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Chapter 26 - The Passing of the Ape-Man

The next morning they set out upon the short journey to Tarzan's cabin. Four Waziri bore the body of the dead Englishman. It had been the ape-man's suggestion that Clayton be buried beside the former Lord Greystoke near the edge of the jungle against the cabin that the older man had built.

Jane Porter was glad that it was to be so, and in her heart of hearts she wondered at the marvelous fineness of character of this wondrous man, who, though raised by brutes and among brutes, had the true chivalry and tenderness which only associates with the refinements of the highest civilization.

They had proceeded some three miles of the five that had separated them from Tarzan's own beach when the Waziri who were ahead stopped suddenly, pointing in amazement at a strange figure approaching them along the beach. It was a man with a shiny silk hat, who walked slowly with bent head, and hands clasped behind him underneath the tails of his long, black coat.

At sight of him Jane Porter uttered a little cry of surprise and joy, and ran quickly ahead to meet him. At the sound of her voice the old man looked up, and when he saw who it was confronting him he, too, cried out in relief and happiness. As Professor Archimedes Q. Porter folded his daughter in his arms tears streamed down his seamed old face, and it was several minutes before he could control himself sufficiently to speak.

When a moment later he recognized Tarzan it was with difficulty that they could convince him that his sorrow had not unbalanced his mind, for with the other members of the party he had been so thoroughly convinced that the ape-man was dead it was a problem to reconcile the conviction with the very lifelike appearance of Jane's "forest god." The old man was deeply touched at the news of Clayton's death.

"I cannot understand it," he said. "Monsieur Thurau assured us that Clayton passed away many days ago."

"Thuran is with you?" asked Tarzan.

"Yes; he but recently found us and led us to your cabin. We were camped but a short distance north of it. Bless me, but he will be delighted to see you both."

"And surprised," commented Tarzan.

A short time later the strange party came to the clearing in which stood the ape-man's cabin. It was filled with people coming and going, and almost the first whom Tarzan saw was D'Arnot.

"Paul!" he cried. "In the name of sanity what are you doing here? Or are we all insane?"

It was quickly explained, however, as were many other seemingly strange things. D'Arnot's ship had been cruising along the coast, on patrol duty, when at the lieutenant's suggestion they had anchored off the little landlocked harbor to have another look at the cabin and the jungle in which many of the officers and men had taken part in exciting adventures two years before. On landing they had found Lord Tennington's party, and arrangements were being made to take them all on board the following morning, and carry them back to civilization.

Hazel Strong and her mother, Esmeralda, and Mr. Samuel T. Philander were almost overcome by happiness at Jane Porter's safe return. Her escape seemed to them little short of miraculous, and it was the consensus of opinion that it could have been achieved by no other man than Tarzan of the Apes. They loaded the uncomfortable ape-man with eulogies and attentions until he wished himself back in the amphitheater of the apes.

All were interested in his savage Waziri, and many were the gifts the black men received from these friends of their king, but when they learned that he might sail away from them upon the great canoe that lay at anchor a mile off shore they became very sad.

As yet the newcomers had seen nothing of Lord Tennington and Monsieur Thurau. They had gone out for fresh meat early in the day, and had not yet returned.

"How surprised this man, whose name you say is Rokoff, will be to see you," said Jane Porter to Tarzan.

"His surprise will be short-lived," replied the ape-man grimly, and there was that in his tone that made her look up into his face in alarm. What she read there evidently confirmed her fears, for she put her hand upon his arm, and pleaded with him to leave the Russian to the laws of France.

"In the heart of the jungle, dear," she said, "with no other form of right or justice to appeal to other than your own mighty muscles, you would be warranted in executing upon this man the sentence he deserves; but with the strong arm of a civilized government at your disposal it would be murder to kill him now. Even your friends would have to submit to your arrest, or if you resisted it would plunge us all into misery and unhappiness again. I cannot bear to lose you again, my Tarzan. Promise me that you will but turn him over to Captain Dufranne, and let the law take its course--the beast is not worth risking our happiness for."

He saw the wisdom of her appeal, and promised. A half hour later Rokoff and Tennington emerged from the jungle. They were walking side by side. Tennington was the first to note the presence of strangers in the camp. He saw the black warriors palavering with the sailors from the cruiser, and then he saw a lithe, brown giant talking with Lieutenant D'Arnot and Captain Dufranne.

"Who is that, I wonder," said Tennington to Rokoff, and as the Russian raised his eyes and met those of the ape-man full upon him, he staggered and went white.

"SAPRISTII!" he cried, and before Tennington realized what he intended he had thrown his gun to his shoulder, and aiming point-blank at Tarzan pulled the trigger. But the Englishman was close to him--so close that his hand reached the leveled barrel a fraction of a second before the hammer fell upon the cartridge, and the bullet that was intended for Tarzan's heart whirred harmlessly above his head.

Before the Russian could fire again the ape-man was upon him and had wrested the firearm from his grasp. Captain Dufranne, Lieutenant D'Arnot, and a dozen sailors had rushed up at the sound of the shot, and now Tarzan turned the Russian over to them without a word. He had explained the matter to the French commander before Rokoff arrived, and the officer gave immediate orders to place the Russian in irons and confine him on board the cruiser.

Just before the guard escorted the prisoner into the small boat that was to transport him to his temporary prison Tarzan asked permission to search him, and to his delight found the stolen papers concealed upon his person.

The shot had brought Jane Porter and the others from the cabin, and a moment after the excitement had died down she greeted the surprised Lord Tennington. Tarzan joined them after he had taken the papers from Rokoff, and, as he approached, Jane Porter introduced him to Tennington.

"John Clayton, Lord Greystoke, my lord," she said.

The Englishman looked his astonishment in spite of his most herculean efforts to appear courteous, and it required many repetitions of the strange story of the ape-man as told by himself, Jane Porter, and Lieutenant D'Arnot to convince Lord Tennington that they were not all quite mad.

At sunset they buried William Cecil Clayton beside the jungle graves of his uncle and his aunt, the former Lord and Lady Greystoke. And it was at Tarzan's request that three volleys were fired over the last resting place of "a brave man, who met his death bravely."

Professor Porter, who in his younger days had been ordained a minister, conducted the simple services for the dead. About the grave, with bowed heads, stood as strange a company of mourners as the sun ever looked down upon. There were French officers and sailors, two English lords, Americans, and a score of savage African braves.

Following the funeral Tarzan asked Captain Dufranne to delay the sailing of the cruiser a couple of days while he went inland a few miles to fetch his "belongings," and the officer gladly granted the favor.

Late the next afternoon Tarzan and his Waziri returned with the first load of "belongings," and when the party saw the ancient ingots of virgin gold they swarmed upon the ape-man with a thousand questions; but he was smilingly obdurate to their appeals--he declined to give them the slightest clew as to the source of his immense treasure. "There are a thousand that I left behind," he explained, "for every one that I brought away, and when these are spent I may wish to return for more."

The next day he returned to camp with the balance of his ingots, and when they were stored on board the cruiser Captain Dufranne said he felt like the commander of an old-time Spanish galleon returning from the treasure cities of the Aztecs. "I don't know what minute my crew will cut my throat, and take over the ship," he added.

The next morning, as they were preparing to embark upon the cruiser, Tarzan ventured a suggestion to Jane Porter.

"Wild beasts are supposed to be devoid of sentiment," he said, "but nevertheless I should like to be married in the cabin where I was born, beside the graves of my mother and my father, and surrounded by the savage jungle that always has been my home."

"Would it be quite regular, dear?" she asked. "For if it would I know of no other place in which I should rather be married to my forest god than beneath the shade of his primeval forest."

And when they spoke of it to the others they were assured that it would be quite regular, and a most splendid termination of a remarkable romance. So the entire party assembled within the little cabin and about the door to witness the second ceremony that Professor Porter was to solemnize within three days.

D'Arnot was to be best man, and Hazel Strong bridesmaid, until Tennington upset all the arrangements by another of his marvelous "ideas."

"If Mrs. Strong is agreeable," he said, taking the bridesmaid's hand in his, "Hazel and I think it would be ripping to make it a double wedding."

The next day they sailed, and as the cruiser steamed slowly out to sea a tall man, immaculate in white flannel, and a graceful girl leaned against her rail to watch the receding shore line upon which danced twenty naked, black warriors of the Waziri, waving their war spears above their savage heads, and shouting farewells to their departing king.

"I should hate to think that I am looking upon the jungle for the last time, dear," he said, "were it not that I know that I am going to a new world of happiness with you forever," and, bending down, Tarzan of the Apes kissed his mate upon her lips.

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