

## Chapter XI - Finding the Airplane

Tarzan of the Apes, returning from a successful hunt, with the body of Bara, the deer, across one sleek, brown shoulder, paused in the branches of a great tree at the edge of a clearing and gazed ruefully at two figures walking from the river to the boma-encircled hut a short distance away.

The ape-man shook his tousled head and sighed. His eyes wandered toward the west and his thoughts to the far-away cabin by the land-locked harbor of the great water that washed the beach of his boyhood home--to the cabin of his long-dead father to which the memories and treasures of a happy childhood lured him. Since the loss of his mate, a great longing had possessed him to return to the haunts of his youth--to the untracked jungle wilderness where he had lived the life he loved best long before man had invaded the precincts of his wild stamping grounds. There he hoped in a renewal of the old life under the old conditions to win surcease from sorrow and perhaps some measure of forgetfulness.

But the little cabin and the land-locked harbor were many long, weary marches away, and he was handicapped by the duty which he felt he owed to the two figures walking in the clearing before him. One was a young man in a worn and ragged uniform of the British Royal Air Forces, the other, a young woman in the even more disreputable remnants of what once had been trim riding togs.

A freak of fate had thrown these three radically different types together. One was a savage, almost naked beast-man, one an English army officer, and the woman, she whom the ape-man knew and hated as a German spy.

How he was to get rid of them Tarzan could not imagine unless he accompanied them upon the weary march back to the east coast, a march that would necessitate his once more retracing the long, weary way he already had covered towards his goal, yet what else could be done? These two had neither the strength, endurance, nor jungle-craft to accompany him through the unknown country to the west, nor did he wish them with him. The man he might have tolerated, but he could not even consider the presence of the girl in the far-off cabin, which had in a way become sacred to him through its memories, without a growl or anger rising to his lips. There remained, then, but the one way, since he could not desert them. He must move by slow and irksome marches back to the east coast, or at least to the first white settlement in that direction.

He had, it is true, contemplated leaving the girl to her fate but that was before she had been instrumental in saving him from torture and death at the hands of the black Wamabos. He chafed under the obligation she had put upon him, but

no less did he acknowledge it and as he watched the two, the rueful expression upon his face was lightened by a smile as he thought of the helplessness of them. What a puny thing, indeed, was man! How ill equipped to combat the savage forces of nature and of nature's jungle. Why, even the tiny balu of the tribe of Golat, the great ape, was better fitted to survive than these, for a balu could at least escape the numerous creatures that menaced its existence, while with the possible exception of Kota, the tortoise, none moved so slowly as did helpless and feeble man.

Without him these two doubtless would starve in the midst of plenty, should they by some miracle escape the other forces of destruction which constantly threatened them. That morning Tarzan had brought them fruit, nuts, and plantain, and now he was bringing them the flesh of his kill, while the best that they might do was to fetch water from the river. Even now, as they walked across the clearing toward the boma, they were in utter ignorance of the presence of Tarzan near them. They did not know that his sharp eyes were watching them, nor that other eyes less friendly were glaring at them from a clump of bushes close beside the boma entrance. They did not know these things, but Tarzan did. No more than they could he see the creature crouching in the concealment of the foliage, yet he knew that it was there and what it was and what its intentions, precisely as well as though it had been lying in the open.

A slight movement of the leaves at the top of a single stem had apprised him of the presence of a creature there, for the movement was not that imparted by the wind. It came from pressure at the bottom of the stem which communicates a different movement to the leaves than does the wind passing among them, as anyone who has lived his lifetime in the jungle well knows, and the same wind that passed through the foliage of the bush brought to the ape-man's sensitive nostrils indisputable evidence of the fact that Sheeta, the panther, waited there for the two returning from the river.

They had covered half the distance to the boma entrance when Tarzan called to them to stop. They looked in surprise in the direction from which his voice had come to see him drop lightly to the ground and advance toward them.

"Come slowly toward me," he called to them. "Do not run for if you run Sheeta will charge."

They did as he bid, their faces filled with questioning wonderment.

"What do you mean?" asked the young Englishman. "Who is Sheeta?" but for answer the ape-man suddenly hurled the carcass of Bara, the deer, to the ground and leaped quickly toward them, his eyes upon something in their rear; and then

it was that the two turned and learned the identity of Sheeta, for behind them was a devil-faced cat charging rapidly toward them.

Sheeta with rising anger and suspicion had seen the ape-man leap from the tree and approach the quarry. His life's experiences backed by instinct told him that the Tarmangani was about to rob him of his prey and as Sheeta was hungry, he had no intention of being thus easily deprived of the flesh he already considered his own.

The girl stifled an involuntary scream as she saw the proximity of the fanged fury bearing down upon them. She shrank close to the man and clung to him and all unarmed and defenseless as he was, the Englishman pushed her behind him and shielding her with his body, stood squarely in the face of the panther's charge. Tarzan noted the act, and though accustomed as he was to acts of courage, he experienced a thrill from the hopeless and futile bravery of the man.

The charging panther moved rapidly, and the distance which separated the bush in which he had concealed himself from the objects of his desire was not great. In the time that one might understandingly read a dozen words the strong-limbed cat could have covered the entire distance and made his kill, yet if Sheeta was quick, quick too was Tarzan. The English lieutenant saw the ape-man flash by him like the wind. He saw the great cat veer in his charge as though to elude the naked savage rushing to meet him, as it was evidently Sheeta's intention to make good his kill before attempting to protect it from Tarzan.

Lieutenant Smith-Oldwick saw these things and then with increasing wonder he saw the ape-man swerve, too, and leap for the spotted cat as a football player leaps for a runner. He saw the strong, brown arms encircling the body of the carnivore, the left arm in front of the beast's left shoulder and the right arm behind his right foreleg, and with the impact the two together rolling over and over upon the turf. He heard the snarls and growls of bestial combat, and it was with a feeling of no little horror that he realized that the sounds coming from the human throat of the battling man could scarce be distinguished from those of the panther.

The first momentary shock of terror over, the girl released her grasp upon the Englishman's arm. "Cannot we do something?" she asked. "Cannot we help him before the beast kills him?"

The Englishman looked upon the ground for some missile with which to attack the panther and then the girl uttered an exclamation and started at a run toward the hut. "Wait there," she called over her shoulder. "I will fetch the spear that he left me."

Smith-Oldwick saw the raking talons of the panther searching for the flesh of the man and the man on his part straining every muscle and using every artifice to keep his body out of range of them. The muscles of his arms knotted under the brown hide. The veins stood out upon his neck and forehead as with ever-increasing power he strove to crush the life from the great cat. The ape-man's teeth were fastened in the back of Sheeta's neck and now he succeeded in encircling the beast's torso with his legs which he crossed and locked beneath the cat's belly. Leaping and snarling, Sheeta sought to dislodge the ape-man's hold upon him. He hurled himself upon the ground and rolled over and over. He reared upon his hind legs and threw himself backwards but always the savage creature upon his back clung tenaciously to him, and always the mighty brown arms crushed tighter and tighter about his chest.

And then the girl, panting from her quick run, returned with the short spear Tarzan had left her as her sole weapon of protection. She did not wait to hand it to the Englishman who ran forward to receive it, but brushed past him and leaped into close quarters beside the growling, tumbling mass of yellow fur and smooth brown hide. Several times she attempted to press the point home into the cat's body, but on both occasions the fear of endangering the ape-man caused her to desist, but at last the two lay motionless for a moment as the carnivore sought a moment's rest from the strenuous exertions of battle, and then it was that Bertha Kircher pressed the point of the spear to the tawny side and drove it deep into the savage heart.

Tarzan rose from the dead body of Sheeta and shook himself after the manner of beasts that are entirely clothed with hair. Like many other of his traits and mannerisms this was the result of environment rather than heredity or reversion, and even though he was outwardly a man, the Englishman and the girl were both impressed with the naturalness of the act. It was as though Numa, emerging from a fight, had shaken himself to straighten his ruffled mane and coat, and yet, too, there was something uncanny about it as there had been when the savage growls and hideous snarls issued from those clean-cut lips.

Tarzan looked at the girl, a quizzical expression upon his face. Again had she placed him under obligations to her, and Tarzan of the Apes did not wish to be obligated to a German spy; yet in his honest heart he could not but admit a certain admiration for her courage, a trait which always greatly impressed the ape-man, he himself the personification of courage.

"Here is the kill," he said, picking the carcass of Bara from the ground. "You will want to cook your portion, I presume, but Tarzan does not spoil his meat with fire."

They followed him to the boma where he cut several pieces of meat from the carcass for them, retaining a joint for himself. The young lieutenant prepared a fire, and the girl presided over the primitive culinary rights of their simple meal. As she worked some little way apart from them, the lieutenant and the ape-man watched her.

"She is wonderful. Is she not?" murmured Smith-Oldwick.

"She is a German and a spy," replied Tarzan.

The Englishman turned quickly upon him. "What do you mean?" he cried.

"I mean what I say," replied the ape-man. "She is a German and a spy."

"I do not believe it!" exclaimed the aviator.

"You do not have to," Tarzan assured him. "It is nothing to me what you believe. I saw her in conference with the Boche general and his staff at the camp near Taveta. They all knew her and called her by name and she handed him a paper. The next time I saw her she was inside the British lines in disguise, and again I saw her bearing word to a German officer at Wilhelmstal. She is a German and a spy, but she is a woman and therefore I cannot destroy her."

"You really believe that what you say is true?" asked the young lieutenant. "My God! I cannot believe it. She is so sweet and brave and good."

The ape-man shrugged his shoulders. "She is brave," he said, "but even Pamba, the rat, must have some good quality, but she is what I have told you and therefore I hate her and you should hate her."

Lieutenant Harold Percy Smith-Oldwick buried his face in his hands. "God forgive me," he said at last. "I cannot hate her."

The ape-man cast a contemptuous look at his companion and arose. "Tarzan goes again to hunt," he said. "You have enough food for two days. By that time he will return."

The two watched him until he had disappeared in the foliage of the trees at the further side of the clearing.

When he had gone the girl felt a vague sense of apprehension that she never experienced when Tarzan was present. The invisible menaces lurking in the grim jungle seemed more real and much more imminent now that the ape-man was no longer near. While he had been there talking with them, the little thatched hut and its surrounding thorn boma had seemed as safe a place as the world might afford. She wished that he had remained--two days seemed an eternity in

contemplation—two days of constant fear, two days, every moment of which would be fraught with danger. She turned toward her companion.

"I wish that he had remained," she said. "I always feel so much safer when he is near. He is very grim and very terrible, and yet I feel safer with him than with any man I ever have known. He seems to dislike me and yet I know that he would let no harm befall me. I cannot understand him."

"Neither do I understand him," replied the Englishman; "but I know this much—our presence here is interfering with his plans. He would like to be rid of us, and I half imagine that he rather hopes to find when he returns that we have succumbed to one of the dangers which must always confront us in this savage land.

"I think that we should try to return to the white settlements. This man does not want us here, nor is it reasonable to assume that we could long survive in such a savage wilderness. I have traveled and hunted in several parts of Africa, but never have I seen or heard of any single locality so overrun with savage beasts and dangerous natives. If we set out for the east coast at once we would be in but little more danger than we are here, and if we could survive a day's march, I believe that we will find the means of reaching the coast in a few hours, for my plane must still be in the same place that I landed just before the blacks captured me. Of course there is no one here who could operate it nor is there any reason why they should have destroyed it. As a matter of fact, the natives would be so fearful and suspicious of so strange and incomprehensible a thing that the chances are they would not dare approach it. Yes, it must be where I left it and all ready to carry us safely to the settlements."

"But we cannot leave," said the girl, "until he returns. We could not go away like that without thanking him or bidding him farewell. We are under too great obligations to him."

The man looked at her in silence for a moment. He wondered if she knew how Tarzan felt toward her and then he himself began to speculate upon the truth of the ape-man's charges. The longer he looked at the girl, the less easy was it to entertain the thought that she was an enemy spy. He was upon the point of asking her point-blank but he could not bring himself to do so, finally determining to wait until time and longer acquaintance should reveal the truth or falsity of the accusation.

"I believe," he said as though there had been no pause in their conversation, "that the man would be more than glad to find us gone when he returns. It is not necessary to jeopardize our lives for two more days in order that we may thank

him, however much we may appreciate his services to us. You have more than balanced your obligations to him and from what he told me I feel that you especially should not remain here longer."

The girl looked up at him in astonishment. "What do you mean?" she asked.

"I do not like to tell," said the Englishman, digging nervously at the turf with the point of a stick, "but you have my word that he would rather you were not here."

"Tell me what he said," she insisted, "I have a right to know."

Lieutenant Smith-Oldwick squared his shoulders and raised his eyes to those of the girl. "He said that he hated you," he blurted. "He has only aided you at all from a sense of duty because you are a woman."

The girl paled and then flushed. "I will be ready to go," she said, "in just a moment. We had better take some of this meat with us. There is no telling when we will be able to get more."

And so the two set out down the river toward the south. The man carried the short spear that Tarzan had left with the girl, while she was entirely unarmed except for a stick she had picked up from among those left after the building of the hut. Before departing she had insisted that the man leave a note for Tarzan thanking him for his care of them and bidding him goodbye. This they left pinned to the inside wall of the hut with a little sliver of wood.

It was necessary that they be constantly on the alert since they never knew what might confront them at the next turn of the winding jungle trail or what might lie concealed in the tangled bushes at either side. There was also the ever-present danger of meeting some of Numabo's black warriors and as the village lay directly in their line of march, there was the necessity for making a wide detour before they reached it in order to pass around it without being discovered.

"I am not so much afraid of the native blacks," said the girl, "as I am of Usanga and his people. He and his men were all attached to a German native regiment. They brought me along with them when they deserted, either with the intention of holding me ransom or selling me into the harem of one of the black sultans of the north. Usanga is much more to be feared than Numabo for he has had the advantage of European military training and is armed with more or less modern weapons and ammunition."

"It is lucky for me," remarked the Englishman, "that it was the ignorant Numabo who discovered and captured me rather than the worldly wise Usanga. He would

have felt less fear of the giant flying machine and would have known only too well how to wreck it."

"Let us pray that the black sergeant has not discovered it," said the girl.

They made their way to a point which they guessed was about a mile above the village, then they turned into the trackless tangle of undergrowth to the east. So dense was the verdure at many points that it was with the utmost difficulty they wormed their way through, sometimes on hands and knees and again by clambering over numerous fallen tree trunks. Interwoven with dead limbs and living branches were the tough and ropelike creepers which formed a tangled network across their path.

South of them in an open meadowland a number of black warriors were gathered about an object which elicited much wondering comment. The blacks were clothed in fragments of what had once been uniforms of a native German command. They were a most unlovely band and chief among them in authority and repulsiveness was the black sergeant Usanga. The object of their interest was a British aeroplane.

Immediately after the Englishman had been brought to Numabo's village Usanga had gone out in search of the plane, prompted partially by curiosity and partially by an intention to destroy it, but when he had found it, some new thought had deterred him from carrying out his design. The thing represented considerable value as he well knew and it had occurred to him that in some way he might turn his prize to profit. Every day he had returned to it, and while at first it had filled him with considerable awe, he eventually came to look upon it with the accustomed eye of a proprietor, so that he now clambered into the fuselage and even advanced so far as to wish that he might learn to operate it.

What a feat it would be indeed to fly like a bird far above the highest tree top! How it would fill his less favored companions with awe and admiration! If Usanga could but fly, so great would be the respect of all the tribesmen throughout the scattered villages of the great interior, they would look upon him as little less than a god.

Usanga rubbed his palms together and smacked his thick lips. Then indeed, would he be very rich, for all the villages would pay tribute to him and he could even have as many as a dozen wives. With that thought, however, came a mental picture of Naratu, the black termagant, who ruled him with an iron hand. Usanga made a wry face and tried to forget the extra dozen wives, but the lure of the idea remained and appealed so strongly to him that he presently found himself



reasoning most logically that a god would not be much of a god with less than twenty-four wives.

He fingered the instruments and the control, half hoping and half fearing that he would alight upon the combination that would put the machine in flight. Often had he watched the British air-men soaring above the German lines and it looked so simple he was quite sure that he could do it himself if there was somebody who could but once show him how. There was, of course, always the hope that the white man who came in the machine and who had escaped from Numabo's village might fall into Usanga's hands and then indeed would he be able to learn how to fly. It was in this hope that Usanga spent so much time in the vicinity of the plane, reasoning as he did that eventually the white man would return in search of it.

And at last he was rewarded, for upon this very day after he had quit the machine and entered the jungle with his warriors, he heard voices to the north and when he and his men had hidden in the dense foliage upon either side of the trail, Usanga was presently filled with elation by the appearance of the British officer and the white girl whom the black sergeant had coveted and who had escaped him.

The Negro could scarce restrain a shout of elation, for he had not hoped that fate would be so kind as to throw these two whom he most desired into his power at the same time.

As the two came down the trail all unconscious of impending danger, the man was explaining that they must be very close to the point at which the plane had landed. Their entire attention was centered on the trail directly ahead of them, as they momentarily expected it to break into the meadowland where they were sure they would see the plane that would spell life and liberty for them.

The trail was broad, and they were walking side by side so that at a sharp turn the park-like clearing was revealed to them simultaneously with the outlines of the machine they sought.

Exclamations of relief and delight broke from their lips, and at the same instant Usanga and his black warriors rose from the bushes all about them.