

## Chapter VII - When Blood Told

Tarzan of the Apes was disgusted. He had had the German spy, Bertha Kircher, in his power and had left her unscathed. It is true that he had slain Hauptmann Fritz Schneider, that Underlieutenant von Goss had died at his hands, and that he had otherwise wreaked vengeance upon the men of the German company who had murdered, pillaged, and raped at Tarzan's bungalow in the Waziri country. There was still another officer to be accounted for, but him he could not find. It was Lieutenant Obergatz he still sought, though vainly, for at last he learned that the man had been sent upon some special mission, whether in Africa or back to Europe Tarzan's informant either did not know or would not divulge.

But the fact that he had permitted sentiment to stay his hand when he might so easily have put Bertha Kircher out of the way in the hotel at Wilhelmstal that night rankled in the ape-man's bosom. He was shamed by his weakness, and when he had handed the paper she had given him to the British chief of staff, even though the information it contained permitted the British to frustrate a German flank attack, he was still much dissatisfied with himself. And possibly the root of this dissatisfaction lay in the fact that he realized that were he again to have the same opportunity he would still find it as impossible to slay a woman as it had been in Wilhelmstal that night.

Tarzan blamed this weakness, as he considered it, upon his association with the effeminizing influences of civilization, for in the bottom of his savage heart he held in contempt both civilization and its representatives--the men and women of the civilized countries of the world. Always was he comparing their weaknesses, their vices, their hypocrisies, and their little vanities with the open, primitive ways of his ferocious jungle mates, and all the while there battled in that same big heart with these forces another mighty force--Tarzan's love and loyalty for his friends of the civilized world.

The ape-man, reared as he had been by savage beasts amid savage beasts, was slow to make friends. Acquaintances he numbered by the hundreds; but of friends he had few. These few he would have died for as, doubtless, they would have died for him; but there were none of these fighting with the British forces in East Africa, and so, sickened and disgusted by the sight of man waging his cruel and inhuman warfare, Tarzan determined to heed the insistent call of the remote jungle of his youth, for the Germans were now on the run and the war in East Africa was so nearly over that he realized that his further services would be of negligible value.

Never regularly sworn into the service of the King, he was under no obligation to remain now that the moral obligation had been removed, and so it was that he disappeared from the British camp as mysteriously as he had appeared a few months before.

More than once had Tarzan reverted to the primitive only to return again to civilization through love for his mate; but now that she was gone he felt that this time he had definitely departed forever from the haunts of man, and that he should live and die a beast among beasts even as he had been from infancy to maturity.

Between him and destination lay a trackless wilderness of untouched primeval savagery where, doubtless in many spots, his would be the first human foot to touch the virgin turf. Nor did this prospect dismay the Tarmangani--rather was it an urge and an inducement, for rich in his veins flowed that noble strain of blood that has made most of the earth's surface habitable for man.

The question of food and water that would have risen paramount in the mind of an ordinary man contemplating such an excursion gave Tarzan little concern. The wilderness was his natural habitat and woodcraft as inherent to him as breathing. Like other jungle animals he could scent water from a great distance and, where you or I might die of thirst, the ape-man would unerringly select the exact spot at which to dig and find water.

For several days Tarzan traversed a country rich in game and watercourses. He moved slowly, hunting and fishing, or again fraternizing or quarreling with the other savage denizens of the jungle. Now it was little Manu, the monkey, who chattered and scolded at the mighty Tarmangani and in the next breath warned him that Histah, the snake, lay coiled in the long grass just ahead. Of Manu Tarzan inquired concerning the great apes--the Mangani--and was told that few inhabited this part of the jungle, and that even these were hunting farther to the north this season of the year.

"But there is Bolgani," said Manu. "Would you like to see Bolgani?"

Manu's tone was sneering, and Tarzan knew that it was because little Manu thought all creatures feared mighty Bolgani, the gorilla. Tarzan arched his great chest and struck it with a clinched fist. "I am Tarzan," he cried. "While Tarzan was yet a balu he slew a Bolgani. Tarzan seeks the Mangani, who are his brothers, but Bolgani he does not seek, so let Bolgani keep from the path of Tarzan."

Little Manu, the monkey, was much impressed, for the way of the jungle is to boast and to believe. It was then that he condescended to tell Tarzan more of the Mangani.

"They go there and there and there," he said, making a wide sweep with a brown hand first toward the north, then west, and then south again. "For there," and he pointed due west, "is much hunting; but between lies a great place where there is no food and no water, so they must go that way," and again he swung his hand through the half-circle that explained to Tarzan the great detour the apes made to come to their hunting ground to the west.

That was all right for the Mangani, who are lazy and do not care to move rapidly; but for Tarzan the straight road would be the best. He would cross the dry country and come to the good hunting in a third of the time that it would take to go far to the north and circle back again. And so it was that he continued on toward the west, and crossing a range of low mountains came in sight of a broad plateau, rock strewn and desolate. Far in the distance he saw another range of mountains beyond which he felt must lie the hunting ground of the Mangani. There he would join them and remain for a while before continuing on toward the coast and the little cabin that his father had built beside the land-locked harbor at the jungle's edge.

Tarzan was full of plans. He would rebuild and enlarge the cabin of his birth, constructing storage houses where he would make the apes lay away food when it was plenty against the times that were lean--a thing no ape ever had dreamed of doing. And the tribe would remain always in the locality and he would be king again as he had in the past. He would try to teach them some of the better things that he had learned from man, yet knowing the ape-mind as only Tarzan could, he feared that his labors would be for naught.

The ape-man found the country he was crossing rough in the extreme, the roughest he ever had encountered. The plateau was cut by frequent canyons the passage of which often entailed hours of wearing effort. The vegetation was sparse and of a faded brown color that lent to the whole landscape a most depressing aspect. Great rocks were strewn in every direction as far as the eye could see, lying partially embedded in an impalpable dust that rose in clouds about him at every step. The sun beat down mercilessly out of a cloudless sky.

For a day Tarzan toiled across this now hateful land and at the going down of the sun the distant mountains to the west seemed no nearer than at morn. Never a sign of living thing had the ape-man seen, other than Ska, that bird of ill omen, that had followed him tirelessly since he had entered this parched waste.

No littlest beetle that he might eat had given evidence that life of any sort existed here, and it was a hungry and thirsty Tarzan who lay down to rest in the evening. He decided now to push on during the cool of the night, for he realized that even mighty Tarzan had his limitations and that where there was no food one could not eat and where there was no water the greatest woodcraft in the world could find none. It was a totally new experience to Tarzan to find so barren and terrible a country in his beloved Africa. Even the Sahara had its oases; but this frightful world gave no indication of containing a square foot of hospitable ground.

However, he had no misgivings but that he would fare forth into the wonder country of which little Manu had told him, though it was certain that he would do it with a dry skin and an empty belly. And so he fought on until daylight, when he again felt the need of rest. He was at the edge of another of those terrible canyons, the eighth he had crossed, whose precipitous sides would have taxed to the uttermost the strength of an untired man well fortified by food and water, and for the first time, as he looked down into the abyss and then at the opposite side that he must scale, misgivings began to assail his mind.

He did not fear death--with the memory of his murdered mate still fresh in his mind he almost courted it, yet strong within him was that primal instinct of self-preservation--the battling force of life that would keep him an active contender against the Great Reaper until, fighting to the very last, he should be overcome by a superior power.

A shadow swung slowly across the ground beside him, and looking up, the ape-man saw Ska, the vulture, wheeling a wide circle above him. The grim and persistent harbinger of evil aroused the man to renewed determination. He arose and approached the edge of the canyon, and then, wheeling, with his face turned upward toward the circling bird of prey, he bellowed forth the challenge of the bull ape.

"I am Tarzan," he shouted, "Lord of the Jungle. Tarzan of the Apes is not for Ska, eater of carrion. Go back to the lair of Dango and feed off the leavings of the hyenas, for Tarzan will leave no bones for Ska to pick in this empty wilderness of death."

But before he reached the bottom of the canyon he again was forced to the realization that his great strength was waning, and when he dropped exhausted at the foot of the cliff and saw before him the opposite wall that must be scaled, he bared his fighting fangs and growled. For an hour he lay resting in the cool shade at the foot of the cliff. All about him reigned utter silence--the silence of the tomb. No fluttering birds, no humming insects, no scurrying reptiles relieved the deathlike stillness. This indeed was the valley of death. He felt the depressing

influence of the horrible place setting down upon him; but he staggered to his feet, shaking himself like a great lion, for was he not still Tarzan, mighty Tarzan of the Apes? Yes, and Tarzan the mighty he would be until the last throb of that savage heart!

As he crossed the floor of the canyon he saw something lying close to the base of the side wall he was approaching—something that stood out in startling contrast to all the surroundings and yet seemed so much a part and parcel of the somber scene as to suggest an actor amid the settings of a well-appointed stage, and, as though to carry out the allegory, the pitiless rays of flaming Kudu topped the eastern cliff, picking out the thing lying at the foot of the western wall like a giant spotlight.

And as Tarzan came nearer he saw the bleached skull and bones of a human being about which were remnants of clothing and articles of equipment that, as he examined them, filled the ape-man with curiosity to such an extent that for a time he forgot his own predicament in contemplation of the remarkable story suggested by these mute evidences of a tragedy of a time long past.

The bones were in a fair state of preservation and indicated by their intactness that the flesh had probably been picked from them by vultures as none was broken; but the pieces of equipment bore out the suggestion of their great age. In this protected spot where there were no frosts and evidently but little rainfall, the bones might have lain for ages without disintegrating, for there were here no other forces to scatter or disturb them.

Near the skeleton lay a helmet of hammered brass and a corroded breastplate of steel while at one side was a long, straight sword in its scabbard and an ancient arquebus. The bones were those of a large man—a man of wondrous strength and vitality Tarzan knew he must have been to have penetrated thus far through the dangers of Africa with such a ponderous yet at the same time futile armament.

The ape-man felt a sense of deep admiration for this nameless adventurer of a bygone day. What a brute of a man he must have been and what a glorious tale of battle and kaleidoscopic vicissitudes of fortune must once have been locked within that whitened skull! Tarzan stooped to examine the shreds of clothing that still lay about the bones. Every particle of leather had disappeared, doubtless eaten by Ska. No boots remained, if the man had worn boots, but there were several buckles scattered about suggesting that a great part of his trappings had been of leather, while just beneath the bones of one hand lay a metal cylinder about eight inches long and two inches in diameter. As Tarzan picked it up he saw that it had been heavily lacquered and had withstood the slight ravages of

time so well as to be in as perfect a state of preservation today as it had been when its owner dropped into his last, long sleep perhaps centuries ago.

As he examined it he discovered that one end was closed with a friction cover which a little twisting force soon loosened and removed, revealing within a roll of parchment which the ape-man removed and opened, disclosing a number of age-yellowed sheets closely written upon in a fine hand in a language which he guessed to be Spanish but which he could not decipher. Upon the last sheet was a roughly drawn map with numerous reference points marked upon it, all unintelligible to Tarzan, who, after a brief examination of the papers, returned them to their metal case, replaced the top and was about to toss the little cylinder to the ground beside the mute remains of its former possessor when some whim of curiosity unsatisfied prompted him to slip it into the quiver with his arrows, though as he did so it was with the grim thought that possibly centuries hence it might again come to the sight of man beside his own bleached bones.

And then, with a parting glance at the ancient skeleton, he turned to the task of ascending the western wall of the canyon. Slowly and with many rests he dragged his weakening body upwards. Again and again he slipped back from sheer exhaustion and would have fallen to the floor of the canyon but for merest chance. How long it took him to scale that frightful wall he could not have told, and when at last he dragged himself over the top it was to lie weak and gasping, too spent to rise or even to move a few inches farther from the perilous edge of the chasm.

At last he arose, very slowly and with evident effort gaining his knees first and then staggering to his feet, yet his indomitable will was evidenced by a sudden straightening of his shoulders and a determined shake of his head as he lurched forward on unsteady legs to take up his valiant fight for survival. Ahead he scanned the rough landscape for sign of another canyon which he knew would spell inevitable doom. The western hills rose closer now though weirdly unreal as they seemed to dance in the sunlight as though mocking him with their nearness at the moment that exhaustion was about to render them forever unattainable.

Beyond them he knew must be the fertile hunting grounds of which Manu had told. Even if no canyon intervened, his chances of surmounting even low hills seemed remote should he have the fortune to reach their base; but with another canyon hope was dead. Above them Ska still circled, and it seemed to the ape-man that the ill-omened bird hovered ever lower and lower as though reading in that failing gait the nearing of the end, and through cracked lips Tarzan growled out his defiance.

Mile after mile Tarzan of the Apes put slowly behind him, borne up by sheer force of will where a lesser man would have lain down to die and rest forever tired muscles whose every move was an agony of effort; but at last his progress became practically mechanical--he staggered on with a dazed mind that reacted numbly to a single urge--on, on, on! The hills were now but a dim, ill-defined blur ahead. Sometimes he forgot that they were hills, and again he wondered vaguely why he must go on forever through all this torture endeavoring to overtake them--the fleeing, elusive hills. Presently he began to hate them and there formed within his half-delirious brain the hallucination that the hills were German hills, that they had slain someone dear to him, whom he could never quite recall, and that he was pursuing to slay them.

This idea, growing, appeared to give him strength--a new and revivifying purpose--so that for a time he no longer staggered; but went forward steadily with head erect. Once he stumbled and fell, and when he tried to rise he found that he could not--that his strength was so far gone that he could only crawl forward on his hands and knees for a few yards and then sink down again to rest.

It was during one of these frequent periods of utter exhaustion that he heard the flap of dismal wings close above him. With his remaining strength he turned himself over on his back to see Ska wheel quickly upward. With the sight Tarzan's mind cleared for a while.

"Is the end so near as that?" he thought. "Does Ska know that I am so near gone that he dares come down and perch upon my carcass?" And even then a grim smile touched those swollen lips as into the savage mind came a sudden thought--the cunning of the wild beast at bay. Closing his eyes he threw a forearm across them to protect them from Ska's powerful beak and then he lay very still and waited.

It was restful lying there, for the sun was now obscured by clouds and Tarzan was very tired. He feared that he might sleep and something told him that if he did he would never awaken, and so he concentrated all his remaining powers upon the one thought of remaining awake. Not a muscle moved--to Ska, circling above, it became evident that the end had come--that at last he should be rewarded for his long vigil.

Circling slowly he dropped closer and closer to the dying man. Why did not Tarzan move? Had he indeed been overcome by the sleep of exhaustion, or was Ska right--had death at last claimed that mighty body? Was that great, savage heart stilled forever? It is unthinkable.

Ska, filled with suspicions, circled warily. Twice he almost alighted upon the great, naked breast only to wheel suddenly away; but the third time his talons touched the brown skin. It was as though the contact closed an electric circuit that instantaneously vitalized the quiet clod that had lain motionless so long. A brown hand swept downward from the brown forehead and before Ska could raise a wing in flight he was in the clutches of his intended victim.

Ska fought, but he was no match for even a dying Tarzan, and a moment later the ape-man's teeth closed upon the carrion-eater. The flesh was coarse and tough and gave off an unpleasant odor and a worse taste; but it was food and the blood was drink and Tarzan only an ape at heart and a dying ape into the bargain--dying of starvation and thirst.

Even mentally weakened as he was the ape-man was still master of his appetite and so he ate but sparingly, saving the rest, and then, feeling that he now could do so safely, he turned upon his side and slept.

Rain, beating heavily upon his body, awakened him and sitting up he cupped his hands and caught the precious drops which he transferred to his parched throat. Only a little he got at a time; but that was best. The few mouthfuls of Ska that he had eaten, together with the blood and rain water and the sleep had refreshed him greatly and put new strength into his tired muscles.

Now he could see the hills again and they were close and, though there was no sun, the world looked bright and cheerful, for Tarzan knew that he was saved. The bird that would have devoured him, and the providential rain, had saved him at the very moment that death seemed inevitable.

Again partaking of a few mouthfuls of the unsavory flesh of Ska, the vulture, the ape-man arose with something of his old force and set out with steady gait toward the hills of promise rising alluringly ahead. Darkness fell before he reached them; but he kept on until he felt the steeply rising ground that proclaimed his arrival at the base of the hills proper, and then he lay down and waited until morning should reveal the easiest passage to the land beyond. The rain had ceased, but the sky still was overcast so that even his keen eyes could not penetrate the darkness farther than a few feet. And there he slept, after eating again of what remained of Ska, until the morning sun awakened him with a new sense of strength and well-being.

And so at last he came through the hills out of the valley of death into a land of park-like beauty, rich in game. Below him lay a deep valley through the center of which dense jungle vegetation marked the course of a river beyond which a primeval forest extended for miles to terminate at last at the foot of lofty, snow-



capped mountains. It was a land that Tarzan never had looked upon before, nor was it likely that the foot of another white man ever had touched it unless, possibly, in some long-gone day the adventurer whose skeleton he had found bleaching in the canyon had traversed it.