

Chapter X - In the Hands of Savages

Tarzan sought Bara, the deer, or Horta, the boar, for of all the jungle animals he doubted if any would prove more palatable to the white woman, but though his keen nostrils were ever on the alert, he traveled far without being rewarded with even the faintest scent spoor of the game he sought. Keeping close to the river where he hoped to find Bara or Horta approaching or leaving a drinking place he came at last upon the strong odor of the Wamabo village and being ever ready to pay his hereditary enemies, the Gomangani, an undesired visit, he swung into a detour and came up in the rear of the village. From a tree which overhung the palisade he looked down into the street where he saw the preparations going on which his experience told him indicated the approach of one of those frightful feasts the piece de resistance of which is human flesh.

One of Tarzan's chief divertissements was the baiting of the blacks. He realized more keen enjoyment through annoying and terrifying them than from any other source of amusement the grim jungle offered. To rob them of their feast in some way that would strike terror to their hearts would give him the keenest of pleasure, and so he searched the village with his eyes for some indication of the whereabouts of the prisoner. His view was circumscribed by the dense foliage of the tree in which he sat, and, so that he might obtain a better view, he climbed further aloft and moved cautiously out upon a slender branch.

Tarzan of the Apes possessed a woodcraft scarcely short of the marvelous but even Tarzan's wondrous senses were not infallible. The branch upon which he made his way outward from the bole was no smaller than many that had borne his weight upon countless other occasions. Outwardly it appeared strong and healthy and was in full foliage, nor could Tarzan know that close to the stem a burrowing insect had eaten away half the heart of the solid wood beneath the bark.

And so when he reached a point far out upon the limb, it snapped close to the bole of the tree without warning. Below him were no larger branches that he might clutch and as he lunged downward his foot caught in a looped creeper so that he turned completely over and alighted on the flat of his back in the center of the village street.

At the sound of the breaking limb and the crashing body falling through the branches the startled blacks scurried to their huts for weapons, and when the braver of them emerged, they saw the still form of an almost naked white man lying where he had fallen. Emboldened by the fact that he did not move they approached more closely, and when their eyes discovered no signs of others of his

kind in the tree, they rushed forward until a dozen warriors stood about him with ready spears. At first they thought that the falling had killed him, but upon closer examination they discovered that the man was only stunned. One of the warriors was for thrusting a spear through his heart, but Numabo, the chief, would not permit it.

"Bind him," he said. "We will feed well tonight."

And so they bound his hands and feet with thongs of gut and carried him into the hut where Lieutenant Harold Percy Smith-Oldwick awaited his fate. The Englishman had also been bound hand and foot by this time for fear that at the last moment he might escape and rob them of their feast. A great crowd of natives were gathered about the hut attempting to get a glimpse of the new prisoner, but Numabo doubled the guard before the entrance for fear that some of his people, in the exuberance of their savage joy, might rob the others of the pleasures of the death dance which would precede the killing of the victims.

The young Englishman had heard the sound of Tarzan's body crashing through the tree to the ground and the commotion in the village which immediately followed, and now, as he stood with his back against the wall of the hut, he looked upon the fellow-prisoner that the blacks carried in and laid upon the floor with mixed feelings of surprise and compassion. He realized that he never had seen a more perfect specimen of manhood than that of the unconscious figure before him, and he wondered to what sad circumstances the man owed his capture. It was evident that the new prisoner was himself as much a savage as his captors if apparel and weapons were any criterion by which to judge; yet it was also equally evident that he was a white man and from his well-shaped head and clean-cut features that he was not one of those unhappy halfwits who so often revert to savagery even in the heart of civilized communities.

As he watched the man, he presently noticed that his eyelids were moving. Slowly they opened and a pair of gray eyes looked blankly about. With returning consciousness the eyes assumed their natural expression of keen intelligence, and a moment later, with an effort, the prisoner rolled over upon his side and drew himself to a sitting position. He was facing the Englishman, and as his eyes took in the bound ankles and the arms drawn tightly behind the other's back, a slow smile lighted his features.

"They will fill their bellies tonight," he said.

The Englishman grinned. "From the fuss they made," he said, "the beggars must be awfully hungry. They like to have eaten me alive when they brought me in. How did they get you?"

Tarzan shrugged his head ruefully. "It was my own fault," he replied. "I deserve to be eaten. I crawled out upon a branch that would not bear my weight and when it broke, instead of alighting on my feet, I caught my foot in a trailer and came down on my head. Otherwise they would not have taken me--alive."

"Is there no escape?" asked the Englishman.

"I have escaped them before," replied Tarzan, "and I have seen others escape them. I have seen a man taken away from the stake after a dozen spear thrusts had pierced his body and the fire had been lighted about his feet."

Lieutenant Smith-Oldwick shuddered. "God!" he exclaimed, "I hope I don't have to face that. I believe I could stand anything but the thought of the fire. I should hate like the devil to go into a funk before the devils at the last moment."

"Don't worry," said Tarzan. "It doesn't last long and you won't funk. It is really not half as bad as it sounds. There is only a brief period of pain before you lose consciousness. I have seen it many times before. It is as good a way to go as another. We must die sometime. What difference whether it be tonight, tomorrow night, or a year hence, just so that we have lived--and I have lived!"

"Your philosophy may be all right, old top," said the young lieutenant, "but I can't say that it is exactly satisfying."

Tarzan laughed. "Roll over here," he said, "where I can get at your bonds with my teeth." The Englishman did as he was bid and presently Tarzan was working at the thongs with his strong white teeth. He felt them giving slowly beneath his efforts. In another moment they would part, and then it would be a comparatively simple thing for the Englishman to remove the remaining bonds from Tarzan and himself.

It was then that one of the guards entered the hut. In an instant he saw what the new prisoner was doing and raising his spear, struck the ape-man a vicious blow across the head with its shaft. Then he called in the other guards and together they fell upon the luckless men, kicking and beating them unmercifully, after which they bound the Englishman more securely than before and tied both men fast on opposite sides of the hut. When they had gone Tarzan looked across at his companion in misery.

"While there is life," he said, "there is hope," but he grinned as he voiced the ancient truism.

Lieutenant Harold Percy Smith-Oldwick returned the other's smile. "I fancy," he said, "that we are getting short on both. It must be close to supper time now."

Zu-tag hunted alone far from the balance of the tribe of Go-lat, the great ape. Zu-tag (Big-neck) was a young bull but recently arrived at maturity. He was large, powerful, and ferocious and at the same time far above the average of his kind in intelligence as was denoted by a fuller and less receding forehead. Already Go-lat saw in this young ape a possible contender for the laurels of his kingship and consequently the old bull looked upon Zu-tag with jealousy and disfavor. It was for this reason, possibly, as much as another that Zu-tag hunted so often alone; but it was his utter fearlessness that permitted him to wander far afield away from the protection which numbers gave the great apes. One of the results of this habit was a greatly increased resourcefulness which found him constantly growing in intelligence and powers of observation.

Today he had been hunting toward the south and was returning along the river upon a path he often followed because it led by the village of the Gomangani whose strange and almost apelike actions and peculiar manners of living had aroused his interest and curiosity. As he had done upon other occasions he took up his position in a tree from which he could overlook the interior of the village and watch the blacks at their vocations in the street below.

Zu-tag had scarcely more than established himself in his tree when, with the blacks, he was startled by the crashing of Tarzan's body from the branches of another jungle giant to the ground within the palisade. He saw the Negroes gather about the prostrate form and later carry it into the hut; and once he rose to his full height upon the limb where he had been squatting and raised his face to the heavens to scream out a savage protest and a challenge, for he had recognized in the brown-skinned Tarmangani the strange white ape who had come among them a night or two before in the midst of their Dum-Dum, and who by so easily mastering the greatest among them, had won the savage respect and admiration of this fierce young bull.

But Zu-tag's ferocity was tempered by a certain native cunning and caution. Before he had voiced his protest there formed in his mind the thought that he would like to save this wonderful white ape from the common enemy, the Gomangani, and so he screamed forth no challenge, wisely determined that more could be accomplished by secrecy and stealth than by force of muscle and fang.

At first he thought to enter the village alone and carry off the Tarmangani; but when he saw how numerous were the warriors and that several sat directly before the entrance to the lair into which the prisoner had been carried, it occurred to him that this was work for many rather than one, and so, as silently as he had come, he slipped away through the foliage toward the north.

The tribe was still loitering about the clearing where stood the hut that Tarzan and Bertha Kircher had built. Some were idly searching for food just within the forest's edge, while others squatted beneath the shade of trees within the clearing.

The girl had emerged from the hut, her tears dried and was gazing anxiously toward the south into the jungle where Tarzan had disappeared. Occasionally she cast suspicious glances in the direction of the huge shaggy anthropoids about her. How easy it would be for one of those great beasts to enter the boma and slay her. How helpless she was, even with the spear that the white man had left her, she realized as she noted for the thousandth time the massive shoulders, the bull necks, and the great muscles gliding so easily beneath the glossy coats. Never, she thought, had she seen such personifications of brute power as were represented by these mighty bulls. Those huge hands would snap her futile spear as she might snap a match in two, while their lightest blow could crush her into insensibility and death.

It was while she was occupied with these depressing thoughts that there dropped suddenly into the clearing from the trees upon the south the figure of a mighty young bull. At that time all of the apes looked much alike to Bertha Kircher, nor was it until some time later that she realized that each differed from the others in individual characteristics of face and figure as do individuals of the human races. Yet even then she could not help but note the wondrous strength and agility of this great beast, and as he approached she even found herself admiring the sheen of his heavy, black, silvershot coat.

It was evident that the newcomer was filled with suppressed excitement. His demeanor and bearing proclaimed this even from afar, nor was the girl the only one to note it. For as they saw him coming many of the apes arose and advanced to meet him, bristling and growling as is their way. Go-lat was among these latter, and he advanced stiffly with the hairs upon his neck and down his spine erect, uttering low growls and baring his fighting fangs, for who might say whether Zu-tag came in peace or otherwise? The old king had seen other young apes come thus in his day filled with a sudden resolution to wrest the kingship from their chief. He had seen bulls about to run amuck burst thus suddenly from the jungle upon the members of the tribe, and so Go-lat took no chances.

Had Zu-tag come indolently, feeding as he came, he might have entered the tribe without arousing notice or suspicion, but when one comes thus precipitately, evidently bursting with some emotion out of the ordinary, let all apes beware. There was a certain amount of preliminary circling, growling, and sniffing, stiff-legged and stiff-haired, before each side discovered that the other had no

intention of initiating an attack and then Zu-tag told Go-lat what he had seen among the lairs of the Gomangani.

Go-lat grunted in disgust and turned away. "Let the white ape take care of himself," he said.

"He is a great ape," said Zu-tag. "He came to live in peace with the tribe of Go-lat. Let us save him from the Gomangani."

Go-lat grunted again and continued to move away.

"Zu-tag will go alone and get him," cried the young ape, "if Go-lat is afraid of the Gomangani."

The king ape wheeled in anger, growling loudly and beating upon his breast. "Go-lat is not afraid," he screamed, "but he will not go, for the white ape is not of his tribe. Go yourself and take the Tarmangani's she with you if you wish so much to save the white ape."

"Zu-tag will go," replied the younger bull, "and he will take the Tarmangani's she and all the bulls of Go-lat who are not cowards," and so saying he cast his eyes inquiringly about at the other apes. "Who will go with Zu-tag to fight the Gomangani and bring away our brother," he demanded.

Eight young bulls in the full prime of their vigor pressed forward to Zu-tag's side, but the old bulls with the conservatism and caution of many years upon their gray shoulders, shook their heads and waddled away after Go-lat.

"Good," cried Zu-tag. "We want no old shes to go with us to fight the Gomangani for that is work for the fighters of the tribe."

The old bulls paid no attention to his boastful words, but the eight who had volunteered to accompany him were filled with self-pride so that they stood around vaingloriously beating upon their breasts, baring their fangs and screaming their hideous challenge until the jungle reverberated to the horrid sound.

All this time Bertha Kircher was a wide-eyed and terrified spectator to what, as she thought, could end only in a terrific battle between these frightful beasts, and when Zu-tag and his followers began screaming forth their fearsome challenge, the girl found herself trembling in terror, for of all the sounds of the jungle there is none more awe inspiring than that of the great bull ape when he issues his challenge or shrieks forth his victory cry.

If she had been terrified before she was almost paralyzed with fear now as she saw Zu-tag and his apes turn toward the boma and approach her. With the agility of a cat Zu-tag leaped completely over the protecting wall and stood before her. Valiantly she held her spear before her, pointing it at his breast. He commenced to jabber and gesticulate, and even with her scant acquaintance with the ways of the anthropoids, she realized that he was not menacing her, for there was little or no baring of fighting fangs and his whole expression and attitude was of one attempting to explain a knotty problem or plead a worthy cause. At last he became evidently impatient, for with a sweep of one great paw he struck the spear from her hand and coming close, seized her by the arm, but not roughly. She shrank away in terror and yet some sense within her seemed to be trying to assure her that she was in no danger from this great beast. Zu-tag jabbered loudly, ever and again pointing into the jungle toward the south and moving toward the boma, pulling the girl with him. He seemed almost frantic in his efforts to explain something to her. He pointed toward the boma, herself, and then to the forest, and then, at last, as though by a sudden inspiration, he reached down and, seizing the spear, repeatedly touched it with his forefinger and again pointed toward the south. Suddenly it dawned upon the girl that what the ape was trying to explain to her was related in some way to the white man whose property they thought she was. Possibly her grim protector was in trouble and with this thought firmly established, she no longer held back, but started forward as though to accompany the young bull. At the point in the boma where Tarzan had blocked the entrance, she started to pull away the thorn bushes, and, when Zu-tag saw what she was doing, he fell to and assisted her so that presently they had an opening through the boma through which she passed with the great ape.

Immediately Zu-tag and his eight apes started off rapidly toward the jungle, so rapidly that Bertha Kircher would have had to run at top speed to keep up with them. This she realized she could not do, and so she was forced to lag behind, much to the chagrin of Zu-tag, who constantly kept running back and urging her to greater speed. Once he took her by the arm and tried to draw her along. Her protests were of no avail since the beast could not know that they were protests, nor did he desist until she caught her foot in some tangled grass and fell to the ground. Then indeed was Zu-tag furious and growled hideously. His apes were waiting at the edge of the forest for him to lead them. He suddenly realized that this poor weak she could not keep up with them and that if they traveled at her slow rate they might be too late to render assistance to the Tarmangani, and so without more ado, the giant anthropoid picked Bertha Kircher bodily from the ground and swung her to his back. Her arms were about his neck and in this position he seized her wrists in one great paw so that she could not fall off and started at a rapid rate to join his companions.

Dressed as she was in riding breeches with no entangling skirts to hinder or catch upon passing shrubbery, she soon found that she could cling tightly to the back of the mighty bull and when a moment later he took to the lower branches of the trees, she closed her eyes and clung to him in terror lest she be precipitated to the ground below.

That journey through the primeval forest with the nine great apes will live in the memory of Bertha Kircher for the balance of her life, as clearly delineated as at the moment of its enactment.

The first overwhelming wave of fear having passed, she was at last able to open her eyes and view her surroundings with increased interest and presently the sensation of terror slowly left her to be replaced by one of comparative security when she saw the ease and surety with which these great beasts traveled through the trees; and later her admiration for the young bull increased as it became evident that even burdened with her additional weight, he moved more rapidly and with no greater signs of fatigue than his unburdened fellows.

Not once did Zu-tag pause until he came to a stop among the branches of a tree no great distance from the native village. They could hear the noises of the life within the palisade, the laughing and shouting of the Negroes, and the barking of dogs, and through the foliage the girl caught glimpses of the village from which she had so recently escaped. She shuddered to think of the possibility of having to return to it and of possible recapture, and she wondered why Zu-tag had brought her here.

Now the apes advanced slowly once more and with great caution, moving as noiselessly through the trees as the squirrels themselves until they had reached a point where they could easily overlook the palisade and the village street below.

Zu-tag squatted upon a great branch close to the bole of the tree and by loosening the girl's arms from about his neck, indicated that she was to find a footing for herself and when she had done so, he turned toward her and pointed repeatedly at the open doorway of a hut upon the opposite side of the street below them. By various gestures he seemed to be trying to explain something to her and at last she caught at the germ of his idea--that her white man was a prisoner there.

Beneath them was the roof of a hut onto which she saw that she could easily drop, but what she could do after she had entered the village was beyond her.

Darkness was already falling and the fires beneath the cooking pots had been lighted. The girl saw the stake in the village street and the piles of fagots about it and in terror she suddenly realized the portent of these grisly preparations. Oh, if

she but only had some sort of a weapon that might give her even a faint hope, some slight advantage against the blacks. Then she would not hesitate to venture into the village in an attempt to save the man who had upon three different occasions saved her. She knew that he hated her and yet strong within her breast burned the sense of her obligation to him. She could not fathom him. Never in her life had she seen a man at once so paradoxical and dependable. In many of his ways he was more savage than the beasts with which he associated and yet, on the other hand, he was as chivalrous as a knight of old. For several days she had been lost with him in the jungle absolutely at his mercy, yet she had come to trust so implicitly in his honor that any fear she had had of him was rapidly disappearing.

On the other hand, that he might be hideously cruel was evidenced to her by the fact that he was planning to leave her alone in the midst of the frightful dangers which menaced her by night and by day.

Zu-tag was evidently waiting for darkness to fall before carrying out whatever plans had matured in his savage little brain, for he and his fellows sat quietly in the tree about her, watching the preparations of the blacks. Presently it became apparent that some altercation had arisen among the Negroes, for a score or more of them were gathered around one who appeared to be their chief, and all were talking and gesticulating heatedly. The argument lasted for some five or ten minutes when suddenly the little knot broke and two warriors ran to the opposite side of the village from whence they presently returned with a large stake which they soon set up beside the one already in place. The girl wondered what the purpose of the second stake might be, nor did she have long to wait for an explanation.

It was quite dark by this time, the village being lighted by the fitful glare of many fires, and now she saw a number of warriors approach and enter the hut Zu-tag had been watching. A moment later they reappeared, dragging between them two captives, one of whom the girl immediately recognized as her protector and the other as an Englishman in the uniform of an aviator. This, then, was the reason for the twostakes.

Arising quickly she placed a hand upon Zu-tag's shoulder and pointed down into the village. "Come," she said, as if she had been talking to one of her own kind, and with the word she swung lightly to the roof of the hut below. From there to the ground was but a short drop and a moment later she was circling the hut upon the side farthest from the fires, keeping in the dense shadows where there was little likelihood of being discovered. She turned once to see that Zu-tag was directly behind her and could see his huge bulk looming up in the dark, while beyond was another one of his eight. Doubtless they had all followed her and this

fact gave her a greater sense of security and hope than she had before experienced.

Pausing beside the hut next to the street, she peered cautiously about the corner. A few inches from her was the open doorway of the structure, and beyond, farther down the village street, the blacks were congregating about the prisoners, who were already being bound to the stakes. All eyes were centered upon the victims, and there was only the remotest chance that she and her companions would be discovered until they were close upon the blacks. She wished, however, that she might have some sort of a weapon with which to lead the attack, for she could not know, of course, for a certainty whether the great apes would follow her or not. Hoping that she might find something within the hut, she slipped quickly around the corner and into the doorway and after her, one by one, came the nine bulls. Searching quickly about the interior, she presently discovered a spear, and, armed with this, she again approached the entrance.

Tarzan of the Apes and Lieutenant Harold Percy Smith-Oldwick were bound securely to their respective stakes. Neither had spoken for some time. The Englishman turned his head so that he could see his companion in misery. Tarzan stood straight against his stake. His face was entirely expressionless in so far as either fear or anger were concerned. His countenance portrayed bored indifference though both men knew that they were about to be tortured.

"Good-bye, old top," whispered the young lieutenant.

Tarzan turned his eyes in the direction of the other and smiled. "Good-bye," he said. "If you want to get it over in a hurry, inhale the smoke and flames as rapidly as you can."

"Thanks," replied the aviator and though he made a wry face, he drew himself up very straight and squared his shoulders.

The women and children had seated themselves in a wide circle about the victims while the warriors, hideously painted, were forming slowly to commence the dance of death. Again Tarzan turned to his companion. "If you'd like to spoil their fun," he said, "don't make any fuss no matter how much you suffer. If you can carry on to the end without changing the expression upon your face or uttering a single word, you will deprive them of all the pleasures of this part of the entertainment. Good-bye again and good luck."

The young Englishman made no reply but it was evident from the set of his jaws that the Negroes would get little enjoyment out of him.

The warriors were circling now. Presently Numabo would draw first blood with his sharp spear which would be the signal for the beginning of the torture after a little of which the fagots would be lighted around the feet of the victims.

Closer and closer danced the hideous chief, his yellow, sharp-filed teeth showing in the firelight between his thick, red lips. Now bending double, now stamping furiously upon the ground, now leaping into the air, he danced step by step in the narrowing circle that would presently bring him within spear reach of the intended feast.

At last the spear reached out and touched the ape-man on the breast and when it came away, a little trickle of blood ran down the smooth, brown hide and almost simultaneously there broke from the outer periphery of the expectant audience a woman's shriek which seemed a signal for a series of hideous screamings, growlings and barkings, and a great commotion upon that side of the circle. The victims could not see the cause of the disturbance, but Tarzan did not have to see, for he knew by the voices of the apes the identity of the disturbers. He only wondered what had brought them and what the purpose of the attack, for he could not believe that they had come to rescue him.

Numabo and his warriors broke quickly from the circle of their dance to see pushing toward them through the ranks of their screaming and terrified people the very white girl who had escaped them a few nights before, and at her back what appeared to their surprised eyes a veritable horde of the huge and hairy forest men upon whom they looked with considerable fear and awe.

Striking to right and left with his heavy fists, tearing with his great fangs, came Zu-tag, the young bull, while at his heels, emulating his example, surged his hideous apes. Quickly they came through the old men and the women and children, for straight toward Numabo and his warriors the girl led them. It was then that they came within range of Tarzan's vision and he saw with unmixed surprise who it was that led the apes to his rescue.

To Zu-tag he shouted: "Go for the big bulls while the she unbinds me," and to Bertha Kircher: "Quick! Cut these bonds. The apes will take care of the blacks."

Turning from her advance the girl ran to his side. She had no knife and the bonds were tied tightly but she worked quickly and coolly and as Zu-tag and his apes closed with the warriors, she succeeded in loosening Tarzan's bonds sufficiently to permit him to extricate his own hands so that in another minute he had freed himself.

"Now unbind the Englishman," he cried, and, leaping forward, ran to join Zu-tag and his fellows in their battle against the blacks. Numabo and his warriors,

realizing now the relatively small numbers of the apes against them, had made a determined stand and with spears and other weapons were endeavoring to overcome the invaders. Three of the apes were already down, killed or mortally wounded, when Tarzan, realizing that the battle must eventually go against the apes unless some means could be found to break the morale of the Negroes, cast about him for some means of bringing about the desired end. And suddenly his eye lighted upon a number of weapons which he knew would accomplish the result. A grim smile touched his lips as he snatched a vessel of boiling water from one of the fires and hurled it full in the faces of the warriors. Screaming with terror and pain they fell back though Numabo urged them to rush forward.

Scarcely had the first cauldron of boiling water spilled its contents upon them ere Tarzan deluged them with a second, nor was there any third needed to send them shrieking in every direction to the security of their huts.

By the time Tarzan had recovered his own weapons the girl had released the young Englishman, and, with the six remaining apes, the three Europeans moved slowly toward the village gate, the aviator arming himself with a spear discarded by one of the scalded warriors, as they eagerly advanced toward the outer darkness.

Numabo was unable to rally the now thoroughly terrified and painfully burned warriors so that rescued and rescuers passed out of the village into the blackness of the jungle without further interference.

Tarzan strode through the jungle in silence. Beside him walked Zu-tag, the great ape, and behind them strung the surviving anthropoids followed by Fraulein Bertha Kircher and Lieutenant Harold Percy Smith-Oldwick, the latter a thoroughly astonished and mystified Englishman.

In all his life Tarzan of the Apes had been obliged to acknowledge but few obligations. He won his way through his savage world by the might of his own muscle, the superior keenness of his five senses and his God-given power to reason. Tonight the greatest of all obligations had been placed upon him--his life had been saved by another and Tarzan shook his head and growled, for it had been saved by one whom he hated above all others.