

The Home Reading Circle

Ugh-lomi and Uya

A Story of the Stone Age By H.G. WELLS. AUTHOR OF 'THE TIME MACHINE' (Copyright, 1897, by H. G. Wells.)

SYNOPSIS. Fifty thousand years ago—in the childhood of the human race—there dwelt a tribe along what is now the river Wau, England, of which the cunning and crafty Uya is the chief. Uya is much attracted by Eudena, one of the fairest maidens of the tribe, but the girl is afraid of him and keeps out of his way. The chief becomes jealous of Ugh-lomi, one of the young men, because Eudena shows a preference for him. One night Uya marks Ugh-lomi with the death-wound, which means that the next day the tribe must hunt the young man down and kill him. The next day Ugh-lomi and Eudena are together, when suddenly they see the whole tribe coming toward them bearing spears and bows. In a flash they understand, and with their hands they start to flee before the pursuers.

PART II. They ran straight—it was their only chance—taking whatever ground came in the way—a spread of stinging nettles, an open glade, a clump of grass out of which a hyena had snarled. Behind them the chase trailed out and scattered, with Uya ever at their heels. Eudena kept the first place, running light and with her breath easy, for Ugh-lomi carried the Fire Stone in his hand.

It told on his pace—not at first, but after a time. His footsteps behind her suddenly grew remote. Glancing over her shoulder as they crossed another open space, Eudena saw that Ugh-lomi was many yards behind her, and Uya close upon him, with another already raised in the air to strike him down. Wau and the others were but just emerging from the shadow of the woods.

Seeing Ugh-lomi in peril, Eudena ran sideways, looking back, threw up her arms and cried aloud, just as the antler flew. And young Ugh-lomi, expecting this and understanding her cry, ducked his head, so that the missile merely struck his scalp lightly, making but a trivial wound, and flew over him. He turned forward, but the quartite Fire Stone in both hands and hurled it straight at Uya's body as he ran loose from the throw. Uya shouted, but could not dodge it. It took him under the ribs, heavy and hot, and he reeled and went down without a cry. Ugh-lomi caught up the antler—one time the line of it tipped with its own blood—and came running on again with a red trickle just coming out of his hair.

Uya rolled over twice, and lay a moment before he got up, and then he did not run fast. The color of his face was changed. Wau overtook him, and then others, and he coughed and labored in his breath. But he kept on.

At last the two fugitives gained the bank of the river, where the stream ran deep and they still had fifty yards in hand of Wau, the foremost pursuer, the man who made the smiting stones. He carried one, a large flint, the shape of an oyster and double the size, chipped to a chisel edge, in either hand.

They sprang down the steep bank into the stream, rushed through the water, swam the deep current in two or three strokes, and came out wading again, dripping and refreshed, to clamber up the further bank. It was undetermined, with a willow growing thickly therefrom, so that it needed clambering. And while Eudena was still among the silvery branches and Ugh-lomi still in the water—for the antler had encumbered him—Wau came up against the sky on the opposite bank and the smiting stone, thrown cunningly, took the side of Eudena's knee. She struggled to the top and fell.

They heard the pursuers shout to one another, and Ugh-lomi, climbing to her knees and moving jerkily to mar Wau's aim, felt the second smiting stone graze his ear, and heard the water splashing below him.

Then it was Ugh-lomi, the stripping, proved himself to have come to man's estate. For running on he found Eudena fell behind, limping, and at that he turned, and, crying savagely and with a face terrible with sweat and trickling blood, ran swiftly past her back to the bank. And Eudena kept on, running steadily still, though she must needs limp at every step, and the pain was already sharp.

So that Wau, rising over the edge and clutching the straight willow branches, saw Ugh-lomi towering over him, frantic against the blue; saw his whole bodyaving round, and the grip of his hands upon the antler. The edge of the antler came sweeping through the air, and he saw no more. The water under the oars whirled and eddied and went crimson six feet down the stream. Uya following, stopped knee-high across the stream, and the man who was swimming turned about.

The other men who trailed after—they were none of them very mighty men (for Uya was more cunning than strong, looking round, and the squirrel), slackened momentarily at the sight of Ugh-lomi standing there above the willows, bloody and terrible, between them and the halting girl, with the huge antler waving in his hand. It seemed as though he had gone into the

water a youth, and come out of it a man full grown. He knew what there was behind him. A broad stretch of grass, and then a thicket, and in that Eudena could hide. That was clear in his mind, though his thinking powers were too feeble to see what should happen thereafter. Uya stood knee-deep, undecided and un-armed. His heavy mouth hung open, showing his canine teeth, and he panted heavily. His side was flushed and bruised under the hair. The other man beside him carried a sharpened stick. The rest of the hunters came up one by one to the top of the bank, hairy, long-armed men clutching flints and sticks.

Several days more than there was any counting in those days, five days, it may be, or six, did Ugh-lomi and Eudena stay on the shelf in the gorge of the river, and they lost all fear of men.



HE WENT TO AND FRO SWINGING IT.

Two ran off along the bank down stream, and then clambered down to the water, where Wau had come to the surface struggling weakly. They gibbered at him without any sane attempt to help, and presently he went under again. Two others threatened Ugh-lomi from the bank. Ugh-lomi glanced over his shoulder and found the others already vanished into the thicket. He would perhaps have waited for Uya, but Uya preferred to spar in the water below him until the others were beside him. Human nature in those days, in all serious fighting, were the tactics of the pincer. Prey that turned at bay, they gathered around and rushed. Ugh-lomi felt the rush coming, and hurling the antler at Uya, turned about and fled.

When he halted to look back on the shadow of the thicket, he found only three of his pursuers had followed him across the river, and they were going back again. Uya, with a bleeding mouth, was on the further side of the stream again, but lower down, and he held his hand to his side. The others were in the river dragging something to shore. For a time at least the chase was intermitted.

Ugh-lomi stood watching for a space, and snarled at the sight of Uya. Then he turned and plunged into the thicket. In a minute, Eudena came hastening to join him, and they went on hand in hand. He dimly perceived the pain she suffered from the cut and bruised knee, and chose the easier ways. But they went on all that day, mile after mile, through wood and thicket, until at last they came to the chalk land, open grass with rare woods of beach, and the birch growing near water, and they saw the Wealden mountains nearer, and groups of horses grazing in the distance.

They had had scarcely any food; it was not the time of year for berries, and they had no time to go aside to share or scavenge. They ran on in hungry, weary silence, gnawing at twigs and leaves. But over the surface of the cliffs were a multitude of snails, and in a bush were the freshly-laid eggs of a little bird, and then Ugh-lomi threw at and killed a squirrel in a beech tree, so that at last they fed well. Ugh-lomi watched during the night, his chin on his knees; and he heard young foxes crying hard by, and the noise of mammoths down the gorge, and the hyenas yelling and laughing far away. It was chilly, but they dared not light a fire. Whenever he dozed, his spirit went abroad, and straightway met with the spirit of Uya, and they fought. Eudena, too, dreamt evil things of Uya, so that they both awoke with the fear of him in their hearts, and by the light of the dawn they saw a woolly rhinoceros go blundering down the valley.

During the day Ugh-lomi found great flints sticking out of the cliff face, greater than any he had seen, and he dragged some to the ledge and began chipping so as to be armed against Uya when he came again. And at one he laughed heartily, and Eudena laughed, and they threw it about in derision. It had a hole in it. They stuck their fingers through it. It was so funny indeed. Then they peeped at one another through it. Afterwards, Ugh-lomi got himself a stick, and thrusting by chance at this foolish flint, the stick went in and stuck there. He had rammed it in too tightly to withdraw it. That was still stranger—scarcely funny, terrible almost, and for a time Ugh-lomi did not greatly care to touch the thing. It was as if the flint had bit and held with its teeth. But then he got familiar with the odd combination. He swung it

about, and perceived dimly that the stick with the heavy stone on the end struck a better blow than anything he knew. He went to and fro swinging it, and striking with it; but later he tired of it and threw it aside. In the afternoon he went up over the brow of the white cliff, and lay watching by a rabbit warren until the rabbits came out to play. There were no men thereabouts, and the rabbits were heedless. He threw a smiting stone he had made and got a kill. That night they made a fire from flint sparks and bracken fronds, and talked and caressed by it. And Uya's spirit came again in sleep, and suddenly while Ugh-lomi was trying to fight vainly, the foolish flint on the stick came into his hand, and he struck Uya with it, and behold! it killed him. But afterward came other dreams of Uya—for spirits take a lot of killing, and he had to be killed a second time after that the stone would not keep on the stick. He awoke tired and rather gloomy, and was sulky all the forenoon, in spite of Eudena's kindness, and instead of hunting he sat chipping a sharp edge to the singular flint and looking strangely at her. Then he found the perforated flint on the stick with strips of rabbit skin. And afterwards he walked up and down the ledge, striking with it, and mutter to himself, and thinking of Uya. It felt very fine and heavy in the hand.

They had feasted. Uya went too far. Ugh-lomi awoke, scowling under his heavy brows, and he took his ax, and extending his hand towards Eudena he bid her wait for him upon the ledge. Then he clambered down the white delicately, glanced up once from the foot of it and flourished his ax, and without looking back again went striding along the river bank until the overhanging cliff at the bend hid him.

Two days and nights did Eudena sit alone by the fire in the ledge waiting, and in the night the beasts howled over the cliffs and down the valley, and on the cliff over against her the hunched hyenas prowled black against the sky. But no evil thing came near her save fear. Once, far away, she heard the roaring of a lion, following the horses as they came northward over the grass lands with the spring. All that time she waited—the waiting that is pain.

And the third day Ugh-lomi came back up the river. The plumes of a raven were in his hair. The ax was red-stained, and had long, dark hairs upon it, and he carried the necklace that had marked the favorite of Uya in his hand. He walked in the soft places, giving no heed to his trail. Save a raw cut below his jaw there was not a wound upon him.

"Uya!" cried Ugh-lomi, exultant, and Eudena saw it was well. He put the necklace on Eudena, and they ate and drank together. And after eating he began to rehearse the whole story from the beginning, when Uya had cast his eyes on Eudena, and Uya and Ugh-lomi, fighting in the forest, had been chased by the bear, citing out his scanty words with abundant pantomime, rising to his feet and whirling the stone ax round when it came to the fighting. The last fight was a mighty one, stamping and shouting, and once a blow at the fire that sent a torrent of sparks up into the night, and Eudena sat in the light of the fire, gazing on him, her face flushed and her eyes shining, and the necklace Uya had made about her neck. It was a splendid time, and the stars that look down on us looked down upon her, our ancestor—who has been dead now these fifty thousand years.

(The End.)

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