Tarzan of the Apes

by Edgar Rice Burroughs

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He was a soldier of France, and he would teach these beasts how an officer and a gentleman died.

Tarzan of the apes needed no interpreter to translate the story of those distant shots. With Jane Porter's kisses still warm upon his lips he was swinging with incredible rapidity through the forest trees straight toward the village of Mbonga.

He was not interested in the location of the encounter, for he judged that that would soon be over. Those who were killed he could not aid; those who escaped would not need his assistance.

It was to those who had neither been killed nor escaped that he hastened. And he knew that he could find them by the great post in the center of Mbonga's village.

Many times had Tarzan seen Mbonga's black raiding parties return from the northward with prisoners, and always were the same scenes enacted about that grim stake, beneath the flaring light of many fires.

Tarzan had looked with complacency upon their former orgies, only occasionally interfering for the pleasure of baiting the blacks. But heretofore their victims had been men of their own color. Tonight it was different. White men, men of Tarzan's own race, might be even now suffering the agonies of torture.

On he sped. In a few minutes he swung into the trees above Mbonga's village. Ah, he was not quite too late! The figure at the stake was very still.

Tarzan knew their customs. The deathblow had been struck. He could tell almost to a minute how far the dance had gone.

In another instant Mbonga's knife would sever one of the victim's ears. That would mark the beginning of the end, for very shortly after only a writhing mass of mutilated flesh would remain.

The stake stood forty feet from the nearest tree. Tarzan coiled his rope. Then there rose suddenly above the fiendish cries of the dancing demons the awful challenge of the ape man.

The dancers halted as though turned to stone. The rope sped with a singing whir high above the heads of the blacks. It was quite invisible in the flaring lights of the campfires.

D'Arnot opened his eyes.

A huge black, standing directly before him, lunged backward as though felled by an invisible hand.

Struggling and shrieking, his body, rolling from side to side, moved quickly toward the shadows beneath the trees. The blacks, their eyes protruding in horror, watched spellbound.

Once beneath the trees the body rose straight into the air, and as it disappeared into the foliage above the terrified negroes, screaming with fright, broke into a mad race for the village gate.

D'Arnot was left alone. He was a brave man, but he had felt the short hairs bristle upon the nape of his neck when that uncanny cry rose upon the air.

As he watched the spot where the body had entered the tree he heard the sounds of movement there. The branches swayed as though under the weight of a man's body. There was a crash, and the black came sprawling to earth again, to lie very quietly where he had fallen.

Immediately after him came a white body, but this one alighted erect.

D'Arnot saw a clean limbed young giant emerge from the shadows into the firelight and come quickly toward him.

What could it mean? Who could it be? Some new creature of torture and destruction doubtless.

D'Arnot waited. His eyes never left the face of the advancing man. The frank, clear eyes did not waver beneath his fixed gaze.

D'Arnot was reassured, but still without much hope, though he felt that that face could not mask a cruel heart.

Without a word Tarzan of the apes cut the bonds which held the Frenchman. Weak from suffering and loss of blood, he would have fallen but for the strong arm that caught him.

He felt himself lifted from the ground.

There was a sensation as of flying, and then he lost consciousness.

* * * * * * *

When dawn broke upon the little camp of Frenchmen in the heart of the jungle it found a sad and disheartened group.

As soon as it was light enough to see their surroundings Lieutenant Charpentier sent men in groups of three in several directions to locate the trail, and in ten minutes it was found, and the expedition was hurrying back toward the beach.

It was slow work, for they bore the bodies of six dead men, two more having succumbed during the night, and several of those who were wounded required support to move even very slowly.

Charpentier had decided to return to camp for re-enforcements and then make an attempt to track down the natives and rescue D'Arnot.

It was late in the afternoon when the exhausted men reached the clearing by the beach, but for two of them the return brought so great a happiness that all their suffering and heartbreaking grief were forgotten on the instant.

As the little party emerged from the jungle the first person that Professor Porter and Cecil Clayton saw was Jane Porter standing by the cabin door.

With a little cry of joy and relief she ran forward to greet them, throwing her arms about her father's neck and bursting into tears for the first time since they had been cast upon this hideous and adventurous shore.

Professor Porter, burying his old face in the girl's shoulder, sobbed like a tired child.

Jane Porter led him toward the cabin, and the Frenchmen turned toward the beach from which several of their fellows were advancing to meet them.

Clayton, wishing to leave father and daughter alone, joined the sailors and remained talking with the officers until their boat pulled away toward the cruiser, whither Lieutenant Charpentier was bound to report the unhappy outcome of his adventure.

Then Clayton turned back slowly toward the cabin. His heart was filled with happiness. The woman he loved was safe.

As he approached the cabin he saw her coming out. When she saw him she hurried forward to meet him.

"Jane!" he cried. "Heaven has been good to us indeed. Tell me how you escaped—what form Providence took to save you for—us."

He had never before called her by her given name. Forty-eight hours before it would have suffused Jane Porter with a soft glow of pleasure to hear that name from Clayton's lips. Now it frightened her.

"Mr. Clayton," she said quietly, extending her hand, "first let me thank you for your loyalty to my father. He has told me how noble and self sacrificing you have been. How can we ever repay you?"

Clayton noticed that she did not return his familiar salutation, but he felt no misgivings on that score. She had been through so much. This was no time to force his love upon her, he quickly realized.

"I am already repaid," he laughed, "just to see you and Professor Porter both safe, well and together again."

The girl bowed her head. There was a question she wanted to ask.

"Where is the forest man who went to rescue you? Why did he not return?"

"I do not understand," said Clayton. "Whom do you mean?"

"He who has saved each of us—who saved me from the gorilla."

"Oh!" cried Clayton, in surprise. "It was he who rescued you? You have not told me anything of your adventure, don't you know. Tell me; do."

"But the woodman," she urged. "Have you not seen him? When we

"He is only a beast of the jungle, Miss Porter."

heard the shots in the jungle, very faint and far away, he left me. We had just reached the clearing, and he hurried off in the direction of the fighting. I know he went to aid you."

Her tone was almost pleading, her manner tense with suppressed emotion. Clayton could not but notice it, and he wondered vaguely why she was so deeply moved, so anxious to know the whereabouts of this strange creature. He did not suspect the truth, for how could he?

In his breast, unknown to himself, was implanted the first germ of jealousy and suspicion of the ape man to whom he owed his life.

"We did not see him," he replied quietly. "He did not join us. Possibly he joined his own tribe, the men who attacked us."

He did not know why he had said it, for he did not believe it. But love is a strange master.

The girl looked at him wide eyed for a moment.

"No!" she exclaimed vehemently, much too vehemently, he thought. "It could not be. They were negroes. He is a white man—and a gentleman!"

Clayton was a generous and chivalrous man, but something in the girl's defense of the forest man stirred him to unreasoning jealousy, so that for the instant he forgot all that he owed to this wild demigod, and he answered her with a half sneer upon his lip.

"Possibly you are right, Miss Porter," he said, "but I do not think that any of us need worry about our carrion eating acquaintance. The chances are that he is some half demented castaway who will forget us more quickly, but no more surely, than we shall forget him. He is only a beast of the jungle, Miss Porter."

The girl did not answer, but she felt her heart shrivel within her. Anger and hate against one we love steel our hearts, but contempt or pity leaves us silent and ashamed.

CHAPTER XVII.

Left in the Jungle.

SLOWLY Jane turned and walked back to the cabin. She tried to imagine her wood god by her side in the saloon of an ocean liner. She saw him eating with his hands, tearing his food like a beast of prey and wiping his greasy fingers upon his thighs. She shuddered.

She saw him as she introduced him to her friends—uncouth, illiterate, a boor—and she winced.

She had reached her room now, and as she sat upon the edge of her bed of ferns and grasses, with one hand resting upon her rising and falling bosom, she felt the hard outlines of the man's locket beneath her waist.

She drew it out, holding it in the palm of her hand for a moment with tear blurred eyes bent upon it. Then she raised it to her lips and, crushing it there, buried her face in the soft ferns, sobbing.

"Beast?" she murmured. "Then heaven make me a beast, for, man or beast, I am yours!"

She did not see Clayton again that day. Esmeralda brought her supper to her, and she sent word to her father that she was suffering from the reaction following her adventure.

The next morning Clayton left early with the relief expedition in search of Lieutenant d'Arnot. There were 200 armed men this time, with ten officers and two surgeons and provisions for a week.

They carried bedding and hammocks, the latter for transporting their sick and wounded.

It was a determined and angry company—a punitive expedition as well as one of relief. They reached the scene of the skirmish of the previous expedition shortly after noon, for they were now traveling a known trail, and no time was lost in exploring.

From there on the elephant trail led straight to Mbonga's village. It was but 2 o'clock when the head of the column halted upon the edge of the clearing.

In a few minutes the village street was filled with armed men fighting in an inextricable tangle. The revolvers, carbines and cutlasses of the Frenchmen crumpled the native spearmen and struck down the black archers with their bolts half drawn.

Soon the battle turned to a wild rout and then to grim massacre, for the French sailors had seen bits of D'Arnot's uniform upon several of the black warriors who opposed them.

They spared the children and those of the women whom they were not forced to kill in self defense, but when at length they stopped, panting, blood covered and sweating, it was because there lived to oppose them no single warrior of all the savage village of Mbonga.

Carefully they ransacked every hut and corner of the village, but no sign of D'Arnot could they find. They questioned the prisoners by signs. Only excited gestures and expressions of fear could they obtain in response to their inquiries concerning their fellow.

At length all hope left them, and they prepared to camp for the night within the village.

The prisoners were herded into three huts, where they were heavily guarded. Sentries were posted at the barred gates, and finally the village was wrapped in the silence of slumber except for the wailing of the native women for their dead.

The next morning they set out upon the return march. Their original intention had been to burn the village, but this idea was abandoned, and the prisoners were left behind, weeping and moaning, but with roofs to cover them and a palisade for refuge from the beasts of the jungle.

Slowly the expedition retraced its steps of the preceding day. Ten loaded hammocks retarded its pace. In eight of them lay the more seriously wounded, while two swung beneath the weight of the dead.

Clayton and Lieutenant Charpentier brought up the rear of the column, the Englishman silent in respect for the other's grief, for D'Arnot and Charpentier had been inseparable since boyhood.

It was quite late when they reached the cabin by the beach. The dead and wounded men were tenderly placed in boats and rowed silently toward the cruiser.

Clayton, exhausted from his five days of laborious marching through the jungle and from the effects of his two battles with blacks, turned toward the cabin to seek a mouthful of food and then the comparative ease of his bed of grasses after two nights in the jungle.

By the cabin door stood Jane Porter.

"The poor lieutenant?" she asked. "Did you find no trace of him?"

"We were too late, Miss Porter," he replied sadly.

"Tell me—what had happened?" she asked.

"I cannot, Miss Porter. It is too horrible."

She thought of what Clayton had said of the forest man's probable relationship to this tribe.

To him, too, suddenly came the thought of the forest man. The strange jealousy he had felt two days before swept over him once more.

In sudden brutality that was unlike him he blurted out:

"When your forest god left you he was doubtless hurrying to the feast."

He was sorry ere the words were spoken, though he did not know how cruelly they had cut the girl. His regret was for his baseless disloyalty to one who had saved the lives of every member of his party nor ever offered harm to one.

The girl's head went high.

"There could be but one suitable reply to your assertion," she said icily, "and I regret that I am not a man that I might make it."

She turned quickly and entered the cabin.

Clayton was an Englishman, so the girl had passed quite out of sight before he deduced what reply a man would have made.

"Upon my word," he said ruefully, "she called me a liar. And I fancy I deserved it. I'd better go to bed."

But before he did so he called gently to Jane Porter upon the opposite side of the sailcloth partition, for he wished to apologize, but he might as well have addressed the sphinx. Then he wrote upon a piece of paper and shoved it beneath the partition.

Jane Porter saw the little note and ignored it, for she was very angry and hurt and mortified, but she was a woman, and so eventually she picked it up and read it. It said:

My Dear Miss Porter—I had no reason to insinuate what I did. My only excuse is that my nerves must be unstrung, which is no excuse at all.

Please try to think that I did not say it. I am very sorry. I would not have hurt you above all others in the world. Say that you forgive me.

WM. CECIL CLAYTON.

"He did think it or he never would have said it," reasoned the girl. "But it cannot be true. I know it is not true!"

One sentence in the letter frightened her—"I would not have hurt you above all others in the world."

A week ago that sentence would have filled her with delight. Now it depressed her.

She wished she had never met Clayton. She was sorry that she had ever seen the forest god—no, she was glad. And there was that other note she had found in the grass before the cabin the day after her return from the jungle, the love note signed by Tarzan of the apes.

Who could be this new suitor? If he were another of the wild denizens of this terrible forest, what might he not do to claim her?

* * * * * * *

When D'Arnot regained consciousness he found himself lying upon a bed of soft ferns and grasses beneath a little A shaped shelter of boughs.

At his feet an opening looked out upon a greensward, and at a little distance beyond was the dense wall of jungle and forest.

He was very lame and sore and weak, and as full consciousness returned he felt the sharp torture of many cruel wounds and the dull aching of every bone and muscle in his body as a result of the hideous beating he had received.

The incessant hum of the jungle, the rustling of millions of leaves, the buzz of insects, the voices of the birds and monkeys seemed blended into a strangely soothing purr, as though he lay apart, far from the myriad life that surrounded him and whose sounds came to him only faintly.

At length he fell into slumber, nor did he awake again until afternoon. Looking through the opening at his feet, he saw the figure of a man squatting on his haunches.

The broad, muscular back was turned toward him; but, tanned though it was, D'Arnot saw that it was the back of a white man, and he thanked heaven.

The Frenchman called faintly. The man turned and, rising, came toward the shelter. His face was very handsome, the handsomest, thought D'Arnot, that he had ever seen.

Stooping, he crawled into the shelter beside the wounded officer and placed a cool hand upon his forehead.

D'Arnot spoke to him in French, but the man only shook his head—sadly, it seemed to the Frenchman.

Then D'Arnot tried English, but still the man shook his head. Italian, Spanish and German brought similar discouragement.

After examining D'Arnot's wounds the man left the shelter and disappeared. In half an hour he was back with fruit and a hollow, gourdlike vegetable filled with water.

D'Arnot drank and ate a little. Suddenly the man hastened from the shelter, only to return a few minutes later with several pieces of bark and—wonder of wonders—a lead pencil.

Squatting beside D'Arnot, he wrote for a minute on the smooth inner surface of the bark; then he handed it to the Frenchman. D'Arnot read:

I am Tarzan of the apes. Who are you? Can you read this language?

(Continued in next week's issue)

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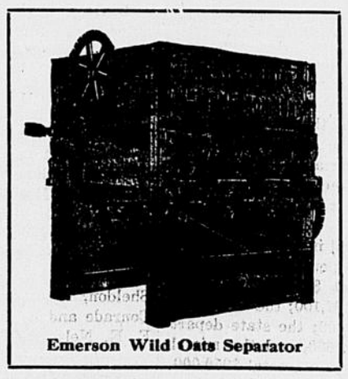

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