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[Jungle Tales of Tarzan](#)

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This Book:

[Contents](#)  
[Previous Chapter](#)  
[Next Chapter](#)

Chapter 8 - The Lion

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NUMA, THE LION, crouched behind a thorn bush close beside the drinking pool where the river eddied just below the bend. There was a ford there and on either bank a well-worn trail, broadened far out at the river's brim, where, for countless centuries, the wild things of the jungle and of the plains beyond had come down to drink, the carnivora with bold and fearless majesty, the herbivora timorous, hesitating, fearful.

Numa, the lion, was hungry, he was very hungry, and so he was quite silent now. On his way to the drinking place he had moaned often and roared not a little; but as he neared the spot where he would lie in wait for Bara, the deer, or Horta, the boar, or some other of the many luscious-fleshed creatures who came hither to drink, he was silent. It was a grim, a terrible silence, shot through with yellow-green light of ferocious eyes, punctuated with undulating tremors of sinuous tail.

It was Pacco, the zebra, who came first, and Numa, the lion, could scarce restrain a roar of anger, for of all the plains people, none are more wary than Pacco, the zebra. Behind the black-striped stallion came a herd of thirty or forty of the plump and vicious little horselike beasts. As he neared the river, the leader paused often, cocking his ears and raising his muzzle to sniff the gentle breeze for the tell-tale scent spoor of the dread flesh-eaters.

Numa shifted uneasily, drawing his hind quarters far beneath his tawny body, gathering himself for the sudden charge and the savage assault. His eyes shot hungry fire. His great muscles quivered to the excitement of the moment.

Pacco came a little nearer, halted, snorted, and wheeled. There was a pattering of scurrying hoofs and the herd was gone; but Numa, the lion, moved not. He was familiar with the ways of Pacco, the zebra. He knew that he would return, though many times he might wheel and fly before he summoned the courage to lead his harem and his offspring to the water. There was the chance that Pacco might be frightened off entirely. Numa had seen this happen before, and so he became almost rigid lest he be the one to send them galloping, waterless, back to the plain.

Again and again came Pacco and his family, and again and again did they turn and flee; but each time they came closer to the river, until at last the plump stallion dipped his velvet muzzle daintily into the water. The others, stepping warily, approached their leader. Numa selected a sleek, fat filly and his flaming eyes burned greedily as they feasted upon her, for Numa, the lion, loves scarce anything better than the meat of Pacco, perhaps because Pacco is, of all the grass-eaters, the most difficult to catch.

Slowly the lion rose, and as he rose, a twig snapped beneath one of his great, padded paws. Like a shot from a rifle he charged upon the filly; but the snapped twig had been enough to startle the timorous quarry, so that they were in instant flight simultaneously with Numa's charge.

The stallion was last, and with a prodigious leap, the lion catapulted through the air to seize him; but the snapping twig had robbed Numa of his dinner, though his mighty talons raked the zebra's glossy rump, leaving four crimson bars across the beautiful coat.

It was an angry Numa that quitted the river and prowled, fierce, dangerous, and hungry, into the jungle. Far from particular now was his appetite. Even Dango, the hyena, would have seemed a tidbit to that ravenous maw. And in this temper it was that the lion came upon the tribe of Kerchak, the great ape.

One does not look for Numa, the lion, this late in the morning. He should be lying up asleep beside his last night's kill by now; but Numa had made no kill last night. He was still hunting, hungrier than ever.

The anthropoids were idling about the clearing, the first keen desire of the morning's hunger having been satisfied. Numa scented them long before he saw them. Ordinarily he would have turned away in search of other game, for even Numa respected the mighty muscles and the sharp fangs of the great bulls of the tribe of Kerchak, but today he kept on steadily toward them, his bristled snout wrinkled into a savage snarl.

Without an instant's hesitation, Numa charged the moment he reached a point from where the apes were visible to him. There were a dozen or more of the hairy, manlike creatures upon the ground in a little glade. In a tree at one side sat a brown-skinned youth. He saw Numa's swift charge; he saw the apes turn and flee, huge bulls trampling upon little balus; only a single she held her ground to meet the charge, a young she inspired by new motherhood to the great sacrifice that her balu might escape.

Tarzan leaped from his perch, screaming at the flying bulls beneath and at those who squatted in the safety of surrounding trees. Had the bulls stood their ground, Numa would not have carried through that charge unless goaded by great rage or the gnawing pangs of starvation. Even then he would not have come off unscathed.

If the bulls heard, they were too slow in responding, for Numa had seized the mother ape and dragged her into the jungle before the males had sufficiently collected their wits and their courage to rally in defense of their fellow. Tarzan's angry voice aroused similar anger in the breasts of the apes. Snarling and barking they followed Numa into the dense labyrinth of foliage wherein he sought to hide himself from them. The ape-man was in the lead, moving rapidly and yet with caution, depending even more upon his ears and nose than upon his eyes for information of the lion's whereabouts.

The spoor was easy to follow, for the dragged body of the victim left a plain trail, blood-spattered and scentful. Even such dull creatures as you or I might easily have followed it. To Tarzan and the apes of Kerchak it was as obvious as a cement sidewalk.

Tarzan knew that they were nearing the great cat even before he heard an angry growl of warning just ahead. Calling to the apes to follow his example, he swung into a tree and a moment later Numa was surrounded by a ring of growling beasts, well out of reach of his fangs and talons but within plain sight of him. The carnivore crouched with his fore-quarters upon the she-ape. Tarzan could see that the latter was already dead; but something within him made it seem quite necessary to rescue the useless body from the clutches of the enemy and to punish him.

He shrieked taunts and insults at Numa, and tearing dead branches from the tree in which he danced, hurled them at the lion. The apes followed his example. Numa roared out in rage and vexation. He was hungry, but under such conditions he could not feed.

The apes, if they had been left to themselves, would doubtless soon have left the lion to peaceful enjoyment of his feast, for was not the she dead? They could not restore

her to life by throwing sticks at Numa, and they might now be feeding in quiet themselves; but Tarzan was of a different mind. Numa must be punished and driven away. He must be taught that even though he killed a Mangani, he would not be permitted to feed upon his kill. The man-mind looked into the future, while the apes perceived only the immediate present. They would be content to escape today the menace of Numa, while Tarzan saw the necessity, and the means as well, of safeguarding the days to come.

So he urged the great anthropoids on until Numa was showered with missiles that kept his head dodging and his voice pealing forth its savage protest; but still he clung desperately to his kill.

The twigs and branches hurled at Numa, Tarzan soon realized, did not hurt him greatly even when they struck him, and did not injure him at all, so the ape-man looked about for more effective missiles, nor did he have to look long. An out-cropping of decomposed granite not far from Numa suggested ammunition of a much more painful nature. Calling to the apes to watch him, Tarzan slipped to the ground and gathered a handful of small fragments. He knew that when once they had seen him carry out his idea they would be much quicker to follow his lead than to obey his instructions, were he to command them to procure pieces of rock and hurl them at Numa, for Tarzan was not then king of the apes of the tribe of Kerchak. That came in later years. Now he was but a youth, though one who already had wrested for himself a place in the councils of the savage beasts among whom a strange fate had cast him. The sullen bulls of the older generation still hated him as beasts hate those of whom they are suspicious, whose scent characteristic is the scent characteristic of an alien order and, therefore, of an enemy order. The younger bulls, those who had grown up through childhood as his playmates, were as accustomed to Tarzan's scent as to that of any other member of the tribe. They felt no greater suspicion of him than of any other bull of their acquaintance; yet they did not love him, for they loved none outside the mating season, and the animosities aroused by other bulls during that season lasted well over until the next. They were a morose and peevish band at best, though here and there were those among them in whom germinated the primal seeds of humanity--reversions to type, these, doubtless; reversions to the ancient progenitor who took the first step out of ape-hood toward humanness, when he walked more often upon his hind feet and discovered other things for idle hands to do.

So now Tarzan led where he could not yet command. He had long since discovered the apish propensity for mimicry and learned to make use of it. Having filled his arms with fragments of rotted granite, he clambered again into a tree, and it pleased him to see that the apes had followed his example.

During the brief respite while they were gathering their ammunition, Numa had settled himself to feed; but scarce had he arranged himself and his kill when a sharp piece of rock hurled by the practiced hand of the ape-man struck him upon the cheek. His sudden roar of pain and rage was smothered by a volley from the apes, who had seen Tarzan's act. Numa shook his massive head and glared upward at his tormentors. For a half hour they pursued him with rocks and broken branches, and though he dragged his kill into densest thickets, yet they always found a way to reach him with their missiles, giving him no opportunity to feed, and driving him on and on.

The hairless ape-thing with the man scent was worst of all, for he had even the temerity to advance upon the ground to within a few yards of the Lord of the Jungle, that he might with greater accuracy and force hurl the sharp bits of granite and the heavy sticks at him. Time and again did Numa charge--sudden, vicious charges--but the lithe, active tormentor always managed to elude him and with such insolent ease that the lion forgot even his great hunger in the consuming passion of his rage, leaving his meat for considerable spaces of time in vain efforts to catch his enemy.

The apes and Tarzan pursued the great beast to a natural clearing, where Numa evidently determined to make a last stand, taking up his position in the center of the open space, which was far enough from any tree to render him practically immune from the rather erratic throwing of the apes, though Tarzan still found him with most persistent and aggravating frequency.

This, however, did not suit the ape-man, since Numa now suffered an occasional missile with no more than a snarl, while he settled himself to partake of his delayed feast. Tarzan scratched his head, pondering some more effective method of offense, for he had determined to prevent Numa from profiting in any way through his attack upon the tribe. The man-mind reasoned against the future, while the shaggy apes thought only of their present hatred of this ancestral enemy. Tarzan guessed that should Numa find it an easy thing to snatch a meal from the tribe of Kerchak, it would be but a short time before their existence would be one living nightmare of hideous watchfulness and dread. Numa must be taught that the killing of an ape brought immediate punishment and no rewards. It would take but a few lessons to insure the former safety of the tribe. This must be some old lion whose failing strength and agility had forced him to any prey that he could catch; but even a single lion, undisputed, could exterminate the tribe, or at least make its existence so precarious and so terrifying that life would no longer be a pleasant condition.

"Let him hunt among the Gomangani," thought Tarzan. "He will find them easier prey. I will teach ferocious Numa that he may not hunt the Mangani."

But how to wrest the body of his victim from the feeding lion was the first question to be solved. At last Tarzan hit upon a plan. To anyone but Tarzan of the Apes it might have seemed rather a risky plan, and perhaps it did even to him; but Tarzan rather liked things that contained a considerable element of danger. At any rate, I rather doubt that you or I would have chosen a similar plan for foiling an angry and a hungry lion.

Tarzan required assistance in the scheme he had hit upon and his assistant must be equally as brave and almost as active as he. The ape-man's eyes fell upon Taug, the playmate of his childhood, the rival in his first love and now, of all the bulls of the tribe, the only one that might be thought to hold in his savage brain any such feeling toward Tarzan as we describe among ourselves as friendship. At least, Tarzan knew, Taug was courageous, and he was young and agile and wonderfully muscled.

"Taug!" cried the ape-man. The great ape looked up from a dead limb he was attempting to tear from a lightning-blasted tree. "Go close to Numa and worry him," said Tarzan. "Worry him until he charges. Lead him away from the body of Mamka. Keep him away as long as you can."

Taug nodded. He was across the clearing from Tarzan. Wrestling the limb at last from the tree he dropped to the ground and advanced toward Numa, growling and barking out his insults. The worried lion looked up and rose to his feet. His tail went stiffly erect and Taug turned in flight, for he knew that warning signal of the charge.

From behind the lion, Tarzan ran quickly toward the center of the clearing and the body of Mamka. Numa, all his eyes for Taug, did not see the ape-man. Instead he shot forward after the fleeing bull, who had turned in flight not an instant too soon, since he reached the nearest tree but a yard or two ahead of the pursuing demon. Like a cat the heavy anthropoid scampered up the bole of his sanctuary. Numa's talons missed him by little more than inches.

For a moment the lion paused beneath the tree, glaring up at the ape and roaring until the earth trembled, then he turned back again toward his kill, and as he did so, his tail shot once more to rigid erectness and he charged back even more ferociously than he had come, for what he saw was the naked man-thing running toward the farther trees with the bloody carcass of his prey across a giant shoulder.

The apes, watching the grim race from the safety of the trees, screamed taunts at Numa and warnings to Tarzan. The high sun, hot and brilliant, fell like a spotlight upon the actors in the little clearing, portraying them in glaring relief to the audience in the leafy shadows of the surrounding trees. The light-brown body of the naked youth, all but hidden by the shaggy carcass of the killed ape, the red blood streaking his smooth hide, his muscles rolling, velvety, beneath. Behind him the black-maned lion, head flattened, tail extended, racing, a jungle thoroughbred, across the sunlit clearing.

Ah, but this was life! With death at his heels, Tarzan thrilled with the joy of such living as this; but would he reach the trees ahead of the rampant death so close behind?

Gunto swung from a limb in a tree before him. Gunto was screaming warnings and advice.

"Catch me!" cried Tarzan, and with his heavy burden leaped straight for the big bull hanging there by his hind feet and one forepaw. And Gunto caught them--the big ape-man and the dead weight of the slain she-ape--caught them with one great, hairy paw and whirled them upward until Tarzan's fingers closed upon a near-by branch.

Beneath, Numa leaped; but Gunto, heavy and awkward as he may have appeared, was as quick as Manu, the monkey, so that the lion's talons but barely grazed him, scratching a bloody streak beneath one hairy arm.

Tarzan carried Mamka's corpse to a high crotch, where even Sheeta, the panther, could not get it. Numa paced angrily back and forth beneath the tree, roaring frightfully. He had been robbed of his kill and his revenge also. He was very savage indeed; but his despoilers were well out of his reach, and after hurling a few taunts and missiles at him they swung away through the trees, fiercely reviling him.

Tarzan thought much upon the little adventure of that day. He foresaw what might happen should the great carnivora of the jungle turn their serious attention upon the tribe of Kerchak, the great ape, but equally he thought upon the wild scramble of the apes for safety when Numa first charged among them. There is little humor in the jungle that is not grim and awful. The beasts have little or no conception of humor; but the young Englishman saw humor in many things which presented no humorous angle to his associates.

Since earliest childhood he had been a searcher after fun, much to the sorrow of his fellow-apes, and now he saw the humor of the frightened panic of the apes and the baffled rage of Numa even in this grim jungle adventure which had robbed Mamka of life, and jeopardized that of many members of the tribe.

It was but a few weeks later that Sheeta, the panther, made a sudden rush among the tribe and snatched a little balu from a tree where it had been hidden while its mother sought food. Sheeta got away with his small prize unmolested. Tarzan was very wroth. He spoke to the bulls of the ease with which Numa and Sheeta, in a single moon, had slain two members of the tribe.

"They will take us all for food," he cried. "We hunt as we will through the jungle, paying no heed to approaching enemies. Even Manu, the monkey, does not so. He keeps two or three always watching for enemies. Pacco, the zebra, and Wappi, the antelope, have those about the herd who keep watch while the others feed, while we, the great Mangani, let Numa, and Sabor, and Sheeta come when they will and carry us off to feed their balus.

"Gr-r-rmph," said Numgo.

"What are we to do?" asked Taug.

"We, too, should have two or three always watching for the approach of Numa, and Sabor, and Sheeta," replied Tarzan. "No others need we fear, except Histah, the snake, and if we watch for the others we will see Histah if he comes, though gliding ever so silently."

And so it was that the great apes of the tribe of Kerchak posted sentries thereafter, who watched upon three sides while the tribe hunted, scattered less than had been their wont.

But Tarzan went abroad alone, for Tarzan was a man-thing and sought amusement and adventure and such humor as the grim and terrible jungle offers to those who know it and do not fear it--a weird humor shot with blazing eyes and dappled with the crimson of lifeblood. While others sought only food and love, Tarzan of the Apes sought food and joy.

One day he hovered above the palisaded village of Mbonga, the chief, the jet cannibal of the jungle primeval. He saw, as he had seen many times before, the witch-doctor, Rabba Kega, decked out in the head and hide of Gorgo, the buffalo. It amused Tarzan to see a Gomangani parading as Gorgo; but it suggested nothing in particular to him until he chanced to see stretched against the side of Mbonga's hut the skin of a lion with the head still on. Then a broad grin widened the handsome face of the savage beast-youth.

Back into the jungle he went until chance, agility, strength, and cunning backed by his marvelous powers of perception, gave him an easy meal. If Tarzan felt that the world owed him a living he also realized that it was for him to collect it, nor was there ever a better collector than this son of an English lord, who knew even less of the ways of his forbears than he did of the forbears themselves, which was nothing.

It was quite dark when Tarzan returned to the village of Mbonga and took his now polished perch in the tree which overhangs the palisade upon one side of the walled enclosure. As there was nothing in particular to feast upon in the village there was little life in the single street, for only an orgy of flesh and native beer could draw out the people of Mbonga. Tonight they sat gossiping about their cooking fires, the older members of the tribe; or, if they were young, paired off in the shadows cast by the palm-thatched huts.

Tarzan dropped lightly into the village, and sneaking stealthily in the concealment of the denser shadows, approached the hut of the chief, Mbonga. Here he found that which he sought. There were warriors all about him; but they did not know that the feared devil-god slunk noiselessly so near them, nor did they see him possess himself of that which he coveted and depart from their village as noiselessly as he had come.

Later that night, as Tarzan curled himself for sleep, he lay for a long time looking up at the burning planets and the twinkling stars and at Goro the moon, and he smiled. He recalled how ludicrous the great bulls had appeared in their mad scramble for safety that day when Numa had charged among them and seized Mamka, and yet he knew them to be fierce and courageous. It was the sudden shock of surprise that always sent them into a panic; but of this Tarzan was not as yet fully aware. That was something he was to learn in the near future.

He fell asleep with a broad grin upon his face.

Manu, the monkey, awoke him in the morning by dropping discarded bean pods upon his upturned face from a branch a short distance above him. Tarzan looked up and smiled. He had been awakened thus before many times. He and Manu were fairly good friends, their friendship operating upon a reciprocal basis. Sometimes Manu would come running early in the morning to awaken Tarzan and tell him that Bara, the deer, was feeding close at hand, or that Horta, the boar, was asleep in a mudhole hard by, and in return Tarzan broke open the shells of the harder nuts and fruits for Manu, or frightened away Histah, the snake, and Sheeta, the panther.

The sun had been up for some time, and the tribe had already wandered off in search of food. Manu indicated the direction they had taken with a wave of his hand and a few piping notes of his squeaky little voice.

"Come, Manu," said Tarzan, "and you will see that which shall make you dance for joy and squeal your wrinkled little head off. Come, follow Tarzan of the Apes."

With that he set off in the direction Manu had indicated and above him, chattering, scolding and squealing, skipped Manu, the monkey. Across Tarzan's shoulders was the thing he had stolen from the village of Mbonga, the chief, the evening before.

The tribe was feeding in the forest beside the clearing where Gunto, and Taug, and Tarzan had so harassed Numa and finally taken away from him the fruit of his kill. Some of them were in the clearing itself. In peace and content they fed, for were there not three sentries, each watching upon a different side of the herd? Tarzan had taught them this, and though he had been away for several days hunting alone, as he often did, or visiting at the cabin by the sea, they had not as yet forgotten his admonitions, and if they continued for a short time longer to post sentries, it would become a habit of their tribal life and thus be perpetuated indefinitely.

But Tarzan, who knew them better than they knew themselves, was confident that they had ceased to place the watchers about them the moment that he had left them, and now he planned not only to have a little fun at their expense but to teach them a lesson in preparedness, which, by the way, is even a more vital issue in the jungle than in civilized places. That you and I exist today must be due to the preparedness of some shaggy anthropoid of the Oligocene. Of course the apes of Kerchak were always prepared, after their own way--Tarzan had merely suggested a new and additional safeguard.

Gunto was posted today to the north of the clearing. He squatted in the fork of a tree from where he might view the jungle for quite a distance about him. It was he who first discovered the enemy. A rustling in the undergrowth attracted his attention, and a moment later he had a partial view of a shaggy mane and tawny yellow back. Just a glimpse it was through the matted foliage beneath him; but it brought from Gunto's leathern lungs a shrill "Kreeg-ah!" which is the ape for beware, or danger.

Instantly the tribe took up the cry until "Kreeg-ahs!" rang through the jungle about the clearing as apes swung quickly to places of safety among the lower branches of the trees and the great bulls hastened in the direction of Gunto.

And then into the clearing strode Numa, the lion-- majestic and mighty, and from a deep chest issued the moan and the cough and the rumbling roar that set stiff hairs to bristling from shaggy craniums down the length of mighty spines.

Inside the clearing, Numa paused and on the instant there fell upon him from the trees near by a shower of broken rock and dead limbs torn from age-old trees. A dozen times he was hit, and then the apes ran down and gathered other rocks, pelting him unmercifully.

Numa turned to flee, but his way was barred by a fusillade of sharp-cornered missiles, and then, upon the edge of the clearing, great Taug met him with a huge fragment of rock as large as a man's head, and down went the Lord of the Jungle beneath the stunning blow.

With shrieks and roars and loud barkings the great apes of the tribe of Kerchak rushed upon the fallen lion. Sticks and stones and yellow fangs menaced the still form. In another moment, before he could regain consciousness, Numa would be battered and torn until only a bloody mass of broken bones and matted hair remained of what had once been the most dreaded of jungle creatures.

But even as the sticks and stones were raised above him and the great fangs bared to tear him, there descended like a plummet from the trees above a diminutive figure with long, white whiskers and a wrinkled face. Square upon the body of Numa it alighted and there it danced and screamed and shrieked out its challenge against the bulls of Kerchak.

For an instant they paused, paralyzed by the wonder of the thing. It was Manu, the monkey, Manu, the little coward, and here he was daring the ferocity of the great Mangani, hopping about upon the carcass of Numa, the lion, and crying out that they must not strike it again.

And when the bulls paused, Manu reached down and seized a tawny ear. With all his little might he tugged upon the heavy head until slowly it turned back, revealing the tousled, black head and clean-cut profile of Tarzan of the Apes.

Some of the older apes were for finishing what they had commenced; but Taug, sullen, mighty Taug, sprang quickly to the ape-man's side and straddling the unconscious form warned back those who would have struck his childhood playmate. And Teeka, his mate, came too, taking her place with bared fangs at Taug's side. Others followed their example, until at last Tarzan was surrounded by a ring of hairy champions who would permit no enemy to approach him.

It was a surprised and chastened Tarzan who opened his eyes to consciousness a few minutes later. He looked about him at the surrounding apes and slowly there returned to him a realization of what had occurred.

Gradually a broad grin illuminated his features. His bruises were many and they hurt; but the good that had come from his adventure was worth all that it had cost. He had learned, for instance, that the apes of Kerchak had heeded his teaching, and he had learned that he had good friends among the sullen beasts whom he had thought without sentiment. He had discovered that Manu, the monkey--even little, cowardly Manu--had risked his life in his defense.

It made Tarzan very glad to know these things; but at the other lesson he had been taught he reddened. He had always been a joker, the only joker in the grim and terrible company; but now as he lay there half dead from his hurts, he almost swore a solemn oath forever to forego practical joking--almost; but not quite.