THE MAN-EATER

Tarzan's Creator Writes a New Romance of the African Jungle

By Edgar Rice Burroughs

(Author of "Tarzan of the Apes," "The Cave Girl," Etc.)

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SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING INSTALMENTS.

Jefferson Scott jr., a rich young Marylander, during a big game trip to Africa, marries Ruth Morton, a missionary's daughter. Scott is killed by savages. His widow goes to his father's Maryland home, with her baby daughter, Virginia. She brings along her wedding certificate and other papers, which her father-in-law puts away for safe keeping. Virginia grows to beautiful womanhood. Her grandfather dies. She is, presumably, heir to his fortune. Scott Taylor, a dissolute nephew of the old man, comes from New York to the Maryland plantation to claim the estate. No will is found. Taylor hints that Virginia's parents were not married. Their wedding certificate being apparently lost, Virginia's mother writes to her husband's former chum, Robert Gordon, an African explorer, asking him to prove her marriage. Taylor intercepts the latter's reply.

CHAPTER I.

(Continued.)

THE letter ran:

"My dear Mr. Gordon:

"My husband's father, Jefferson Scott, has just passed away, and as certain legal requirements necessitate a proof of my marriage to Jefferson I am writing to ask that you mail an affidavit to Judge Sperry, of this village, to the effect that you witnessed the ceremony.

"My marriage certificate is, I imagine, still in the tin box beneath the hearth of the mission bungalow where father always kept his valuables, but as even it may have been destroyed during the second uprising of the Wakandas I imagine that we shall have to depend entirely upon your affidavit. I understand that the savages left no stone standing upon another and that every stick of timber was burned. That was eighteen years ago—a year after the massacre in which Jefferson, father and mother were slain, and so it is rather doubtful if anything remains of the certificate.

"I am particularly anxious to legally establish the authenticity of my marriage, not so much because of the property which my daughter Virginia will inherit thereby, as from the fact that another heir has questioned my daughter's legitimacy.

"I write thus plainly to you because of the love I know that you and Jefferson felt for one another, and as well to impress upon you my urgent need of this affidavit, which you alone can furnish. Very sincerely,

"RUTH MORTON SCOTT.

"Scottsville, Va., July 10, 19—."

"H'm," commented Mr. Scott Taylor, with a laugh. "Well, I can let this letter go forward with perfect safety, as I happen to know that Robert Gordon, Esq., died to years ago."

CHAPTER II.

MR. DICK GORDON of New York, rich, indolent and bored, tossed his morning paper aside, yawned, rose from the breakfast table and strolled wearily into the living room of his bachelor apartments. His man, who was busying himself about the room, looked up at his master questioningly.

"I am wondering, Murphy," announced that young man, "what the devil we are going to do to assassinate time to-day."

"Well, sir," replied Murphy, "you know you sort o' promised Mr. Jones as how you'd make up a four-flush at the Country Club this morning, sir."

"Foursome, Murphy, foursome!" laughed Gordon, and then, shooting a sharp glance at his servant: "I believe you were handing me one that time, you old fraud."

But the solemn-visaged Murphy shook his head in humble and horrified denial.

"All right, Murphy; get my things out. I suppose I might as well do that as anything," resignedly.

Languidly, Mr. Dick Gordon donned his golf togs and stood at last correctly clothed and with the faithful Murphy at his heels bearing his caddie bag. He crossed his living room toward the door of the apartment, halted half way and turned upon his servant.

"Golf's an awful bore, Murphy," he said. "Let's not play to-day."

"But Mr. Jones, sir!" exclaimed Murphy.

"Oh, Jones's foursomes always start at the nineteenth hole and never make the first. They'll not miss me."

His eyes fell upon a tennis racket, and lighted with new interest.

"Say, Murphy, we haven't played tennis in a coon's age," he exclaimed. "Go put those clubs away. I'm going to play tennis."

"With yourself, sir?" questioned Murphy. "I never saw no one playing tennis at the club, sir, of a morning."

"I guess you're right, Murphy, and anyway I don't want to play tennis. Tiresome game, tennis."

"Yes, sir."

"Ha! I have it! Great morning for a ride. Hustle, you old snail, and fetch my things. Telephone Billy and tell him to bring Redcoat around. Get a move on, escargot!"

By the time Murphy had attended to the various duties assigned him and returned from the telephone he found his young master sitting on the edge of a chair with one boot on and the other half so, staring hard at the floor, a weary expression on his face.

"Can I help you, sir?" asked Murphy.

"Yes, you can help me take off this boot. It's too hot to ride, and besides I don't want to ride anyway. What the devil did you suggest riding for, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"I wish that you would say no, sir, for a change, Murphy. You're getting to be a terrific bore in your old age. Go and tell Billy to never mind Redcoat."

"Yes, sir," replied Murphy, but he did not go.

"You'd better hurry, Murphy, and catch him before he leaves the stables," suggested Gordon after a moment, in which he had divested himself of his riding breeches and started to pull on the trousers of a street suit.

"It won't be necessary, sir," said Murphy. "I didn't telephone him for Redcoat in the first place, sir. I knew as how you would change your mind, sir, and thought it wouldn't be worth while calling up, sir."

Gordon cocked his head on one side and surveyed his servant from head to foot for a long moment. "Yes, sir," he said, at last.

Clothed again he wandered back into the living room, wishing that there was something in the world to hold his interest for a moment. The photograph of a handsome woman caught his eye. He picked it up and looked at it for several seconds.

"She photographs well," he murmured, "and that is about all one can say for her. I'll bet an X-ray of her brain wouldn't show three convolutions."

Then he passed to another, the picture of a young debutante at whose feet were half the eligible males of New York society—and all the ineligible. He tossed the photographs aside in disgust. One by one he examined others. All wearied him. Everything wearied him.

"I wish," he remarked, turning toward Murphy, "that there was something or some one on earth that could raise my temperature over half a degree."

"Yes, sir," said Murphy. "That must be the mail man, sir," as an electric bell rang in the rear of the apartment and Murphy turned toward the door.

A moment later he re-entered with a bundle of letters in his hand, laying them on Gordon's desk. The young man picked up the top envelope and opened it.

"Mrs. R—— requests the pleasure"——he read, half aloud, and dropped the invitation listlessly upon the desk to pick up and open the next. "The Blank Club announces"—— "The Blank Club is always announcing tiresome things," he sighed, and dropped the communication into the waste basket. "'Mrs. F. Benton J—— and Miss J—— will be at home'—— which is a dang sight more than Mr. F. Benton J—— can ever say," commented Mr. Gordon, gathering up the next, which proved to be another invitation. One after another the young man opened the envelopes, nor did any succeed in erasing the bored expression from his countenance. The last he glanced at with a faint tinge of curiosity before opening. The feminine handwriting was unfamiliar, which was nothing unusual, but the postmark it was that drew his interest—Scottsville, Va.

"Now, who the devil do I know in Scottsville, Va.?" he asked himself as he drew his paper knife through the flap of the envelope. "Oh, it's addressed to Dad!" he exclaimed, suddenly noting his father's name upon the envelope. "Dear old Dad," sighed the young man; "I never lacked bully good company when you were alive, and I didn't know then what it meant to be bored. I wonder if you know how I miss you."

He turned first to the signature at the close of the letter. "'Ruth Morton Scott,'" he read. "H'm, I've heard Dad speak of you, and Jefferson Scott, Jr., your husband, and the tragedy at the mission. Lord, what an awful place that must have been for a young girl! It was bad enough three years ago when Dad and I camped among its ruins; but twenty years ago the country must have been awful for white women."

As Dick Gordon read the letter through slowly his face reflected for the first time in days a real interest. Toward the close he muttered something that sounded like, "Damned cad," and then he carefully re-read the letter. After the second reading he sat upon the edge of his desk, the letter still in the hand that had dropped to his knee, and stared fixedly and unseeingly at the barbaric patterns of the Navajo rug at his feet. For ten minutes he sat thus; then he sprang up, animation reflected upon his face and determination in his every movement. Weariness and lassitude had been swept away as by magic. Seating himself at the desk he drew writing materials from a drawer and for ten minutes more was busily engaged in framing a letter. This done he rang for Murphy.

"Skip out and post this, you old tortoise," he shouted, "and then go and book passage for the two of us on the first boat that sails direct or makes good connections for Mombasa—do you know where it is?"

"Yes, sir; Africa, sir," replied the imperturbable Murphy, in as matter a fact tone as though White Plains was to have been their destination.

Mr. Dick Gordon always had been an impulsive young man, his saving characteristic being an innate fineness of character that directed his impulses into good channels, if not always wisely chosen ones. His letter to Mrs. Scott had been written upon the impulse of the moment—an impulse to serve his father's friend coupled with a longing for adventure and action—for a change from the monotony of his useless existence.

The following day, as Scott Taylor, mounted upon Gen. Scott's favorite saddle horse, rode leisurely about 'my plantation,' as he now described the Scott estate, he chanced to meet the little wagon of the Rural Free Delivery carrier coming from town.

"Anything for The Oaks?" he asked, reining in.

The man handed him a packet of letters and papers, clucked to his bony old horse and drove on. Taylor ran through the letters. There was one that interested him—it bore the name and address of Richard Gordon on the flap. This he thrust into his inside pocket. Then he rode up the driveway, turned his horse over to a negro, and entered the library. It was empty, and laying the balance of the mail upon the table he made his way up stairs to his own room.

Here he quickly opened and read Gordon's letter to Mrs. Scott. His eyes narrowed and his brows contracted with the reading of the last paragraph: "Father has been dead two years; but I know all about the location of the mission, as I visited it three years ago while lion hunting with him. As I am just about to leave for Africa again I sha" make it a point to recover the papers you wish."

Taylor crumpled the letter angrily in his hand. "The fool!" he muttered. "What does he want to butt in for?"

Then there came a knock upon the door and Taylor hastily crammed the letter into the side pocket of his coat.

"Come in!" he snapped, and an old negress entered with fresh towels and bed linen. As she moved in her slow and deliberate way about her duties Taylor sat with puckered brows and narrowed lids gazing through the window. It was not until the woman had left the room that he arose. Now he seemed to have reached a decision that demanded rapid action. He snatched off his coat, throwing it across the bed, where it dropped over the side to the floor beyond. His trousers he flung on the floor; his shirt, collar and tie upon the centre table, and in fifteen minutes he was dressed in fresh linen and another suit and was cramming his belongings into his bag.

Running downstairs and out to the stables, he shouted to a hostler to harness the team and take him to the station. Mrs. Scott and Virginia had the car out, so he was forced to content himself with the slower method of transportation. Forty-five minutes later he boarded a northound train for New York, and late that night rang the bell of an apartment in West One Hundred and Forty-fifth Street.

A bleached blonde in a green kimono opened the door in response to his ring.

"Why, hello, kid!" she cried when the dim light in the hallway revealed his features to her. "You're just in time for a snifter. Where you been keepin' yourself? Jim and me were talkin' about you not five minutes ago. Come on in; the gang's all here," and she grasped him by the lapel of his coat, drew him into the hall and slammed the door.

"I've been doing the rural," replied Taylor with a laugh; "and, take it from me, it's mighty good to be back again where there are some live ones."

He preceded the girl into the dining room of the little apartment, where two men, seated at the dining table with a deck of cards, a bottle of Scotch, a syphon and three glasses rose as he entered and greeted him with a noisy welcome.

"Well, well! Little ol' kid back again!" cried one.

"Hello, Jim! Hello, Bill!" cried Taylor, grasping their outstretched hands. "You sure look good to me."

"Get another glass, Blanche," Jim called to the girl. "Sit in, kid, and we'll have a little round o' roodles—dollar limit—whatdyu say?"

"Piker game," sneered Taylor, with a grin. "I'm dealing in millions just now. Throw your cards in the gobboon and listen to me, if you want to make a hundred thou apiece." He paused to note the effect of his remark.

"Quick, Blanche!" cried Jim. "Get the poor devil a drink. Can't you see he's dyin' of thirst and gone bug?"

Taylor grinned. "I'm sure dying of thirst all right," he admitted; "but I'm not bug. Now listen—here's how, thanks!—you guys are broke. You always have been and always will be till you stop piking. Once in a while you pull down a couple of hundred simoleons and then sweat blood for a week or so for fear you'll be pinched and get a couple of years on the Island. I've got a real proposition here; but it's a man's job, though there isn't any chance of a comeback because we'll pull it off where there's no lamp posts and no law."

He paused and eyed his companions.

"Spiel!" said Bill.

Taylor narrated the events that had taken place during the past week.

"And now," he concluded, "if this Buttinsky Gordon brings back that marriage certificate I can kiss all my chance good-bye, for there isn't a court in that neck of the woods that would give me a look in with that Scott chicken if she had the ghost of a case."

"And you want us to?"—Jim paused.

"You guessed it the first time," said Taylor. "I want you to help me follow Gordon, take that paper away from him and—croak him."

For a moment the four sat in silence.

"Why do you have to croak him?" asked the girl.

"So he can't come back and swear that he seen the certificate," said Bill. "That'ud be just as good as the certificate itself in any court, against the kid."

"There isn't the least chance of our getting in wrong, either," explained Taylor, "because we can lay it all onto the natives or to an accident and there won't be anybody to disprove it—if we are suspected; but the chances are that we can pull it off without any one being the wiser."

"And what did you say we got out of it?" asked Bill.

"A hundred thou apiece the day I get the proprety in my hands," replied Taylor. "If you could get hold of the certificate first it would be fine and dandy, but we've got to follow Gordon to Central Africa to find where it is, and by that time he'll have it. So the only chance we have is to pass him the K. O. and take it away from him. I'll sure breathe easier after I've seen that piece of paper go up in smoke."

James Kelly and William Gootch were, colloquially, short sports. They had rolled many a souse and separated more than a single rube from his bank roll by such archaic means as wire tapping and fixed mills, but so far they never had risen to the heights of murder. The idea found them tremulous but receptive. Their doubts were based more upon the material than the ethical. Could they get away with it without danger of detection? Ah, that was the question—the only question.

"Well?" said Taylor after a long pause, during which the other two men had drained their glasses while the girl sat revolving hers upon the table cloth between her fingers.

"I'm game," announced Kelly, dodging the girl's eyes and looking sideways at Gootch.

"So'm I!" declared the latter.

And so it happened that when Mr. Dick Gordon walked up the gang plank of the liner that was to bear him as far as Liverpool on his journey to Africa, three men, leaning over a rail on an upper deck, watched him with interested eyes.

"That's him," said Taylor, "the tall one, just in front of the solemn looking party that resembles a Methodist minister crossed in love—only he ain't. He's Gordon's man."

As neither Gordon nor Murphy was acquainted even by sight or repute with any of the precious three, the latter made no attempt to avoid them during the trip. It was Taylor's intention to scrape an acquaintance with Gordon after they had changed ships at Liverpool, when he would then know for certain Gordon's destination, and could casually announce that he and his companions were bound for that very point on a hunting expedition.

All went well with his plans until after they had sailed from Liverpool for Mombasa, when the depravity which was inherent in Kelly and Gootch resulted in an unpleasantness which immediately terminated all friendly relations between Gordon and the three. Taylor had succeeded in drawing Gordon into conversation soon after sailing from Liverpool, when he casually remarked that he and his friends were bound for the country about Victoria Nyanza in search of lions.

"Is that so?" exclaimed Gordon. "I am going into the neighborhood of Albert Edward Nyanza myself, and shall take the route from Mabido around the north end of Victoria Nyanza." And a common interest established, the two became better acquainted.

Then Taylor introduced his two friends and later on Kelly suggested cards. Taylor tried to find an opportunity to warn his accomplices against the crookedness which he knew to be second nature with them. He would have preferred to let Gordon win, but the estimable Messieurs Kelly and Gootch, considering a bird in the hand worth two in the jungle, swooped down upon the opportunity thus afforded them to fleece their prey. The result was that after half an hour of play Gordon rose from the table, a rather unpleasant light in his eyes, caused in his remaining checks and quit the game.

"Why, what's the matter, old man?" queried Taylor, inwardly cursing Gootch and Kelly.

"I wouldn't force an explanation if I were you," replied Gordon coldly, "the captain might overhear."

Taylor flushed and Gordon walked away, which was the end of the acquaintance upon which Taylor had based such excellent plans.

"You boobs are wonders," sneered Taylor. "You must have made all of fifty dollars apiece out of it—and ruined every chance we had to travel right to the mission in Gordon's company," and he turned disgustedly away and sought his cabin.

CHAPTER III.

SOPHRONIA was blithely humming Dixie as she went about her work on the second floor of the Scott house. Occasionally she broke the monotony by engaging in heated discussions with herself.

"Yassem," she said, shaking her head. "Ah never done laik dat Mistah Scott Taylah. He may be po' Miss Do'thy's boy; but he's po' white trash, jes' de same. Yass'm. An' look yere," as she pushed the bed out from the wal to ply her broom beneath. "Jes' look yere! Dere he's gone an' lef' his coat. Shif'less, das what he is—a throwin' his coat aroun' laik dat," and she seized the garment with a vigorous shake.

Throwing the coat across her arm, the negress carried it down to the library, where Mrs. Scott and Virginia were sitting.

"Heah dat Mistah Scott Taylor's coat," she announced, laying it on the table. "What Ah done goin' do wif it—give it to dat good-fer-nothin' nigger, Samu-el?"

"No, Sophronia," said Mrs. Scott, "we'll have to send it to him," and she picked up the garment to wrap it for mailing. As she folded it a crumpled sheet of note paper fell from a side pocket. Virginia picked it up to replace it in the coat, when, by chance, she saw her mother's name upon the top of the sheet.

"Why," she exclaimed, "this is yours, mother," and she spread the note out, smoothing it upon the table top. "It's a letter to you. How in the world did it happen to be in Scott's coat?"

Mrs. Scott took the note and read it; then she handed it to her daughter. When Virginia had completed it she looked up at her mother, her face clouded and angry.

"Why, the scoundrel!" she exclaimed. "He actually has been intercepting your mail." Then she glanced again at the date line and her eyes opened wide. "Mother!" she ejaculated. "This letter must have come the very day Scott left in such a hurry. It must have been because of this letter that he did leave. What can it mean?"

Mrs. Scott shook her head.

"I know," announced Virginia. "He has gone to prevent Mr. Gordon from recovering the certificate or else to follow him and obtain possession of it himself. There could be no other explanation of his hurried departure immediately after the receipt of this letter."

"It does look that way, Virginia; but what can we do?"

"We can wire Mr. Gordon at once."

"What can we say that will not appear silly in a telegram, unless we actually accuse Scott of criminal designs," argued Mrs. Scott, "and we cannot do that, for we have only conjecture to base a charge upon."

"I can go to New York and talk with Mr. Gordon," said Virginia, "and that is just what I shall do."

"But, my dear"—— Mrs. Scott started to expostulate.

"But I am," said Virginia determinedly, and she did.

To her dismay she found Mr. Richard Gordon's apartment locked and apparently untenanted, for there was no response to her repeated ringing of the bell. Then she inquire' at another apartment across the hall. Here a house man informed her that Mr. Gordon's man had told him that he and Mr. Gordon were leaving for Africa—he even recalled the name of the liner upon which they had sailed for Liverpool.

What was she to do? Well, the first thing was to assure herself as to whether Scott Taylor had also sailed for Africa, and if not to arrange to have him watched until she could get word to Mr. Richard Gordon. The taxi that had brought her to Gordon's apartment was waiting at the curb. Descending to it, she gave the driver instructions to take her to the offices of a certain steamship company—she would examine the passenger list and thus discover whether Taylor had sailed on the same boat with Gordon; but after examining the list and finding Tayler's name not among those of the passengers it suddenly occurred to her that the man would doubtless have assumed a name if his intentions were ulterior. Now she was in as bad a plight as formerly. She racked her brain for a solution of her problem. It would do no good to wire Gordon, for he would not know Taylor if he saw him, and anyway it was possible that Taylor had not followed him and that she would only be making herself appear silly by sending Gordon a melodramatic wireless.

"I only wish," she murmured to herself, "that I knew whether or not Scott Taylor has followed him to Africa. How can I find out?"

And then came a natural solution of her problem—to search for Scott Taylor himself in New York. Her first thought was of a city directory, and here she found a Scott Taylor with an address on West 146th Street, and a moment later her taxi was whirling her uptown in that direction.

It was with considerable trepidation that Virginia Scott mounted the steps and rang the bell beneath the speaking tube. She feared Taylor and knew that she was doing a risky thing in thus placing herself even temporarily in his power; but loyalty and gratitude toward Richard Gordon, a stranger who had put his life, maybe, in jeopardy to serve her and her mother, insisted that she accept the risk, and so when the latch of the front door clicked and a voice, ignoring the speaking tube, called down from above for her to come up, she bravely entered the dark stairway and marched upward, to what she had no idea. She had been glad to note that the voice from above had been that of a woman. It made her feel more at her ease; but when she reached the topmost step and found a slovenly young woman with bleached hair and a green kimono awaiting her her heart sank.

"Does Mr. Scott Taylor live here?" she asked.

"Yes, but he ain't home. What do you want—anything I can do for you?"

"Has he left the city?" asked Virginia.

The girl's eyes narrowed, and Virginia noted it, but she thought, too, that she saw a trace of fear in them. She was convinced that this woman could tell her all she wished to know, but how was she to get the information from her?

"May I come in a moment and rest?" she asked. "It's rather a long climb up here from the street," and she smiled—one of those delightful smiles that even a woman admires in another woman.

"Sure!" said the girl. "Come right in. Don't mind how things look. I'm alone now and takin' it easy. You have to keep things straightened around when the men folks are home, or they're always growlin'."

So the men folks were away!

"What a cute little place you have here," said Virginia. "You are Mrs. Taylor?"

The girl flushed just a trifle. "No," she replied. "My man's name is Kelly. Mr. Taylor boards with us when he's in town."

And afterward when she addressed her as Mrs. Kelly Virginia could not but note an odd expression about the corners of the girl's mouth.

"Is Mr. Taylor out of town now?" asked Virginia.

The girl looked her straight in the eyes for a moment before she replied.

"Say, look here," she demanded at last, "What's your game? Who are you anyhow, and what's your idea in doin' all this rubberin' after Kid Taylor?"

For a moment Virginia did not know what answer to make, and then, impulsively, she decided to tell this girl a part of her conjectures at least in the hope that either sympathy for Gordon or fear of the consequences upon Taylor would enlist her services in Virginia's behalf. There was that in the girl's face which convinced Virginia that beneath the soiled green kimono and the evidences of dissipation in the old-young face there lay a kind heart and a generous disposition. And so she told her.

Her story was not all news to Blanche. She had heard most of it from Taylor's lips. When Virginia had finished the girl sat glowering sullenly at the floor for several seconds. At last she looked up.

"I don't know," she said, "what strings Kid Taylor has on me. He ain't never done nothing except to egg Jim on first to one job and then to another that Taylor didn't have the nerve to pull off himself. Jim's been to the Island once already for a job that Taylor worked up an' then sat right here drinkin' high-balls an' tryin' to flozzie up to me while Jim an' Bill were out gettin' pinched.

"An' now"—— she paused, a startled look coming into her eyes. "An' now he's framed up a murder for them, 'cause he ain't got the nerve to do it himself."

"You mean," cried Virginia, "that they have really followed Mr. Gordon to Africa to murder him?"

Blanche nodded, affirmatively. Then she leaned forward toward her caller.

"I've told you," she said, "because I thought you might find a way to stop them before they did it. I don't want Jim sent to the chair. He's always been good to me. But for Gawd's sake don't let them know I told you. Bill 'ud kill me, an' Jim 'ud quit me. I'd care more about that than the other. You won't tell, will you?"

"No," said Virginia. "I won't. Now, tell me, they sailed on the same boat as Mr. Gordon?"

"Yes, Jim and Bill and Taylor, an' they were goin' to follow Gordon until he got the paper, then croak him an' take it away an' say it was an accident or something."

Virginia Scott rose from the chair upon which she had been sitting. Outwardly she was calm and collected, but inwardly her thoughts were in a confused and hysterical jumble in which horror predominated. What was she to do? How helpless she was to avert the grim tragedy! She thought of cabling Gordon, but when she suggested the plan to Blanche the girl pointed out that it was too late—Gordon must already have left the end of the railroad and be well upon his way into the interior.

For a moment Virginia stood in silence. Then she held out her hand to the young woman.

"I thank you," she said. "You have done right to tell me all that you have. Goodby!"

"What are you going to do?" asked Blanche.

"I don't know yet," replied Virginia. "I want to think—maybe a solution will come."

And as she was driving back to her hotel the solution did come—in the crystallization of a determination to take the saving of Richard Gordon into her own hands. It was for her that he was risking his life. She would be a coward to do one whit less than her plain duty. There was no one upon whom she could call to do this thing for her, since she realized that whoever attempted it must risk his life in pitting himself against Taylor and his confederates—desperate men who already had planned upon one murder in the furtherance of their dishonorable purpose.

She thought of writing her mother first; but deliberation assured her that her parent would do everything in her power to prevent the carrying out of a scheme which Virginia herself knew to be little short of madness—and yet she could think of no other way. No, she would wait until it was too late to recall her before she let her mother know her purpose.

So instead of returning at once to her hotel, Virginia drove to the offices of a transatlantic steamship company, where she made inquiries as to sailings and connections for Mombasa, Africa. To her delight she discovered that by sailing the following morning she could make direct connections at Liverpool. Once committed to her plan she permitted no doubts to weaken her determination, but booked her passage immediately and returned uptown to make necessary purchases and obtain currency and a letter of credit through a banker friend of her grandfather.

The morning that she sailed she posted a long letter to her mother in which she explained her plans fully, and frankly stated that she had intentionally left her mother in ignorance of them until now for fear she would find the means to prevent their consummation.

"I know that, to say the least," she wrote, "the thing that I am going to do is most unconventional and I realize also that it is not unfraught with dangers; but I cannot see a total stranger sacrifice his life in our service without a willingness to make an equal sacrifice, if necessary, in his."

And when her mother read the letter, though her heart was heavy with fear and sorrow, she felt that her daughter had done no more than the honor of the Scotts demanded.

To Virginia the long journey seemed an eternity, but at last it came to an end and she found herself negotiating with an agent at Mabido for native porters and guards and the considerable outfit necessary to African travel. From this man she learned that Gordon had left for the interior a month before, but he had not heard of a man by the name of Taylor, though there had been, he said, another party of three Americans who had followed Gordon by about a week. These had been bound for Victoria Nyanza to hunt, and the agent smiled as he recalled their evident unfamiliarity with all things pertaining to their avocation.

Virginia asked him to describe these men, and in the description of one she recognized Taylor and rightly guessed that the others were Kelly and Gootch. So three men, one of them an unprincipled scoundrel, had gone out into the savage, lawless wilds on the trail of Richard Gordon! Virginia went cold as the fear swept her that she was too late.

Further questioning of the agent revealed the fact that while Gordon and the other three had arrived simultaneously they had had no intercourse, and that Gordon had obtained considerable start of the others because of his familiarity with customs of African travel and the utter ignorance of the others of the first essentials of their requirements.

This hope sustained her: that Gordon with his superior knowledge and experience had been able to outdistance the others, and that she, by travelling light and carefully selecting her party, might overtake them before they overtook Gordon or met him upon his return.

With this idea in mind Virginia hastened her preparations, and once on the march urged her safari on to utmost speed. Almost from the start she discovered that her head man, while apparently loyal to her, had but meagre control of the men of the safari, who were inclined to be insubordinate and quarrelsome. The result was that to her other burdens was added constant apprehension from this source, since it not only threatened her own welfare but the success of her mission as well.

It was upon the tenth day that the first really flagrant breach of discipline occurred—one which the headman could not handle or the girl permit to pass unnoticed. The men had long been grumbling at the forced marching which had fallen to their lot since the very beginning, notwithstanding the fact that they had been employed with the distinct understanding that such was to be the nature of the duty. To-day, after the midday rest, the porters were unusually slow in shouldering their packs, and there was much muttering and grumbling as the headman went among them trying to enforce his commands by means of all manner of terrible threats. Some of the men had risen sullenly and adjusted their burdens, others still sat upon the ground eying the headman, but making no move to obey him. Virginia was at a little distance waiting for the safari to set out. She was a witness to all which transpired. She saw a hulking black Hercules slowly raise his pack in laggard response to the commands of the excited headman.

(To Be Continued.)

Such Is Life!

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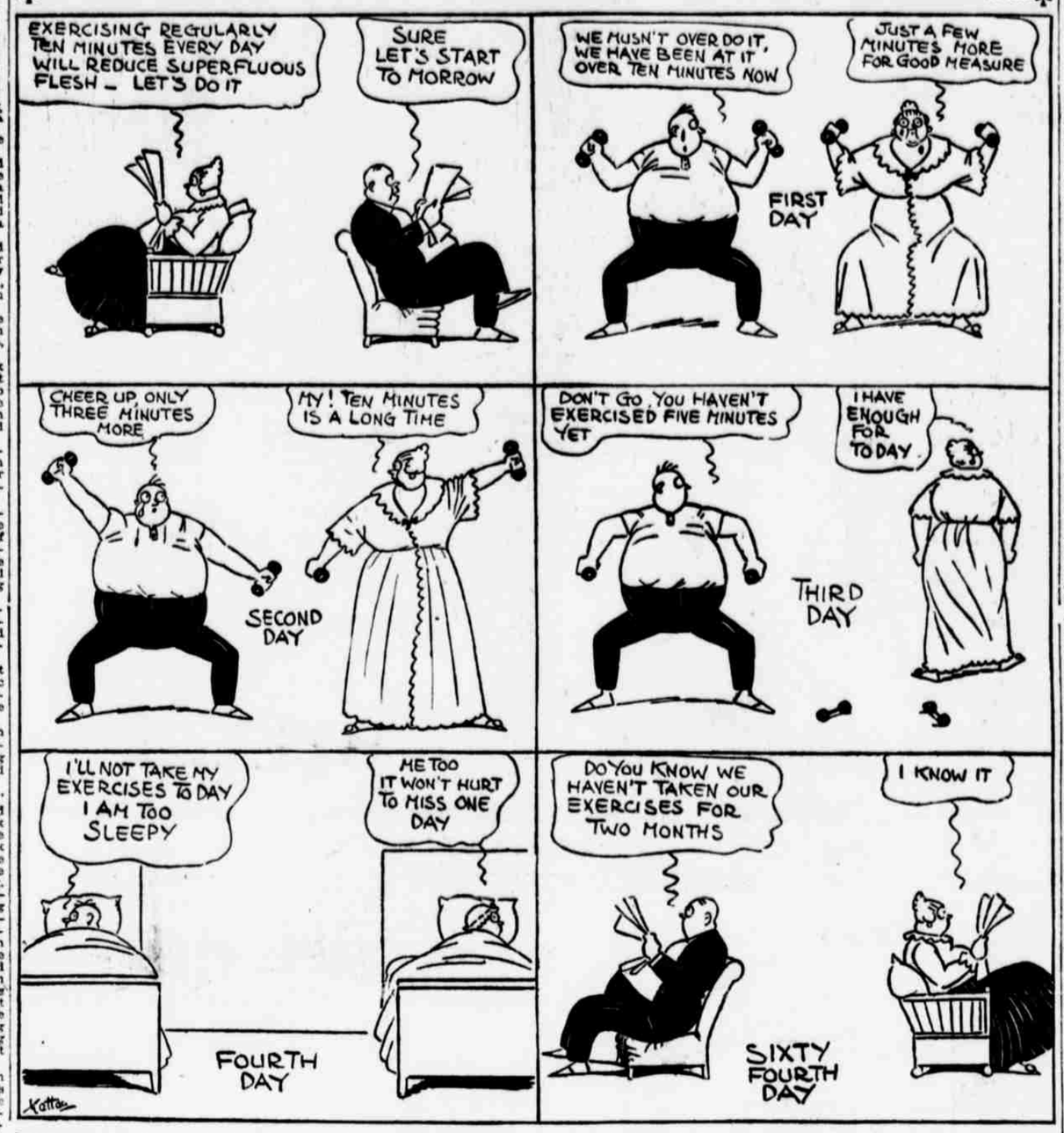
By Maurice Ketten



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