

## CHAPTER XX. -The coming Race

Following Tae's adventurous expedition, his visits to me became more frequent, his youthful curiosity and affection for me presenting a refreshing break from his typically grave and duty-bound peers. Despite being on the younger side and not yet engrossed in the rigorous scientific training of his age group, Tae, barely twelve, displayed a blend of wisdom and playful humor often found in seasoned geniuses. To him, I was akin to an entertaining pet, a source of amusement as he endeavored to acquaint me with the customs and technologies of the Vrilya.

One such fascination was the art of flying using large, mechanically enhanced wings designed from the feathers of a gigantic native bird. These wings, elegant and efficient, were beyond my mastery despite my physical adeptness and experience as an adept swimmer. My attempts at flight resulted in bruising failures, highlighting the stark difference between the inherent capabilities of the Vrilya and my own. The wings, though technically attachable to any being, demanded a level of volitional control over the vril energy that I, as an outsider, lacked. This energy, interwoven with their being from birth, allowed them to manipulate these artificial appendages with instinctive ease, a trait born from generations of adaptation and inheritance.

Zee, ever the patient observer, finally intervened after a particularly harrowing attempt that nearly ended in severe injury. She posited that my repeated failures weren't due to any lack on the part of the wings or a physical deficiency in myself but stemmed from an "organic defect" in my volitional power—a gap unbridgeable by mere practice or desire. The Vrilya's symbiotic relationship with vril, developed over countless generations, had evolved into an innate faculty, as natural to them as any instinct. Acknowledging the futility and danger of further attempts, Zee, whose concern for my safety had grown, decided to cease the experiment. Her attachment to me, it seemed, had deepened beyond mere scientific curiosity, hinting at a burgeoning sense of care and possibly an emotional bond.