd of people were marching out of some long, low houses that were very much like the Bunch's Houses. Just as Dikar spied them, they stopped marching and stood in a long, straight line in front of the houses.

They were pretty far away, but Dikar could see them, and he could see that they were very thin, and they were dressed in ragged clothes that hung loose on them. He could see that their faces were white, and that their eyes were sunk deep in their heads, and that they were all stooped over as if they were very tired, although it was only early morning.

A voice yelled something, and the white people turned, so that the lines faced Dikar. Dikar saw that the one who had yelled was different. His face was yellow, and he was dressed in green, but there was something different about his green clothes, and he had no gun.

There were other men in green standing around in there. Some of them were black-faced, and some yellow-faced, some had guns and others didn't. One very big one only had green on below his waist, above that he had nothing on. His body was as yellow as his face, and his muscles were bigger than Dikar's muscles, or even Tomball's. He was holding something in one hand. It was long and thin and black. His other hand was against a thick post beside which he stood.

The man in the different green clothes yelled something again, and then Dikar saw two black-faced ones come out of a smaller house to one side, and between them was a white one who was so weak they had to almost carry him. They came to the thick post, and they shoved the white man up against the post with his face to it, and they tied his arms and his legs around it, and then they tore off his clothes above the waist, and stepped away.

The yellow-faced man yelled a lot to the white people. Dikar could hear him, but he couldn't make out what he was saying. When he finished he made a sign with his hand to the big yellow man.

That one lifted the long, thin thing he held, and it looked like a snake. And he lifted it above his head and it straightened out, and then it came down across the back of the white man who was tied to the post. Dikar heard the crack it made, and he saw the red mark across the white man's back.

And the yellow man lifted the thin, snakelike thing again, and brought it down again, and there was another crack, and another red mark across the white man's back.

Dikar was sick, seeing that. And then he wasn't sick. He was mad. He wanted to yell out, "Stop!" but he remembered his dream now, remembered what the guns could do, and he knew that if he yelled the men between the wires would see him and shoot him down.

Crack, Dikar heard, and *crack* again, and now the back of the man tied to the post was all red, all shining red. But Dikar was on his feet, on the tree branch. He was pulling taut the string of his bow, and an arrow was laid across it.

The big yellow lifted his arm again, but when it fell there was no crack. The big yellow was falling, and the feathers of an arrow were sticking out of his back. Just the feathers.

Dikar didn't see any more, because he was swinging through the treetops, a brown and naked Boy flashing through the tops of the trees, fleeing the death from the guns that he recalled were swifter and farther reaching than any arrow.

Whether the men in green ever thought to look for him in the treetops Dikar never knew.

Far away from the place of the thorny wires, Dikar lay on his belly in the tall grass that covered a hill, and he looked down through the grass at a place where two roads crossed.

There stood a pole, high as a tall tree, but there was no bark on it, no branches nor leaves, and because at its top five or six cross-sticks were fastened, and a lot of wires ran from these cross-pieces to other cross-sticks at the top of another pole far away down one of the roads.

Dikar was looking at a rope that hung taut from one of the cross-sticks at the top of the pole. Dikar was looking at that which weighed down the rope and kept it taut.

The thing swung back and forth, back and forth, very slowly in the wind, and rags fluttered about it in the wind, and the rags were no grayer nor dirtier than the thing was. And Dikar saw that the thing once had been a man.

… Dikar came to a place where there was a House all of rock, and it was three or four times as high as the Boys' House, and ten times as long. The window openings in the wall of this House were very high and very wide.

Dikar saw a lot of people in there, and there were white men and women. These were thin and gray and sunken-eyed as those in the place with the wires, and they were pushing around things piled high with heavy loads, and they were so weak they could push the things only slowly. And there were men in green standing around, and these had little guns hanging at their waists, and they held black, snakelike things like the big yellow one held.

And Dikar saw a white woman stumble and fall, and he saw one of the men in green raise the thing he held and bring it down on her, again

and again till, all bloody, she pulled herself up on the thing she had been pushing and started pushing it again.

And the other men in green laughed, but the white people just kept on pushing, all stooped over and weak, their eyes like the eyes of the woman in Dikar's dream who stood in the subway station and said that God was dead.

Dikar went far and wide that day, a brown shadow flitting through the fields and the woods, a silent shadow none saw. Dikar saw many things that day, and the more he saw the heavier his heart grew within him. For Dikar knew that the white-faced men and women were his people and that this green land belonged to them and to him, and that the black men and yellow men were They whom the voice in his dream had said, "have come out of the East to make this world a Hell."

Yes, Dikar saw the Hell they had made … The sky darkened and the night crept out of the woods, and Dikar lay belly down in tall grass of a field near the woods, head buried in his curled arm, thinking. Last night he had known that he would never return to the Mountain where the Bunch lived, and now he knew that he could not stay in this land that had seemed so pleasant when he had gazed at it from his tall tree in the forest.

Neither there nor here was there place for Dikar. Nowhere was there place for him—

Fingers clutched Dikar's arm, bruising fingers. Dikar rolled over but the fingers held, and there was a growl of words Dikar could not understand, and in the sunless dusk Dikar saw green-clothed legs, and a green-clothed breast, and a black, fierce face goggling at him.

Chapter 8

IN THE TOMORROW

Dikar kicked at the black man's legs, and he saw the black man's hand dart to the little gun at his waist. Dikar kicked again, wrenched loose, exploded from the ground.

Dikar's one hand caught the little gun, his other smashed into the black, goggling face. Somehow the black man was on the ground and Dikar was atop him, and Dikar was clutching the black throat with one hand while the other was smashing the little gun down on the black man's head, smashing and smashing and smashing.

When Dikar fled into the night-shrouded woods he left behind him something that had legs and a body and arms, but nothing that was anything like a head.

Deep in the woods, Dikar found a little cave. He crawled into this and lay there a long time, shuddering. But after awhile he stirred, and he became aware that he still held in his hands the little gun, and he sat up, his eyes widening with a sudden thought.

Dikar hid the little gun under a pile of rotting leaves, and he went out of the cave and prowled about till he was certain that no one was anywhere within sound of hearing. Then he went back into the cave with certain things he had picked up and he made a fire, and by the light of the fire Dikar studied the little gun until he had made out how it worked.

Satisfied at last, Dikar put out his fire and buried it with wet earth, and left the cave. That night Dikar traveled far and fast, but careful to leave no tracks by which he might be traced.

Dikar was going back to the Mountain, and he must not leave any trail the men in green might follow.

One more night Dikar stole down through the dark forest to the Houses of the Bunch, but this night it was long after Bed-Time that he did so. This night Dikar did not crouch behind a tree, looking out at the Fire, but crept, noiselessly, along the wall of the Boys' House that was away from the Fire till, under a certain window opening, he came to a stop.

Dikar listened, trembling a bit, and all he could hear was the whisper of wind in the trees, and the shrill of insects in the night, and the soft breathing of the sleeping Boys. Dikar lifted, slowly, slowly, till he stood upright. The ground here was banked against the wall so that, standing, Dikar's belly was level with the bottom of the window.

Slowly, he ran his hand over the sill, and touched the curtain of woven withes; and moved it aside. And then he was peering through, and a fleck of red light was dancing on a sleeping face, and the face was rashed with pimples.

Dikar breathed again. He had remembered right. This was Jimlane.

Dikar got his other hand through the window, and then it was tight over Jimlane's mouth, and Jimlane's scared eyes were staring up at Dikar.

"Listen," Dikar breathed. "Listen to me, Jimlane." Dikar spoke so low that barely he could hear himself, but by the look in Jimlane's eyes he knew that Jimlane heard him and understood.

After awhile Dikar stole away, and for the first time since Tomball had challenged him, Dikar was smiling.

There was green all about Dikar, the dancing, leafy green of the top of the giant oak in which he had spent the rest of that night. He was still smiling when he awoke, but peering through the leaves at the Bunch where they chattered, cleaning up after Brekfes, there was a flutter of some small muscle in the tautness of his belly.

Across the space between the House Dikar spied Marilee talking with Bessalton. Dikar saw how thin Marilee had grown, and how wan her little face, and how her fingers plucked endlessly at her short skirt of plaited grasses, and Dikar's smile faded.

Tomball strode up to the two Girls, black-stubbled as ever. His belly was overlaid with fat, but it was still shaggy with hair, and Tomball's grin was still leering.

Tomball put a hand on Marilee's arm, and Marilee shrank away from him. Under Dikar's yellow beard little muscles knotted to ridge his jaw, and there was a growl in his throat.

Tomball laughed, and then from behind the Boys' House came the loud words of a scrap. "He's mine!" Jimlane's voice piped, and "I say he's mine," squealed the thin voice of Billthomas, and around the corner of the Boys' House the two came, and between them was a half-grown fawn, with a vine wound around its brown neck and trailing, broken, from it.

Jimlane had hold of the fawn's head and Billthomas of its hind legs, and each tugged as if to take it from the other.

"It was caught in my snare," Billthomas piped.

"You lie," Jimlane squealed.

And then Billthomas straightened and cried out. "It's you who lie, Jimlane. I dare you to fight out with me, bare fists, whose snare he was caught in, and whose he shall be."

Tomball's deep-chested laugh came to Dikar's ears, but Jimlane's voice, breaking from squeal to bass and back again to squeal, was answering Billthomas. "You dare me fight whose the fawn shall be?" it said. "Do you cry a fight between us fair?"

And Billthomas: "I cry us equal-matched," and all about were cries of, "Fair. Fair. They're equal-matched!" and the Boys and Girls of the Bunch were running from all over, and crying, "Fight! Let them fight!"

And then the Bunch was crowded in a great circle, and the fawn was tied by the vine about its neck to the Boss's Seat, and Tomball, grinning, was seated in the Boss's Seat, just beneath the oak, and Bessalton was seated beside him, mantled in her black hair, and Jimlane and Billthomas stood before them while Tomball spoke to them.

But Dikar's look was on Marilee where she stood in the crowd, her two long brown braids coming down over her shoulders, her deepening breasts beneath leafy circlets.

Dikar's eyes drank thirstily of Marilee till Tomball was finished speaking and Jimlane and Billthomas were walking slowly, each to their end of the cleared space where they were to fight. Jimlane reached the end of the circle, turned—

The little gun jumped in Dikar's hand, and the fawn, just beneath him dropped, wet-redness streaking the brown neck.

A Girl screamed, high and shrill, and then Dikar was shouting: "Stay where you are or I'll kill each of you as I've killed the fawn. I'll kill the first one that moves."

"Dikar!" Marilee cried, and then she was silent, and all were silent and unmoving, the Boys and the Girls in their jammed circle, Tomball in the Boss's Seat.

"Jimlane," Dikar shouted down into that hush, "tell the Bunch how the stone came into my hand with which I struck Tomball when we fought who should be Boss."

Jimlane, white of face and big of eye, but standing straight, cried out. "I put the stone in Dikar's hand, when he fell at my feet."

"Did I know you put the stone in my hand?" Dikar shouted from the tree.

"You did not know, Dikar. You were blinded with your own blood, an' numbed with Tomball's blows, an' you did not know there was a stone in your hand."

A murmuring ran around the circle, and a growl, and Dikar saw that the Bunch did not quite believe that he had not known he was striking Tomball with a stone though they had agreed to fight bare fist.

"Jimlane," Dikar shouted. "Have you ever told this thing to anyone?"

"I told it to Tomball," Jimlane cried, "and Tomball beat me for saying that you did not know you fought no fair, an' Tomball said that if I spoke to anyone else he would kill me, an' kill the one to whom I spoke of it."

"You lie!" Tomball shouted, starting from seat. "You lie, dumby!" Jimlane screamed with terror of Tomball, but Dikar's shout beat down Jimlane's scream.

"Back!" Dikar shouted. "Back to your seat, Tomball, or you die." And Tomball went pasty white under his black stubble, and he slumped down in his seat.

And Dikar leaped out from the oak bough on which he stood, and came down, spring-legged, in the clear space around which the Bunch was jammed, and held aloft the little gun.

"This is the thing that kills," he shouted. "Without it I cannot kill," and then he flung the little gun from him, flung it hard so that it went up on the roof of the Boys' House and stayed there.

"Now I cannot kill," Dikar shouted. "No more than any of you."

"Stone him," Tomball yelled. "Stone him, Bunch. He is none of us and we will have none of him." And Dikar saw the Bunch stoop to pluck up stones. Spraddle-legged, bronze-skinned in the sun, he saw this, and his heart within him died, but he would not move.

"No!" It was a high, wild cry in his ear, and it came from Marilee, and Marilee's was beside Dikar. "I cry no fair. I cry the Bunch no fair, all of you against this one."

"He fought no fair," Tomball shouted, "and so has no right to call for fairness. Stand aside, Marilee, and let the Bunch stone him."

"I will not stand aside," Marilee answered. "Be you Boss or not, till you tell the Bunch why you said you would kill Jimlane if he told his tale to anyone, an' would kill anyone he told the tale to. If you still thought Dikar had fought no fair, why were you afraid to let the Bunch hear Jimlane's tale and judge for themselves?"

Now Tomball's little eyes seemed to have grown even smaller, and his mouth was drawn very tight.

"She's right," someone yelled. "Why, Tomball, did you not let us judge for ourselves?"

"Jimlane lies," Tomball answered. "He never told me this tale, and I never—"

"It is you who lie," Dikar cut in. "I say you lie, Tomball. I cry you a liar, Tomball, an' I dare you to fight me whether you lie or not. I cry that I fought fair, an' I dare you to fight me whether I fought fair or not. I dare you to fight me who shall be Boss of the Bunch. I cry us equal-matched, an' if you refuse to fight me I will cry you a liar and yellow an' not fit to be Boss of the Bunch an' not fit to be one of the Bunch. Will you fight, Tomball, bare fists?"

There was only one answer Tomball could make. "I fight you bare fists, Dikar. I fight you here an' now."

And then they were fighting, were clubbing at each other with fisted arms, lips drawn back from white teeth, eyes hating. But Dikar was gaunt and hard-bitten, and toughened by the life he had led since he'd been stoned from the Bunch, and Tomball was fat and slow, and short-winded, and so the fight did not last long. Dikar beat Tomball down, laid him rolling at his feet, and there was scarcely a mark on Dikar when he stood above his beaten enemy and heard the shouts of the Bunch.

"Hurray for Dikar. Hurray for the Boss. Hurray and hurray and hurray."

Dikar scarcely heard the hurrays. He was peering about for Marilee and he saw her, and he motioned commandingly for her to come to him. She came to him, her white and slender body shining in the sun, her eyes shining more brightly than the sun, and then she was beside Dikar, and Dikar's arm was around her, and he was holding her close to his side.

Under the thunder of the hurrays, Dikar spoke to Marilee. "Marilee," he said. "In the time I have been alone in the woods I have learned many things—an' one of the things I have learned is that each creature has his mate, the birds an' the small beasts of the woods, an' the deer. I learned that He who made all things meant this to be so, an' meant that we too, each of us, shall have his mate. Marilee, I want you for my mate." He was looking down into her face, and now he waited, with a tightness growing in him that was both keen happiness and fear.

Marilee's red lips spoke. "Oh, Dikar. This that you have learned only now, I have known always. Dikar, always I have wanted you for my mate."

A great joy leaped within Dikar, and he raised his hand and roared, "Shut up! Shut up, all of you." And the hurrays died away, and the Bunch was hushed, and Dikar was talking into that smiling hush.

"There are many things I have to say to you, an' many Rules I shall have to change. All this will come later. Just now I have something to say, but not to you, though I wish all the Bunch to hear it, all the Bunch, an' Another."

Then, in that hush, Dikar turned to the giant oak, and to the forest beyond the oak, and his voice was low, and slow, and awed.

"You Whose voice is the whisper of the wind in the trees, an' the ripple of the water in the streams an' the song of the insects in the night! You, Who watch over us by day, an' by night! You to Whom we say our Now-I-lay-mes at Bed Time! Sir! Look upon me and upon this Girl, an' hear me. In Your sight an' Your hearin' I take this Girl to be my mate, an' none other than this Girl, an' to You an' to her I promise that all my life I will take care of her an' let no harm come near her. I promise that all my life she shall be bone of my bone an' flesh of my flesh, all my life an' all her life, an' always an' always."

"Hear me, Sir!" Marilee's clear, young voice rang out. "I shall be this Boy's mate, an' none other's, an' he shall be bone of my bone, an' flesh of my flesh, always an' always."

And it seemed to Dikar that a soft hand stroked his hair, though it might have been the wind. How could it be the wind, though, that said in his ear, in sweet, low tones, "The Lord bless you, my son, an' the Lord bless my daughter."

Dikar had climbed to the topmost branch of the tallest tree in the forest, and Marilee had climbed there with him. For a long time, clasped in each other's arms, they had gazed out on the green land that stretched, fold on fold, to the sky, while Dikar told Marilee of his dream that was not a dream, and of the terrible things he had seen down there.

"Some day, Marilee," Dikar ended. "I shall lead the Bunch down there. I have to, because down there is the America of which the man spoke, an' this is the he talked about, an' we are the children of yesterday who will reconquer those green and pleasant fields for democracy, and liberty, and freedom."

And all at once there was a light shining on the land down there, a great and golden light that cast no shadows.

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