CHAPTER 13

I did not sleep much the night before I went to the place of the sea elephants. I thought again about the law that forbade women to make weapons. I wondered if my arrows would go straight and, if they did, would they pierce the animal's tough hide. What if one of the bulls turned on me! What if I were injured and then had to fight the wild dogs as I dragged myself homeward?

I thought about these things most of the night, but with the sun I was up and on my way to the place where the sea elephants

lived.

When I reached the cliff, the animals had left the reef and gathered along the shore. Like grey boulders the bulls sat on the pebbly slope. Below them the cows and their babies played in the waves.

Perhaps it is not right to speak of young sea elephants as babies, for they are as large as a man. But they are still babies in many ways. They follow their mothers around, waddling along on their flippers like children learning to walk, making crying sounds and sounds of pleasure that only the young make. And before they will leave the shore and learn to swim their mothers have to push them into the sea, which is often difficult to do because of their size.

Some distance separated the bulls from each other, for they are bad-tempered, very jealous by nature and quick to fight over anything that displeases them. There were six of them below me on the slope, each sitting alone like a great chief, watching his herd of cows and babies.

The cow has a smooth body and a face that looks much like that of a mouse, with a sharp-pointed nose and whiskers, but the bull is different. His nose has a large hump on it which hangs down over his mouth. His skin is rough and looks like wet earth that has dried in the sun and cracked. He is an ugly animal.

From the top of the cliff I looked down at each of the sea elephants and tried to choose the smallest of the six.

They were all the same size save one, which was the farthest from me and partly hidden by a rock. He was about half as large as the others, a young bull. Since no cows were playing among the waves in front of him, I knew that he did not have a herd of his own, and for that reason would not be so wary or quickly angered.

Quietly I let myself down over the edge of the cliff. To reach him I had to pass behind the others, being careful not to alarm them. They fear nothing and would not move if they saw me, but it was better, I thought, not to put them on their guard. I carried my new bow, which was almost as tall as I was, and five arrows.

The path was rough and covered with small stones. I took pains not to send them tumbling down the slope. I was also careful not to be seen by the cows, which get alarmed easily and would have warned the rest of the herd with their cries.

I crawled behind a big rock near the young bull. I then got to my feet and fitted an arrow to the bow, although I suddenly remembered my father's warning that, because I was a woman, the bow would break.

The sun was far in the west, but luckily my shadow fell away from the young bull. The distance between us was short and his back was turned squarely to- wards me. Still I did not know where to place the first arrow, whether in his shoulders or in his head. The skin of the sea elephant is rough, yet very thin, but beneath it are thick layers of fat, and though his body is large, his head is small and makes a poor target.

While I stood there behind the rock, not knowing what to do, again aware of my father's warning that a bow in the hands of a woman would always break in a time of danger, the animal began to move to- wards the shore. At first I thought that by some chance he had heard me. I soon saw that he was on his way towards the cows that belonged to the old bull sitting near by.

The sea elephant moves fast in spite of his size, waddling along on his great dippers which he uses like hands. The bull was nearing the water. I let the arrow go and it went straight. At the last instant he changed direction and, though the bow did not break, the arrow passed harmlessly to one side.

I had failed to notice that the old bull was moving down the slope until I heard stones grating against each other. Quickly he overtook his rival and with a single thrust of his shoulders overturned him. The young bull stood as high as a tall man and was twice that length, yet from the force of the blow he rolled into the water and lay there stunned.

The old bull bore down upon him, swinging his head and bellowing so loud it echoed against the cliffs. The herd of cows and calves, who were lying in the waves and scratching their backs with their dippers, stopped to watch the battle.

Two of the cows were in the bull's path as he waddled towards his rival, but he went over them as if they were small stones.

Using his tusk like teeth, he ripped a long gash in the young bull's side.

The young bull raised himself and as be turned his small eyes shone fiercely red. When the old bull slashed at him again, he struck first and sunk his teeth into the other's neck. He did not let go and the two rolled over in the waves, splashing water high into the air.

The cows had scattered by now, but the other bulls still sat quietly on the slope.

The two fighters paused, getting ready for a new attack. It was a good chance to send an arrow into the young bull, who lay on his back with his teeth still grasping the other's neck. But I hoped that he would win the battle, and I stood there and did not move.

The old bull had many deep scars on his head and shoulders from battles he had fought before. Suddenly he lashed out with

his tail, trying to loose the hold on his neck, and struck the side of a rock. With his tail against the rock, he flung his body out of the water and thus broke away.

He came quickly up the slope, his great mouth open, the young bull close behind him. He came towards me and, in haste to get out of his way, not knowing whether he was bent on attacking me. I stepped back. In doing so, I tripped over a stone and fell to my knees.

I felt a sharp pain in my leg, but was quickly up. By this time the old bull had whirled around and turned upon his pursuer so fast that the young bull was taken by surprise. Again the young bull's flank was ripped deep, and again the force of the blow threw him backward into the water.

The waves grew redder from his blood, but this time he rolled over and was waiting for the charge. He met the old bull with his shoulder. The sound was like rocks crashing together. Once more the young bull caught the other's throat, and together they disappeared beneath a wave. When they came up they were still locked together.

The sun had gone down and it was so dark I could no longer see clearly. My leg had now begun to hurt, Since I had a long way to go, I left them. I could hear their bellowing as I went up the cliff, and for a long time afterwards.

CHAPTER 14

My leg hurt so much by the time I had reached the house that it was hard for me to crawl under the fence and move aside the heavy rock.

For five suns I could not go out because my leg had swollen so badly and I had no herbs with which to treat it. I had enough food to eat, but on the third day the water in the basket ran low. Two days later the basket was empty. It was necessary then for me to go to the spring in the ravine.

I started out when the sun rose. I took with me shellfish to eat, also my spear and my bow and arrows. I went very slowly, for I had to crawl on my hands and knees, carrying the food tied to my back, and dragging the weapons.

There was a short way to the spring, but it was over many rocks which I could not climb, so I had to take a longer way through the brush. I reached the ravine when the sun was overhead. The spring was not far off and I rested there, though I was very thirsty, cutting a lobe from a cactus bush to chew on.

While I was resting there, sucking the juice from the cactus, I saw the big grey dog, the leader of the wild pack, in the brush above me. His head was down and he was moving slowly, sniffing the tracks I had made. He saw me soon after I saw him and stopped. Behind him was the rest of the pack, trotting along one after the other. The pack stopped too.

I took up my bow and fitted an arrow, but as I did this the big dog faded away into the brush and was quickly followed by the others. In the time of one breath they were gone. There was nothing to aim my arrow at. It was as if they had not been there at all.

I listened. They were moving so silently I could not hear their steps, but I was sure that they would try to surround me. Slowly I crawled on, stopping to listen, to glance back, to measure the distance between me and the spring. My leg hurt. I left my bow and arrows behind as I went on, for the brush had grown heavy and I could not use them. In one hand I dragged my spear.

I came to the spring. It flowed out of a crack in a rock and the rock rose high on three sides of it. The wild dogs could not attack me from any of these directions, so I lay on the earth and drank, watching the ravine below me. I drank for a long time and filled my basket and then, feeling better, crawled towards the mouth of the cave.

A ledge of black rock ran out above it. Some low bushes grew there and among them, with just his head showing, stood the big grey dog. He did not move, but his yellow eyes followed me, turning slowly as I drew near the cave. Another head showed behind him and another. They were too far away for me to reach with my spear.

Suddenly I saw brush moving on the opposite bank of the ravine. The pack had split up and were waiting on both sides of the ravine for me to pass them.

The cave was now in front of me. I crawled to the mouth and into it. Above me I could hear feet running and the cracking of brush, which was followed by silence.

I was safe. I knew the wild dogs would come back and they did as night fell, stalking around in the brush until morning, but nor venturing close.

Although the mouth of the cave was small, once you were inside, it spread out and you could stand up. Water dropped from the roof and the cave was cold without a fire, but here I stayed for six suns, until my leg was well, crawling out only once to fetch water from the spring.

While I was living there I decided that I would make the cave into another house, where I: could stay should I again get hurt or sick. And this I did as soon as I was strong and could walk.

The cave went far back into the hill, around many turns, but I needed only that part which lay near the opening and which the sun could reach during some of the day.

A long time before this my ancestors had used the cave, why I do not know, and along the walls on each side they had cut figures in the stone. There were figures of pelicans floating on the water and flying, of dolphins, whales, sea elephants, gulls, ravens, dogs, and foxes. Near the opening of the cave they had also cut two deep basins in the stone, which I decided to use for storing water since they held much more than the baskets.

I made shelves in the side of the rock as I had done in the other house, and gathered shellfish and seeds to store there. I also gathered herbs from the hill above the spring in case I should need them. The bow and arrows I had first made I likewise took to the cave. At the last, after I had made a good bed of seaweed and collected dry wood for my fires, I closed the opening with stones, except for a small hole at the top which I could crawl through.

All this I did, thinking of the days I had been sick and without water. It was hard work, much of it a man's work, but not until I was finished did I go back to the place where the sea elephants lived.

The tide was low when I reached it. Far up on the slope lay the body of the old bull. Gulls had picked his bones clean, but I found what I had come for.

Some of the teeth were as long as my hand and half its width. They were curved at the tops and some were broken, but when I had ground the best of them down with sand, I had for my work four good spear points, broad at the bottom and very sharp at the ends.

I made two more spears from these points and at last was ready to go to the cave of the wild dogs.