

Walk Like a Mountain

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Some of Wellman's stories are probably better classified as horror, but many of them, particularly the best of the "Silver John" stories, also function well as fantasy. In the one that follows, for instance, John encounters a creature right out of a fairy tale (or perhaps out of the Bible, which tells us that "there were giants in the earth in those days"), a genuine Giant, still abroad in the twentieth-century world—where he discovers that there's no man so big that he can't run up against a problem that's bigger still. . .

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MANLY WADE WELLMAN

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* * * *

Once at Sky Notch, I never grudged the trouble getting there. It was so purely pretty. I was glad outlanders weren't apt to crowd in and spoil all.

The Notch cut through a tall peak that stood against a higher cliff. Steep brushy faces each side, and a falls at the back that made a trickly branch, with five pole cabins along the waterside. Corn patches, a few pigs in pens, chickens running round, a cow tied up one place. It wondered me how they ever got a cow up there. Laurels grew, and viney climbers, and mountain flowers in bunches and sprawls. The water made a happy noise. No-body moved in the yards or at the doors, so I stopped by a tree and hollered the first house.

“Hello the house!” I called. “Hello to the man of the house and all inside!”

A plank door opened about an inch. “Hello to yourself,” a gritty voice replied me. “Who’s that out there with the guitar?”

I moved from under the tree. “My name’s John. Does Mr. Lane Jarrett live up here? Got word for him, from his old place on Drowning Creek.”

The door opened wider, and there stood a skimpy little man with gray whiskers. “That’s funny,” he said.

The funnyness I didn’t see. I’d known Mr. Lane Jarrett years back, before he and his daughter Page moved to Sky Notch. When his uncle Jeb died and heired him some money, I’d agreed to

carry it to Sky Notch, and, gentlemen, it was a long, weary way getting there.

First a bus, up and down and through mountains, stop at every pig trough for passengers. I got off at Charlie's Jump—who Charlie was, nor why or when he jumped, nobody there can rightly say. Climbed a high ridge, got down the far side, then a twenty-devil way along a deep valley river. Up another height, another beyond that. Then it was night, and nobody would want to climb the steep face above, because it was grown up with the kind of trees that the dark melts in around you. I made a fire and took my supper rations from my pocket. Woke at dawn and climbed up and up and up, and here I was.

“Funny, about Lane Jarrett,” gritted the little man out. “Sure you ain’t come about that business?”

I looked up the walls of the Notch. Their tops were toothy rocks, the way you’d think those walls were two jaws, near about to close on what they’d caught inside them. Right then the Notch didn’t look so pretty.

“Can’t say, sir,” I told him, “till I know what business you mean.”

“Rafe Enoch!” he boomed out the name, like firing two barrels of a gun.

“That’s what I mean!” Then he appeared to remember his manners, and came out, puny in his jeans and no shoes on his feet. “I’m Oakman Dillon,” he named himself. “John—that’s your name,

huh? Why you got that guitar?"

"I pick it some," I replied him. "I sing." Tweaking the silver strings, I sang a few lines:

*By the shore of Lonesome River
Where the waters ebb and flow,
Where the wild red rose is budding
And the pleasant breezes blow,
It was there I spied the lady
That forever I adore,
As she was a-lonesome walking
By the Lonesome River shore...*

"Rafe Enoch!" he grit-grated out again. "Carried off Miss Page Jarrett the way you'd think she was a banty chicken!"

Slap, I quieted the strings with my palm. "Mr. Lane's little daughter Page

was stolen away?”

He sat down on the door-log. “She ain’t suchy little daughter. She’s six foot maybe three inches—taller’n you, even. Best-looking big woman I ever see, brown hair like a wagonful of home-cured tobacco, eyes green and bright as a fresh-squoze grape pulp.”

“Fact?” I said, thinking Page must have changed a right much from the long-leggy little girl I’d known, must have grown tall like her daddy and her dead mammy, only taller. “Is this Rafe Enoch so big, a girl like that is right for him?”

“She’s puny for him. He’s near about eight foot tall, best I judge.” Oakman Dillon’s gray whiskers stuck out like a mad cat’s. “He just grabbed her last

evening, where she walked near the fall, and up them rocks he went like a possum up a jack oak.”

I sat down on a stump. “Mr. Lane’s a friend of mine. How can I help?”

“Nobody can’t help, John. It’s right hard to think you ain’t knowing all this stuff. Don’t many strangers come up here. Ain’t room for many to live in the Notch.”

“Five homes,” I counted them with my eyes.

“Six. Rafe Enoch lives up at the top.” He jerked his head toward the falls.

“Been there a long spell—years, I reckon, since when he run off from somewhere. Heard tell he broke a circus man’s neck for offering him a job with a

show. He built up top the falls, and he used to get along with us. Thanked us kindly for a mess of beans or roasting ears. Lately, he's been mean-talking."

"Nobody mean-talked him back? Five houses in the Notch mean five grown men—couldn't they handle one giant?"

"Giant size ain't all Rafe Enoch's got." Again the whiskers bristled up. "Why!

He's got powers, like he can make rain fall—"

"No," I put in quick. "Can't even science men do that for sure."

"I ain't studying science men. Rafe Enoch says for rain to fall, down it comes, any hour day or night he speaks. Could drown us out of this Notch if he

had the mind.”

“And he carried off Page Jarrett,” I went back to what he’d said.

“That’s the whole truth, John. Up he went with her in the evening, daring us to follow him.”

I asked, “Where are the other Notch folks?”

“Up yonder by the falls. Since dawn we’ve been talking Lane Jarrett back from climbing up and getting himself neck-twisted. I came to feed my pigs, now I’m heading back.”

“I’ll go with you,” I said, and since he didn’t deny me I went.

The falls dropped down a height as straight up as a chimney, and a many times taller, and their water boiled off

down the branch. Either side of the falls, the big boulder rocks piled on top of each other like stones in an almighty big wall. Looking up, I saw clouds boiling in the sky, dark and heavy and wet-looking, and I remembered what Oakman Dillon had said about big Rafe Enoch's rain-making.

A bunch of folks were there, and I made out Mr. Lane Jarrett, bald on top and bigger than the rest. I touched his arm, and he turned.

“John! Ain't seen you a way-back time. Let me make you known to these here folks.”

He called them their first names—Yoot, Ollie, Bill, Duff, Miss Lulie, Miss Sara May and so on. I said I had a

pocketful of money for him, but he just nodded and wanted to know did I know what was going on.

“Looky up against them clouds, John. That pointy rock. My girl Page is on it.”

The rock stuck out like a spur on a rooster’s leg. Somebody was scrouched down on it, with the clouds getting blacker above, and a long, long drop below.

“I see her blue dress,” allowed Mr. Oakman, squinting up. “How long she been there, Lane?”

“I spotted her at sunup,” said Mr. Lane. “She must have got away from Rafe Enoch and crope out there during the night. I’m going to climb.”

He started to shinny up a rock, up

clear of the brush around us. And, Lord, the laugh that came down on us! Like a big splash of water, it was clear and strong, and like water it made us shiver. Mr. Oakman caught onto Mr. Lane's ankle and dragged him down.

"Ain't a God's thing ary man or woman can do, with him waiting up there,"

Mr. Oakman argued.

"But he's got Page," said Mr. Lane busting loose again. I grabbed his elbow.

"Let me," I said.

"You, John? You're a stranger, you ain't got no pick in this."

"This big Rafe Enoch would know if it was you or Mr. Oakman or one of

these others climbing, he might fling down a rock or the like. But I'm strange to him. I might wonder him, and he might let me climb all the way up."

"Then?" Mr. Lane said, frowning.

"Once up, I might could do something."

"Leave him try it," said Mr. Oakman to that.

"Yes," said one of the lady-folks.

I slung my guitar behind my shoulder and took to the rocks. No peep of noise from anywhere for maybe a minute of climbing. I got on about the third or fourth rock from the bottom, and that clear, sky-ripping laugh came from over my head.

"Name yourself!" roared down the

voice that had laughed.

I looked up. How high was the top I can't say, but I made out a head and shoulders looking down, and knew they were another sight bigger head and shoulders than ever I'd seen on any mortal man.

"Name yourself!" he yelled again, and in the black clouds a lightning flash wiggled, like a snake caught fire.

"John!" I bawled back.

"What you aiming to do, John?"

Another crack of lightning, that for a second seemed to peel off the clouds right and left. I looked this way and that. Nowhere to get out of the way should lightning strike, or a rock or anything. On notion, I pulled my guitar to me and

picked and sang:

*Went to the rock to hide my face,
The rock cried out, "No hiding
place!" ...*

Gentlemen, the laugh was like thunder after the lightning.

"Better climb quick, John!" he hollered me. "I'm a-waiting on you up here!"

I swarmed and swarved and scrabbled my way up, not looking down. Over my head that rock-spur got bigger, I figured it for maybe twelve-fifteen feet long, and on it I made out Page Jarrett in her blue dress. Mr. Oakman was right, she was purely big and she was purely good-looking. She hung to the pointy rock with both her long hands.

“Page,” I said to her, with what breath I had left, and she stared with her green eyes and gave me an inch of smile. She looked to have a right much of her daddy’s natural sand in her craw.

“John,” boomed the thunder-voice, close over me now. “I asked you a while back, why you coming up?”

“Just to see how you make the rain fall,” I said, under the overhang of the ledge. “Help me up.”

Down came a bare brown honey-hairy arm, and a hand the size of a scoop shovel. It got my wrist and snatched me away like a turnip coming out of a patch, and I landed my feet on broad flat stones.

Below me yawned up those rock-

toothed tops of the Notch's jaws. Inside them the brush and trees looked mossy and puny. The cabins were like baskets, the pigs and the cow like play-toys, and the branch looked to run so narrow you might bridge it with your shoe. Shadow fell on the Notch from the fattening dark clouds.

Then I looked at Rafe Enoch. He stood over me like a sycamore tree over a wood shed. He was the almightiest big thing I'd ever seen on two legs.

Eight foot high, Oakman Dillon had said truly, and he was thick-made in keeping. Shoulders wide enough to fill a barn door, and legs like tree trunks with fringe-sided buckskin pants on them, and his big feet wore moccasin shoes of

bear's hide with the fur still on. His shirt, sewed to-gether of pelts—fox, coon, the like of that—hadn't any sleeves, and hung open from that big chest of his that was like a cotton bale. Topping all, his face put you in mind of the full moon with a yellow beard, but healthy-looking brown, not pale like the moon. Big and dark eyes, and through the yellow beard his teeth grinned like big white sugar lumps.

“Maybe I ought to charge you to look at me,” he said.

I remembered how he'd struck a man dead for wanting him in a show, and I looked elsewhere. First, naturally, at Page Jarrett on the rock spur. The wind from the clouds waved her brown hair

like a flag, and fluttered her blue skirt around her drawn-up feet. Then I turned and looked at the broad space above the falls.

From there I could see there was a right much of higher country, and just where I stood with Rafe Enoch was a big shelf, like a lap, with slopes behind it. In the middle of the flat space showed a pond of water, run-ning out past us to make the falls. On its edge stood Rafe Enoch's house, built wigwam-style of big old logs leaned together and chinked between with clay over twigs. No trees to amount to anything on the shelf—just one behind the wigwam-house, and to its branches hung joints that looked like smoke meat.

“You hadn’t played that guitar so clever, maybe I mightn’t have saved you,”

said Rafe Enoch’s thunder voice.

“Saved?” I repeated him.

“Look.” His big club of a finger pointed to the falls, then to those down-hugged clouds. “When they get together, what happens?”

Just at the ledge lip, where the falls went over, stones looked halfway washed out. A big shove of water would take them out the other half, and the whole thing pour down on the Notch.

“Why you doing this to the folks?” I asked.

He shook his head. “John, this is one rain I never called for.” He put one big

pumpkin-sized fist into the palm of his other hand. "I can call for rain, sure, but some of it comes without me. I can't start it or either stop it, I just know it's coming. I've known about this for days. It'll drown out Sky Notch like a rat nest."

"Why didn't you try to tell them?"

"I tried to tell her." His eyes cut around to where Page Jarrett hung to the pointy rock, and his stool-leg fingers raked his yellow beard. "She was walking off by herself, alone. I know how it feels to be alone. But when I told her, she called me a liar. I brought her up here to save her, and she cried and fought me." A grin.

"She fought me better than any living

human I know. But she can't fight me hard enough."

"Can't you do anything about the storm?" I asked him to tell.

"Can do this." He snapped his big fingers, and lightning crawled through the clouds over us. It made me turtle my neck inside my shirt collar. Rafe Enoch never twitched his eyebrow.

"Rafe," I said, "you might could persuade the folks. They're not your size, but they're human like you."

"Them?" He roared his laugh. "They're not like me, nor you aren't like me, either, though you're longer-made than common. Page yonder, she looks to have some of the old Genesis giant blood in her. That's why I saved her

alive.”

“Genesis giant blood,” I repeated him, remembering the Book, sixth chapter of Genesis. ““There were giants in the earth in those days.”“

“That’s the whole truth,” said Rafe. “When the sons of God took wives of the daughters of men—their children were the mighty men of old, the men of renown. That’s not exact quote, but it’s near enough.”

He sat down on a rock, near about as tall sitting as I was standing. “Ary giant knows he was born from the sons of the gods,” he said. “My name tells it, John.”

I nodded, figuring it. “Rafe—Raphah, the giant whose son was Goliath, Enoch-”

“Or Anak,” he put in. “Remember the sons of Anak, and them scared-out spies sent into Canaan? They was grasshoppers in the sight of the sons of Anak, in more ways than just size, John.” He sniffed. “They got scared back into the wilderness for forty years. And Goliath!”

“David killed him,” I dared remind Rafe.

“By a trick. A slingshot stone. Else he’d not lasted any longer than that.”

A finger-snap, and lightning winged over us like a hawk over a chicken run. I tried not to scrouch down.

“What use to fight little old human men,” he said, “when you got the sons of the gods in your blood?”

I allowed he minded me of Strap Buckner with that talk.

“Who’s Strap Buckner? Why do I mind you of him?”

I picked the guitar, I sang the song:

*Strap Buckner lie was called, he was
more than eight foot kill, And he
walked like a mountain among men.*

*He was good and, he was great, and
the glorious Lone Star State Will never
look upon his like again.*

“Strap Buckner had the strength of ten lions,” I said, “and he used it as ten lions. Scorned to fight ordinary folks, so he challenged old Satan himself, skin for skin, on the banks of the Brazos, and if Satan hadn’t fought foul-”

“Another dirty fighter!” Rafe got up

from where he sat, quick as quick for all his size. "Foul or not, Satan couldn't whup me!"

"Might be he couldn't," I judged, looking at Rafe. "But anyway, the Notch folks never hurt you. Used to give you stuff to eat."

"Don't need their stuff to eat," he said, the way you'd think that was the only argument. He waved his hand past his wigwam-house. "Down yonder is a bunch of hollows, where ain't no human man been, except maybe once the Indians. I hoe some corn there, some potatoes. I pick wild salad greens here and yonder. I kill me a deer, a bear, a wild hog—ain't no human man got nerve to face them big wild hogs, but I chunk

them with a rock or I fling a sharp ash sapling, and what I fling at I bring down. In the pond here I spear me fish. Don't need their stuff to eat, I tell you."

"Need it or not, why let them drown out?"

His face turned dark, the way you'd think smoke drifted over it.

"I can't abide little folks' little eyes looking at me, wondering themselves about me, thinking I'm not rightly natural."

He waited for what I had to say, and it took nerve to say it.

"But you're not a natural man, Rafe. You've allowed that yourself, you say you come from different blood. Paul Bunyan thought the same thing."

He grinned his big sugar-lump teeth at me. Then: "Page Jarrett," he called,

"better come off that rock before the rain makes it slippery and you fall off. I'll help you—"

"You stay where you are," she called back. "Let John help."

I went to the edge of that long drop down. The wind blew from some place—maybe below, maybe above or behind or before. I reached out my guitar, and Page Jarrett crawled to where she could lay hold, and that way I helped her to the solid standing. She stood beside me, inches taller, and she put a burning mean look on Rafe Enoch. He made out he didn't notice.

"Paul Bunyan," he said, after what I'd

been saying. "I've heard tell his name—champion logger in the northern states, wasn't he?"

"Champion logger," I said. "Bigger than you, I reckon——"

"Not bigger!" thundered Rafe Enoch.

"Well, as big."

"Know ary song about him?"

"Can't say there's been one made. Rafe, you say you despise to be looked on by folks."

"Just by little folks, John. Page Jarrett can look on me if she relishes to."

Quick she looked off, and drew herself up proud. Right then she appeared to be taller than what Mr. Oakman Dillon had reckoned her, and a beauty-looking thing she was, you hear

what I say, gentlemen. I cut my eyes up to the clouds; they hung down over us, loose and close, like the roof of a tent. I could feel the closeness around me, the way you feel water when you've waded up to the line of your mouth.

"How soon does the rain start falling?" I asked Rafe.

"Can fall any time now," said Rafe, pulling a grass-stalk to bite in his big teeth. "Page's safe off that rock point, it don't differ me a shuck when that rain falls."

"But when?" I asked again. "You know."

"Sure I know." He walked toward the pond, and me with him. I felt Page Jarrett's grape-green eyes digging our

backs. The pond water was shiny tarry black from reflecting the clouds. “Sure,” he said, “I know a right much. You natural human folks, you know so pitiful little I’m sorry for you.”

“Why not teach us?” I wondered him, and he snorted like a big mean horse.

“Ain’t the way it’s reckoned to be, John. Giants are figured stupid. Remember the tales? Your name’s John—do you call to mind a tale about a man named Jack, long back in time?”

“Jack the Giant Killer,” I nodded. “He trapped a giant in a hole—”

“Cormoran,” said Rafe. “Jack dug a pit in front of his door. And Blunderbore he tricked into stabbing himself open wida a knife. But how did them things

happen? He blew a trumpet to tole Cormoran out, and he sat and ate at Blunderbore's table like a friend before tricking him to death." A louder snort.

"More foul fighting, John. Did you come up here to be Jack the Giant Killer? Got some dirty tricks? If that's how it is, you done drove your ducks to the wrong puddle."

"More than a puddle here," I said, looking at the clouds and then across the pond. "See yonder, Rafe, where the water edge comes above that little slanty slope. If it was open, enough water could run off to keep the Notch from flooding."

"Could be done," he nodded his big head, "if you had machinery to pull the

rocks out. But they're bigger than them fall rocks, they ain't half washed away to begin with. And there ain't no machinery, so just forget it. The Notch washes out, with most of the folks living in it—all of them, if the devil bids high enough. Sing me a song.”

I swept the strings with my thumb. “Thinking about John Henry,” I said, half to myself. “He wouldn’t need a machine to open up a drain-off place yonder.”

“How’d he do it?” asked Rafe.

“He had a hammer twice the size any other man swung,” I said. “He drove steel when they cut the Big Bend Tunnel through Craze Mountain. Out-drove the steam drill they brought to compete him out of his job.”

“Steam drill,” Rafe repeated me, the way you’d think he was faintly recollecting the tale. “They’d do that—ordinary size folks, trying to work against a giant. How big was John Henry?”

“Heard tell he was the biggest man ever in Virginia.”

“Big as me?”

“Maybe not quite. Maybe just stronger.”

“Stronger!”

I had my work cut out not to run from the anger in Rafe Enoch’s face.

“Well,” I said, “he beat the steam drill...”

*John Henry said to his captain,
“A man ain’t nothing but a man,*

But before I let that steam drill run me down, I'll die with this hammer in my hand..."

"He'd die trying," said Rafe, and his ears were sort of cocked forward, the way you hear elephants do to listen.

"He'd die winning," I said, and sang the next verse:

*John Henry drove steel that long day through,
The steam drill failed by his side.*

The mountain was high, the sun was low,

John he laid down his hammer and he died. . . .

"Killed himself beating the drill!" and Rafe's pumpkin fist banged into his other palm. "Reckon I could have beat it and

lived!”

I was looking at the place where the pond could have a drain-off.

“No,” said Rafe. “Even if I wanted to, I don’t have no hammer twice the size of other folks’ hammers.”

A drop of rain fell on me. I started around the pond.

“Where you going?” Rafe called, but I didn’t look back. Stopped be-side the wigwam-house and put my guitar inside. It was gloomy in there, but I saw his homemade stool as high as a table, his table almost chin high to a natural man, a bed woven of hickory splits and spread with bear and deer skins to be the right bed for Og, King of Bashan, in the Book of Joshua. Next to the door I grabbed up

a big pole of hickory, off some stacked firewood.

“Where you going?” he called again.

I went to where the slope started. I poked my hickory between two rocks and started to pry. He laughed, and rain sprinkled down.

“Go on, John,” he granted me. “Grub out a sluiceway there. I like to watch little scrabbly men work. Come in the house, Page, we’ll watch him from in there.”

I couldn’t budge the rocks from each other. They were big—like trunks or grain sacks, and must have weighed in the half-tons. They were set in there, one next to the other, four-five of them holding the water back from pouring

down that slope. I heaved on my hickory till it bent like a bow.

“Come on,” said Rafe again, and I looked around in time to see him put out his shovel hand and take her by the wrist. Gentlemen, the way she slapped him with her other hand it made me jump with the crack.

I watched, knee-deep in water. He put his hand to his gold-bearded cheek and his eye-whites glittered in the rain.

“If you was a man,” he boomed down at Page, “I’d slap you dead.”

“Do it!” she blazed him back. “I’m a woman, and I don’t fear you or any overgrown, sorry-for-himself giant ever drew breath!”

With me standing far enough off to

forget how little I was by them, they didn't seem too far apart in size. Page was like a small-made woman facing up to a sizeable man, that was all.

"If you was a man—" he began again.

"I'm no man, nor neither ain't you a man!" she cut off. "Don't know if you're an ape or a bull-brute or what, but you're no man! John's the only man here, and I'm helping him! Stop me if you dare!"

She ran to where I was. Rain battered her hair into a brown tumble and soaked her dress snug against her fine proud strong body. Into the water she splashed.

"Let me pry," and she grabbed the hickory pole. "I'll pry up and you tug up, and maybe—"

I bent to grab the rock with my hands. Together we tried. Seemed to me the rock stirred a little, like the drowsy sleeper in the old song. Drag-ging at it, I felt the muscles strain and crackle in my shoulders and arms.

“Look out!” squealed Page. “Here he comes!”

Up on the bank she jumped again, with the hickory ready to club at him. He paid her no mind, she stopped down toward where I was.

“Get on out of there!” he bellowed, the way I’ve always reckoned a buffalo bull might do. “Get out!”

“But—but—” I was wheezing. “Somebody’s got to move this rock—”

“You ain’t budging it ary mite!” he

almost deafened me in the ear. “Get out and let somebody there can do something!”

He grabbed my arm and snatched me out of the water, so sudden I almost sprained my fingers letting go the rock. Next second he jumped in, with a splash like a jolt-wagon going off a bridge. His big shovelly hands clamped the sides of the rock, and through the falling rain I saw him heave.

He swole up like a mad toad-frog. His patchy fur shirt split down the middle of his back while those muscles humped under his skin. His teeth flashed out in his beard, set hard together.

Then, just when I thought he'd bust open, that rock came out of its bed, came

up in the air, landing on the bank away from where it'd been.

"I swear, Rafe—" I began to say.

"Help him," Page put in. "Let's both help."

We scrabbled for a hold on the rock, but Rafe hollered us away, so loud and sharp we jumped back like scared dogs. I saw that rock quiver, and cracks ran through the rain-soaked dirt around it. Then it came up on end, the way you'd think it had hinges, and Rafe got both arms around it and heaved it clear. He laughed, with the rain wet in his beard.

Standing clear where he'd told her to stand, Page pointed to the falls' end.

Looked as if the rain hadn't had to put down but just a little bit. Those loose

rocks trembled and shifted in their places. They were ready to go. Then Rafe saw what we saw.

“Run, you two!” he howled about that racketty storm. “Run, run-quick!”

I didn’t tarry to ask the reason. I grabbed Page’s arm and we ran to-ward the falls. Running, I looked back past my elbow.

Rafe had straightened up, straddling among the rocks by the slope. He looked into the clouds, that were almost resting on his shaggy head, and both his big arms lifted and his hands spread and then their fingers snapped. I could hear t h e *snaps*—*Whap! Whap!* Like two pistol shots.

He got what he called for, a forked

stroke of lightning, straight and hard down on him like a fish-gig in the hands of the Lord's top angel. It slammed down on Rafe and over and around him, and it shook itself all the way from rock to clouds. Rafe Enoch in its grip lit up and glowed, the way you'd think he'd been forge-hammered out of iron and heated red in a furnace to temper him.

I heard the almightiest tearing noise I ever could call for. I felt the rock shelf quiver all the way to where we'd stopped dead to watch. My thought was, the falls had torn open and the Notch was drowning.

But the lightning yanked back to where it had come from. It had opened the sluiceway, and water flooded

through and down slope, and Rafe had fallen down while it poured and puddled over him.

“He’s struck dead!” I heard Page say over the rain.

“No,” I said back.

For Rafe Enoch was on his knees, on his feet, and out of that drain-off rush, somehow staggering up from the flat sprawl where the lightning had flung him. His knees wobbled and bucked, but he drew them up straight and mopped a big muddy hand across his big muddy face.

He came walking toward us, slow and dreamy-moving, and by now the rain rushed down instead of fell down. It was like what my old folks used to call

raining tomcats and hoe handles. I bowed my head to it, and made to pull Page toward Rafe's wigwam; but she wouldn't pull, she held where she was, till Rafe came up with us. Then, all three, we went to-gether and got into the tight, dark shelter of the wigwam-house, with the rain and wind battering the outside of it.

Rafe and I sat on the big bed, and Page on a stool, looking small there. She wrung the water out of her hair.

"You all right?" she inquired Rafe.

I looked at him. Between the drain-off and the wigwam, rain had washed off that mud that gaumed all over him. He was wet and clean, with his patch-pelt shirt hanging away from his big chest

and shoulders in soggy rags.

The lightning had singed off part of his beard. He lifted big fingers to wipe off the wet fluffy ash, and I saw the stripe on his naked arm, on the broad back of his hand, and I made out another stripe just like it on the other. Lightning had slammed down both hands and arms, and clear down his flanks and legs—I saw the burnt lines on his fringed leggings. It was like a double lash of God's whip.

Page got off the stool and came close to him. Just then he didn't look so out-and-out much bigger than she was. She put a long gentle finger on that lightning lash where it ran along his shoulder.

“Does it hurt?” she asked. “You got

some grease I could put on it?”

He lifted his head, heavy, but didn't look at her. He looked at me. “I lied to you all,” he said.

“Lied to us?” I asked him.

“I did call for the rain. Called for the biggest rain I ever thought of. Didn't pure down want to kill off the folks in the Notch, but to my reck-oning, if I made it rain, and saved Page up here—”

At last he looked at her, with a shamed face.

“The others would be gone and forgotten. There'd be Page and me.” His dark eyes grabbed her green ones. “But I didn't rightly know how she disgusts the sight of me.” His head dropped again. “I feel the nearest to nothing I ever did.”

“You opened the drain-off and saved the Notch from your rain,” put in Page, her voice so gentle you’d never think it. “Called down the lightning to help you.”

“Called down the lightning to kill me,” said Rafe. “I never reckoned it wouldn’t. I wanted to die. I want to die now.”

“Live,” she bade him.

He got up at that, standing tall over her.

“Don’t worry when folks look on you,” she said, her voice still ever so gentle. “They’re just wondered at you, Rafe. Folks were wondered that same way at Saint Christopher, the giant who carried Lord Jesus across the river.”

“I was too proud,” he mumbled in his

big bull throat. “Proud of my Genesis giant blood, of being one of the sons of God—”

“Shoo, Rafe,” and her voice was gentler still, “the least man in size you’d call for, when he speaks to God, he says, ‘Our Father.’”

Rafe turned from her.

“You said I could look on you if I wanted,” said Page Jarrett. “And I want.”

Back he turned, and bent down, and she rose on her toe tips so their faces came together.

The rain stopped, the way you’d think that stopped it. But they never seemed to know it, and I picked up my guitar and went out toward the lip of the cliff.

The falls were going strong, but the drain-off handled enough water so there'd be no washout to drown the folks below. I reckoned the rocks would be the outdoingist slippery rocks ever climbed down by mortal man, and it would take me a long time. Long enough, maybe so, for me to think out the right way to tell Mr. Lane Jarrett he was just before hav-ing himself a son-in-law of the Genesis giant blood, and pretty soon after while, grandchildren of the same strain.

The sun came stabbing through the clouds and flung them away in chunks to right and left, across the bright blue sky.

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