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Chapter 5 - The Golden Locket

The little British army in East Africa, after suffering severe reverses at the hands of a numerically much superior force, was at last coming into its own. The German offensive had been broken and the Huns were now slowly and doggedly retreating along the railway to Tanga. The break in the German lines had followed the clearing of a section of their left-flank trenches of native soldiers by Tarzan and Numa, the lion, upon that memorable night that the ape-man had loosed a famishing man-eater among the superstitious and terror-stricken blacks. The Second Rhodesian Regiment had immediately taken possession of the abandoned trench and from this position their flanking fire had raked contiguous sections of the German line, the diversion rendering possible a successful night attack on the part of the balance of the British forces.

Weeks had elapsed. The Germans were contesting stubbornly every mile of waterless, thorn-covered ground and clinging desperately to their positions along the railway. The officers of the Second Rhodesians had seen nothing more of Tarzan of the Apes since he had slain Unterlieutenant von Goss and disappeared toward the very heart of the German position, and there were those among them who believed that he had been killed within the enemy lines.

"They may have killed him," assented Colonel Capell; "but I fancy they never captured the beggar alive."

Nor had they, nor killed him either. Tarzan had spent those intervening weeks pleasantly and profitably. He had amassed a considerable fund of knowledge concerning the disposition and strength of German troops, their methods of warfare, and the various ways in which a lone Tarmangani might annoy an army and lower its morale.

At present he was prompted by a specific desire. There was a certain German spy whom he wished to capture alive and take back to the British. When he had made his first visit to German headquarters, he had seen a young woman deliver a paper to the German general, and later he had seen that same young woman within the British lines in the uniform of a British officer. The conclusions were obvious -- she was a spy.

And so Tarzan haunted German headquarters upon many nights hoping to see her again or to pick up some clue as to her whereabouts, and at the same time he utilized many an artifice whereby he might bring terror to the hearts of the Germans. That he was successful was often demonstrated by the snatches of conversation he overheard as he prowled through the German camps. One night as he lay concealed in the bushes close beside a regimental headquarters he listened to the conversation of several Boche officers. One of the men reverted to the stories told by the native troops in connection with their rout by a lion several weeks before and the simultaneous appearance in their trenches of a naked, white giant whom they were perfectly assured was some demon of the jungle.

"The fellow must have been the same as he who leaped into the general's headquarters and carried off Schneider," asserted one. "I wonder how he happened to single out the poor major. They say the creature seemed interested in no one but Schneider. He had von Kelter in his grasp, and he might easily have taken the general himself; but he ignored them all except Schneider. Him he pursued about the room, seized and carried off into the night. Gott knows what his fate was."

"Captain Fritz Schneider has some sort of theory," said another. "He told me only a week or two ago that he thinks he knows why his brother was taken -- that it was a case of mistaken identity. He was not so sure about it until von Goss was killed, apparently by the same creature, the night the lion entered the trenches. Von Goss was attached to Schneider's company. One of Schneider's men was found with his neck wrung the same night that the major was carried off and Schneider thinks that this devil is after him and his command -- that it came for him that night and got his brother by mistake. He says Kraut told him that in presenting the major to Fraulein Kirchner the former's name was no sooner spoken than this wild man leaped through the window and made for him."

Suddenly the little group became rigid -- listening. "What was that?" snapped one, eyeing the bushes from which a smothered snarl had issued as Tarzan of the Apes realized that through his mistake the perpetrator of the horrid crime at his bungalow still lived -- that the murderer of his wife went yet unpunished.

For a long minute the officers stood with tensed nerves, every eye riveted upon the bushes from whence the ominous sound had issued. Each recalled recent mysterious disappearances from the heart of camps as well as from lonely out-guards. Each thought of the silent dead he had seen, slain almost within sight of their fellows by some unseen creature. They thought of the marks upon dead throats -- made by talons or by giant fingers, they could not tell which -- and those upon shoulders and jugulars where powerful teeth had fastened and they waited with drawn pistols.

Once the bushes moved almost imperceptibly and an instant later one of the officers, without warning, fired into them; but Tarzan of the Apes was not there. In the interval between the moving of the bushes and the firing of the shot he had melted into the night. Ten minutes later he was hovering on the outskirts of that part of camp where were bivouacked for the night the black soldiers of a native company commanded by one Hauptmann Fritz Schneider. The men were stretched upon the ground without tents; but there were tents pitched for the officers. Toward these Tarzan crept. It was slow and perilous work, as the Germans were now upon the alert for the uncanny foe that crept into their camps to take his toll by night, yet the ape-man passed their sentinels, eluded the vigilance of the interior guard, and crept at last to the rear of the officers' line.

Here he flattened himself against the ground close behind the nearest tent and listened. From within came the regular breathing of a sleeping man -- one only. Tarzan was satisfied. With his knife he cut the tie strings of the rear flap and entered. He made no noise. The shadow of a falling leaf, floating gently to earth upon a still day, could have been no more soundless. He moved to the side of the sleeping man and bent low over him. He could not know, of course, whether it was Schneider or another, as he had never seen Schneider; but he meant to know and to know even more. Gently he shook the man by the shoulder. The fellow turned heavily and grunted in a thick guttural.

"Silence!" admonished the ape-man in a low whisper. "Silence -- I kill."

The Hun opened his eyes. In the dim light he saw a giant figure bending over him. Now a mighty hand grasped his shoulder and another closed lightly about his throat.

"Make no outcry," commanded Tarzan; "but answer in a whisper my questions. What is your name?"

"Luberg," replied the officer. He was trembling. The weird presence of this naked giant filled him with dread. He, too, recalled the men mysteriously murdered in the still watches of the night camps. "What do you want?"

"Where is Hauptmann Fritz Schneider?" asked Tarzan, "Which is his tent?"

"He is not here," replied Luberg. "He was sent to Wilhelmsstal yesterday."

"I shall not kill you -- now," said the ape-man. "First I shall go and learn if you have lied to me and if you have your death shall be the more terrible. Do you know how Major Schneider died?"

Luberg shook his head negatively.

"I do," continued Tarzan, "and it was not a nice way to die -- even for an accursed German. Turn over with your face down and cover your eyes. Do not move or make any sound."

The man did as he was bid and the instant that his eyes were turned away, Tarzan slipped from the tent. An hour later he was outside the German camp and headed for the little hill town of Wilhelmsstal, the summer seat of government of German East Africa.

Fraulein Bertha Kircher was lost. She was humiliated and angry -- it was long before she would admit it, that she, who prided herself upon her woodcraft, was lost in this little patch of country between the Pangani and the Tanga railway. She knew that Wilhelmsstal lay southeast of her about fifty miles; but, through a combination of untoward circumstances, she found herself unable to determine which was southeast.

In the first place she had set out from German headquarters on a well-marked road that was being traveled by troops and with every reason to believe that she would follow that road to Wilhelmsstal. Later she had been warned from this road by word that a strong British patrol had come down the west bank of the Pangani, effected a crossing south of her, and was even then marching on the railway at Tonda.

After leaving the road she found herself in thick bush and as the sky was heavily overcast she presently had recourse to her compass and it was not until then that she discovered to her dismay that she did not have it with her. So sure was she of her woodcraft, however, that she continued on in the direction she thought west until she had covered sufficient distance to warrant her in feeling assured that, by now turning south, she could pass safely in rear of the British patrol.

Nor did she commence to feel any doubts until long after she had again turned toward the east well south, as she thought, of the patrol. It was late afternoon -- she should long since have struck the road again south of Tonda; but she had found no road and now she began to feel real anxiety.

Her horse had traveled all day without food or water, night was approaching and with it a realization that she was hopelessly lost in a wild and trackless country notorious principally for its tsetse flies and savage beasts. It was maddening to know that she had absolutely no knowledge of the direction she was traveling -- that she might be forging steadily further from the railway, deeper into the gloomy and forbidding country toward the Pangani; yet it was impossible to stop -- she must go on.

Bertha Kircher was no coward, whatever else she may have been, but as night began to close down around her she could not shut out from her mind entirely contemplation of the terrors of the long hours ahead before the rising sun should dissipate the Stygian gloom -- the horrid jungle night -- that lures forth all the prowling, preying creatures of destruction.

She found, just before dark, an open meadow-like break in the almost interminable bush. There was a small clump of trees near the center and here she decided to camp. The grass was high and thick, affording feed for her horse and a bed for herself, and there was more than enough dead wood lying about the trees to furnish a good fire well through the night. Removing the saddle and bridle from her mount she placed them at the foot of a tree and then picketed the animal close by. Then she busied herself collecting firewood and by the time darkness had fallen she had a good fire and enough wood to last until morning.

From her saddlebags she took cold food and from her canteen a swallow of water. She could not afford more than a small swallow for she could not know how long a time it might be before she should find more. It filled her with sorrow that her poor horse must go waterless, for even German spies may have hearts and this one was very young and very feminine.

It was now dark. There was neither moon nor stars and the light from her fire only accentuated the blackness beyond. She could see the grass about her and the boles of the trees which stood out in brilliant relief against the solid background of impenetrable night, and beyond the firelight there was nothing.

The jungle seemed ominously quiet. Far away in the distance she heard faintly the boom of big guns; but she could not locate their direction. She strained her ears until her nerves were on the point of breaking; but she could not tell from whence the sound came. And it meant so much to her to know, for the battle-lines were north of her and if she could but locate the direction of the firing she would know which way to go in the morning.

In the morning! Would she live to see another morning? She squared her shoulders and shook herself together. Such thoughts must be banished -- they would never do. Bravely she hummed an air as she arranged her saddle near the fire and pulled a quantity of long grass to make a comfortable seat over which she spread her saddle blanket. Then she unstrapped a heavy, military coat from the cantle of her saddle and donned it, for the air was already chill.

Seating herself where she could lean against the saddle she prepared to maintain a sleepless vigil throughout the night. For an hour the silence was broken only by the distant booming of the guns and the low noises of the feeding horse and then, from possibly a mile away, came the rumbling thunder of a lion's roar. The girl started and laid her hand upon the rifle at her side. A little shudder ran through her slight frame and she could feel the goose flesh rise upon her body.

Again and again was the awful sound repeated and each time she was certain that it came nearer. She could locate the direction of this sound although she could not that of the guns, for the origin of the former was much closer. The lion was up wind and so could not have caught her scent as yet, though he might be approaching to investigate the light of the fire which could doubtless be seen for a considerable distance.

For another fear-filled hour the girl sat straining her eyes and ears out into the black void beyond her little island of light. During all that time the lion did not roar again; but there was constantly the sensation that it was creeping upon her. Again and again she would start and turn to peer into the blackness beyond the trees behind her as her overwrought nerves conjured the stealthy fall of padded feet. She held the rifle across her knees at the ready now and she was trembling from head to foot.

Suddenly her horse raised his head and snorted, and with a little cry of terror the girl sprang to her feet. The animal turned and trotted back toward her until the picket rope brought him to a stand, and then he wheeled about and with ears up-pricked gazed out into the night; but the girl could neither see nor hear aught.

Still another hour of terror passed during which the horse often raised his head to peer long and searchingly into the dark. The girl replenished the fire from time to time. She found herself becoming very sleepy. Her heavy lids persisted in drooping; but she dared not sleep. Fearful lest she might be overcome by the drowsiness that was stealing through her she rose and walked briskly to and fro, then she threw some more wood on the fire, walked over and stroked her horse's muzzle and returned to her seat.

Leaning against the saddle and trying to occupy her mind with plans for the morning; but she must have dozed. With a start she awoke. It was broad daylight. The hideous night with its indescribable terrors was gone.

She could scarce believe the testimony of her senses. She had slept for hours, the fire was out and yet she and the horse were safe and alive, nor was there sign of savage beast about. And, best of all, the sun was shining, pointing the straight road to the east. Hastily she ate a few mouthfuls of her precious rations, which with a swallow of water constituted her breakfast. Then she saddled her horse and mounted. Already she felt that she was as good as safe in Wilhelmstal.

Possibly, however, she might have revised her conclusions could she have seen the two pairs of eyes watching her every move intently from different points in the bush.

Light-hearted and unsuspecting, the girl rode across the clearing toward the bush while directly before her two yellow-green eyes glared round and terrible, a tawny tail twitched nervously and great, padded paws gathered beneath a sleek barrel for a mighty spring. The horse was almost at the edge of the bush when Numa, the lion, launched himself through the air. He struck the animal's right shoulder at the instant that it reared, terrified, to wheel in flight. The force of the impact hurled the horse backward to the ground and so quickly that the girl had no opportunity to extricate herself; but fell to the earth with her mount, her left leg pinned beneath its body.

Horror-stricken, she saw the king of beasts open his mighty jaws and seize the screaming creature by the back of its neck. The great jaws closed, there was an instant's struggle as Numa shook his prey. She could hear the vertebrae crack as the mighty fangs crunched through them, and then the muscles of her faithful friend relaxed in death.

Numa crouched upon his kill. His terrifying eyes rivetted themselves upon the girl's face -- she could feel his hot breath upon her cheek and the odor of the fetid vapor nauseated her. For what seemed an eternity to the girl the two lay staring at each other and then the lion uttered a menacing growl.

Never before had Bertha Kircher been so terrified -- never before had she had such cause for terror. At her hip was a pistol -- a formidable weapon with which to face a man; but a puny thing indeed with which to menace the great beast before her. She knew that at best it could but enrage him and yet she meant to sell her life dearly, for she felt that she must die. No human succor could have availed her even had it been there to offer itself. For a moment she tore her gaze from the hypnotic fascination of that awful face and breathed a last prayer to her God. She did not ask for aid, for she felt that she was beyond even divine succor -- she only asked that the end might come quickly and with as little pain as possible.

No one can prophesy what a lion will do in any given emergency. This one glared and growled at the girl for a moment and then fell to feeding upon the dead horse. Fraulein Kircher wondered for an instant and then attempted to draw her leg cautiously from beneath the body of her mount; but she could not budge it. She increased the force of her efforts and Numa looked up from his feeding to growl again. The girl desisted. She hoped that he might satisfy his hunger and then depart to lie up, but she could not believe that he would leave her there alive. Doubtless he would drag the remains of his kill into the bush for hiding and, as there could be no doubt that he considered her part of his prey, he would certainly come back for her, or possibly drag her in first and kill her.

Again Numa fell to feeding. The girl's nerves were at the breaking point. She wondered that she had not fainted under the strain of terror and shock. She recalled that she often had wished she might see a lion, close to, make a kill and feed upon it. God! how realistically her wish had been granted.

Again she bethought herself of her pistol. As she had fallen, the holster had slipped around so that the weapon now lay beneath her. Very slowly she reached for it; but in so doing she was forced to raise her body from the ground. Instantly the lion was aroused. With the swiftness of a cat he reached across the carcass of the horse and placed a heavy, taloned paw upon her breast, crushing her back to earth, and all the time he growled and snarled horribly. His face was a picture of frightful rage incarnate. For a moment neither moved and then from behind her the girl heard a human voice uttering bestial sounds.

Numa suddenly looked up from the girl's face at the thing beyond her. His growls increased to roars as he drew back, ripping the front of the girl's waist almost from her body with his long talons, exposing her white bosom, which through some miracle of chance the great claws did not touch.

Tarzan of the Apes had witnessed the entire encounter from the moment that Numa had leaped upon his prey. For some time before, he had been watching the girl, and after the lion attacked her he had at first been minded to let Numa have his way with her. What was she but a hated German and a spy besides? He had seen her at General Kraut's headquarters, in conference with the German staff and again he had seen her within the British lines masquerading as a British officer. It was the latter thought that prompted him to interfere. Doubtless General Jan Smuts would be glad to meet and question her. She might be forced to divulge information of value to the British commander before Smuts had her shot.

Tarzan had recognized not only the girl, but the lion as well. All lions may look alike to you and me; but not so to their intimates of the jungle. Each has his individual characteristics of face and form and gait as well defined as those that differentiate members of the human family, and besides these the creatures of the jungle have a still more positive test -- that of scent. Each of us, man or beast, has his own peculiar odor, and it is mostly by this that the beasts of the jungle, endowed with miraculous powers of scent, recognize individuals.

It is the final proof. You have seen it demonstrated a thousand times -- a dog recognizes your voice and looks at you. He knows your face and figure. Good, there can be no doubt in his mind but that it is you; but is he satisfied? No, sir -- he must come up and smell of you. All his other senses may be fallible, but not his sense of smell, and so he makes assurance positive by the final test.

Tarzan recognized Numa as he whom he had muzzled with the hide of Horta, the boar -- as he whom he handled by a rope for two days and finally loosed in a German front-line trench, and he knew that Numa would recognize him -- that he would remember the sharp spear that had goaded him into submission and obedience and Tarzan hoped that the lesson he had learned still remained with the lion.

Now he came forward calling to Numa in the language of the great apes -- warning him away from the girl. It is open to question that Numa, the lion, understood him; but he did understand the menace of the heavy spear that the Tarman-gani carried so ready in his brown, right hand, and so he drew back, growling, trying to decide in his little brain whether to charge or flee.

On came the ape-man with never a pause, straight for the lion. "Go away, Numa," he cried, "or Tarzan will tie you up again and lead you through the jungle without food. See Arad, my spear! Do you recall how his point stuck into you and how with his haft I beat you over the head? Go, Numa! I am Tarzan of the Apes!"

Numa wrinkled the skin of his face into great folds, until his eyes almost disappeared and he growled and roared and snarled and growled again, and when the spear point came at last quite close to him he struck at it viciously with his armed paw; but he drew back. Tarzan stepped over the dead horse and the girl lying behind him gazed in wide-eyed astonishment at the handsome figure driving an angry lion deliberately from its kill.

When Numa had retreated a few yards, the ape-man called back to the girl in perfect German, "Are you badly hurt?"

"I think not," she replied; "but I cannot extricate my foot from beneath my horse."

"Try again," commanded Tarzan. "I do not know how long I can hold Numa thus."

The girl struggled frantically; but at last she sank back upon an elbow.

"It is impossible," she called to him.

He backed slowly until he was again beside the horse, when he reached down and grasped the cinch, which was still intact. Then with one hand he raised the carcass from the ground. The girl freed herself and rose to her feet.

"You can walk?" asked Tarzan.

"Yes," she said; "my leg is numb; but it does not seem to be injured."

"Good," commented the ape-man. "Back slowly away behind me -- make no sudden movements. I think he will not charge."

With utmost deliberation the two backed toward the bush. Numa stood for a moment, growling, then he followed them, slowly. Tarzan wondered if he would come beyond his kill or if he would stop there. If he followed them beyond, then they could look for a charge, and if Numa charged it was very likely that he would get one of them. When the lion reached the carcass of the horse Tarzan stopped and so did Numa, as Tarzan had thought that he would and the ape-man waited to see what the lion would do next. He eyed them for a moment, snarled angrily and then looked down at the tempting meat. Presently he crouched upon his kill and resumed feeding.

The girl breathed a deep sigh of relief as she and the ape-man resumed their slow retreat with only an occasional glance from the lion, and when at last they reached the bush and had turned and entered it, she felt a sudden giddiness overwhelm her so that she staggered and would have fallen had Tarzan not caught her. It was only a moment before she regained control of herself.

"I could not help it," she said, in half apology. "I was so close to death -- such a horrible death -- it unnerved me for an instant; but I am all right now. How can I ever thank you? It was so wonderful -- you did not seem to fear the frightful creature in the least; yet he was afraid of you. Who are you?"

"He knows me," replied Tarzan, grimly -- "that is why he fears me."

He was standing facing the girl now and for the first time he had a chance to look at her squarely and closely. She was very beautiful -- that was undeniable; but Tarzan realized her beauty only in a subconscious way. It was superficial -- it did not color her soul which must be black as sin. She was German -- a German spy. He hated her and desired only to compass her destruction; but he would choose the manner so that it would work most grievously against the enemy cause.

He saw her naked breasts where Numa had torn her clothing from her and dangling there against the soft, white flesh he saw that which brought a sudden scowl of surprise and anger to his face -- the diamond-studded, golden locket of his youth -- the love token that had been stolen from the breast of his mate by Schneider, the Hun. The girl saw the scowl but did not interpret it correctly. Tarzan grasped her roughly by the arm.

"Where did you get this?" he demanded, as he tore the bauble from her.

The girl drew herself to her full height. "Take your hand from me," she demanded, but the ape-man paid no attention to her words, only seizing her more forcibly.

"Answer me!" he snapped. "Where did you get this?"

"What is it to you?" she countered.

"It is mine," he replied. "Tell me who gave it to you or I will throw you back to Numa."

"You would do that?" she asked.

"Why not?" he queried. "You are a spy and spies must die if they are caught."

"You were going to kill me, then?"

"I was going to take you to headquarters. They would dispose of you there; but Numa can do it quite as effectively. Which do you prefer?"

"Hauptmann Fritz Schneider gave it to me," she said.

"Headquarters it will be then," said Tarzan. "Come!" The girl moved at his side through the bush and all the time her mind worked quickly. They were moving east, which suited her, and as long as they continued to move east she was glad to have the protection of the great, white savage. She speculated much upon the fact that her pistol still swung at her hip. The man must be mad not to take it from her.

"What makes you think I am a spy?" she asked after a long silence.

"I saw you at German headquarters," he replied, "and then again inside the British lines."

She could not let him take her back to them. She must reach Wilhelmstal at once and she was determined to do so even if she must have recourse to her pistol. She cast a side glance at the tall figure. What a magnificent creature! But yet he was a brute who would kill her or have her killed if she did not slay him. And the locket! She must have that back -- it must not fail to reach Wilhelmstal. Tarzan was now a foot or two ahead of her as the path was very narrow. Cautiously she drew her pistol. A single shot would suffice and he was so close that she could not miss. As she figured it all out her eyes rested on the brown skin with the graceful muscles rolling beneath it and the perfect limbs and head and the carriage that a proud king of old might have envied. A wave of revulsion for her contemplated act surged through her. No, she could not do it -- yet, she must be free and she must regain possession of the locket. And then, almost blindly, she swung the weapon up and struck Tarzan heavily upon the back of the head with its butt. Like a felled ox he dropped in his tracks.