

## Chapter XXIV - The Tommies

Daylight overtook them after they had entered the gorge, but, tired as they all were with the exception of Tarzan, they realized that they must keep on at all costs until they found a spot where they might ascend the precipitous side of the gorge to the floor of the plateau above. Tarzan and Otobu were both equally confident that the Xujans would not follow them beyond the gorge, but though they scanned every inch of the frowning cliffs upon either hand noon came and there was still no indication of any avenue of escape to right or left. There were places where the ape-man alone might have negotiated the ascent but none where the others could hope successfully to reach the plateau, nor where Tarzan, powerful and agile as he was, could have ventured safely to carry them aloft.

For half a day the ape-man had been either carrying or supporting Smith-Oldwick and now, to his chagrin, he saw that the girl was faltering. He had realized well how much she had undergone and how greatly the hardships and dangers and the fatigue of the past weeks must have told upon her vitality. He saw how bravely she attempted to keep up, yet how often she stumbled and staggered as she labored through the sand and gravel of the gorge. Nor could he help but admire her fortitude and the uncomplaining effort she was making to push on.

The Englishman must have noticed her condition too, for some time after noon, he stopped suddenly and sat down in the sand. "It's no use," he said to Tarzan. "I can go no farther. Miss Kircher is rapidly weakening. You will have to go on without me."

"No," said the girl, "we cannot do that. We have all been through so much together and the chances of our escape are still so remote that whatever comes, let us remain together, unless," and she looked up at Tarzan, "you, who have done so much for us to whom you are under no obligations, will go on without us. I for one wish that you would. It must be as evident to you as it is to me that you cannot save us, for though you succeeded in dragging us from the path of our pursuers, even your great strength and endurance could never take one of us across the desert waste which lies between here and the nearest fertile country."

The ape-man returned her serious look with a smile. "You are not dead," he said to her, "nor is the lieutenant, nor Otobu, nor myself. One is either dead or alive, and until we are dead we should plan only upon continuing to live. Because we remain here and rest is no indication that we shall die here. I cannot carry you both to the country of the Wamabos, which is the nearest spot at which we may expect to find game and water, but we shall not give up on that account. So far we have found a way. Let us take things as they come. Let us rest now because

you and Lieutenant Smith-Oldwick need the rest, and when you are stronger we will go on again."

"But the Xujans--?" she asked, "may they not follow us here?"

"Yes," he said, "they probably will. But we need not be concerned with them until they come."

"I wish," said the girl, "that I possessed your philosophy but I am afraid it is beyond me."

"You were not born and reared in the jungle by wild beasts and among wild beasts, or you would possess, as I do, the fatalism of the jungle."

And so they moved to the side of the gorge beneath the shade of an overhanging rock and lay down in the hot sand to rest. Numa wandered restlessly to and fro and finally, after sprawling for a moment close beside the ape-man, rose and moved off up the gorge to be lost to view a moment later beyond the nearest turn.

For an hour the little party rested and then Tarzan suddenly rose and, motioning the others to silence, listened. For a minute he stood motionless, his keen ears acutely receptive to sounds so faint and distant that none of the other three could detect the slightest break in the utter and deathlike quiet of the gorge. Finally the ape-man relaxed and turned toward them. "What is it?" asked the girl.

"They are coming," he replied. "They are yet some distance away, though not far, for the sandaled feet of the men and the pads of the lions make little noise upon the soft sands."

"What shall we do--try to go on?" asked Smith-Oldwick. "I believe I could make a go of it now for a short way. I am much rested. How about you Miss Kircher?"

"Oh, yes," she said, "I am much stronger. Yes, surely I can go on."

Tarzan knew that neither of them quite spoke the truth, that people do not recover so quickly from utter exhaustion, but he saw no other way and there was always the hope that just beyond the next turn would be a way out of the gorge.

"You help the lieutenant, Otobu," he said, turning to the black, "and I will carry Miss Kircher," and though the girl objected, saying that he must not waste his strength, he lifted her lightly in his arms and moved off up the canyon, followed by Otobu and the Englishman. They had gone no great distance when the others of the party became aware of the sounds of pursuit, for now the lions were whining as though the fresh scent spoor of their quarry had reached their nostrils.

"I wish that your Numa would return," said the girl.

"Yes," said Tarzan, "but we shall have to do the best we can without him. I should like to find some place where we can barricade ourselves against attack from all sides. Possibly then we might hold them off. Smith-Oldwick is a good shot and if there are not too many men he might be able to dispose of them provided they can only come at him one at a time. The lions don't bother me so much. Sometimes they are stupid animals, and I am sure that these that pursue us, and who are so dependent upon the masters that have raised and trained them, will be easily handled after the warriors are disposed of."

"You think there is some hope, then?" she asked.

"We are still alive," was his only answer.

"There," he said presently, "I thought I recalled this very spot." He pointed toward a fragment that had evidently fallen from the summit of the cliff and which now lay imbedded in the sand a few feet from the base. It was a jagged fragment of rock which rose some ten feet above the surface of the sand, leaving a narrow aperture between it and the cliff behind. Toward this they directed their steps and when finally they reached their goal they found a space about two feet wide and ten feet long between the rock and the cliff. To be sure it was open at both ends but at least they could not be attacked upon all sides at once.

They had scarcely concealed themselves before Tarzan's quick ears caught a sound upon the face of the cliff above them, and looking up he saw a diminutive monkey perched upon a slight projection--an ugly-faced little monkey who looked down upon them for a moment and then scampered away toward the south in the direction from which their pursuers were coming. Otobu had seen the monkey too. "He will tell the parrots," said the black, "and the parrots will tell the madmen."

"It is all the same," replied Tarzan; "the lions would have found us here. We could not hope to hide from them."

He placed Smith-Oldwick, with his pistol, at the north opening of their haven and told Otobu to stand with his spear at the Englishman's shoulder, while he himself prepared to guard the southern approach. Between them he had the girl lie down in the sand. "You will be safe there in the event that they use their spears," he said.

The minutes that dragged by seemed veritable eternities to Bertha Kircher and then at last, and almost with relief, she knew that the pursuers were upon them. She heard the angry roaring of the lions and the cries of the madmen. For several

minutes the men seemed to be investigating the stronghold which their quarry had discovered. She could hear them both to the north and south and then from where she lay she saw a lion charging for the ape-man before her. She saw the giant arm swing back with the curved saber and she saw it fall with terrific velocity and meet the lion as he rose to grapple with the man, cleaving his skull as cleanly as a butcher opens up a sheep.

Then she heard footsteps running rapidly toward Smith-Oldwick and, as his pistol spoke, there was a scream and the sound of a falling body. Evidently disheartened by the failure of their first attempt the assaulters drew off, but only for a short time. Again they came, this time a man opposing Tarzan and a lion seeking to overcome Smith-Oldwick. Tarzan had cautioned the young Englishman not to waste his cartridges upon the lions and it was Otobu with the Xujan spear who met the beast, which was not subdued until both he and Smith-Oldwick had been mauled, and the latter had succeeded in running the point of the saber the girl had carried, into the beast's heart. The man who opposed Tarzan inadvertently came too close in an attempt to cut at the ape-man's head, with the result that an instant later his corpse lay with the neck broken upon the body of the lion.

Once again the enemy withdrew, but again only for a short time, and now they came in full force, the lions and the men, possibly a half dozen of each, the men casting their spears and the lions waiting just behind, evidently for the signal to charge.

"Is this the end?" asked the girl.

"No," cried the ape-man, "for we still live!"

The words had scarcely passed his lips when the remaining warriors, rushing in, cast their spears simultaneously from both sides. In attempting to shield the girl, Tarzan received one of the shafts in the shoulder, and so heavily had the weapon been hurled that it bore him backward to the ground. Smith-Oldwick fired his pistol twice when he too was struck down, the weapon entering his right leg midway between hip and knee. Only Otobu remained to face the enemy, for the Englishman, already weak from his wounds and from the latest mauling he had received at the claws of the lion, had lost consciousness as he sank to the ground with this new hurt.

As he fell his pistol dropped from his fingers, and the girl, seeing, snatched it up. As Tarzan struggled to rise, one of the warriors leaped full upon his breast and bore him back as, with fiendish shrieks, he raised the point of his saber above the

other's heart. Before he could drive it home the girl leveled Smith-Oldwick's pistol and fired point-blank at the fiend's face.

Simultaneously there broke upon the astonished ears of both attackers and attacked a volley of shots from the gorge. With the sweetness of the voice of an angel from heaven the Europeans heard the sharp-barked commands of an English noncom. Even above the roars of the lions and the screams of the maniacs, those beloved tones reached the ears of Tarzan and the girl at the very moment that even the ape-man had given up the last vestige of hope.

Rolling the body of the warrior to one side Tarzan struggled to his feet, the spear still protruding from his shoulder. The girl rose too, and as Tarzan wrenched the weapon from his flesh and stepped out from behind the concealment of their refuge, she followed at his side. The skirmish that had resulted in their rescue was soon over. Most of the lions escaped but all of the pursuing Xujans had been slain. As Tarzan and the girl came into full view of the group, a British Tommy leveled his rifle at the ape-man. Seeing the fellow's actions and realizing instantly the natural error that Tarzan's yellow tunic had occasioned the girl sprang between him and the soldier. "Don't shoot," she cried to the latter, "we are both friends."

"Hold up your hands, you, then," he commanded Tarzan. "I ain't taking no chances with any duffer with a yellow shirt."

At this juncture the British sergeant who had been in command of the advance guard approached and when Tarzan and the girl spoke to him in English, explaining their disguises, he accepted their word, since they were evidently not of the same race as the creatures which lay dead about them. Ten minutes later the main body of the expedition came into view. Smith-Oldwick's wounds were dressed, as well as were those of the ape-man, and in half an hour they were on their way to the camp of their rescuers.

That night it was arranged that the following day Smith-Oldwick and Bertha Kircher should be transported to British headquarters near the coast by aeroplane, the two planes attached to the expeditionary force being requisitioned for the purpose. Tarzan and Otobu declined the offers of the British captain to accompany his force overland on the return march as Tarzan explained that his country lay to the west, as did Otobu's, and that they would travel together as far as the country of the Wamabos.

"You are not going back with us, then?" asked the girl.

"No," replied the ape-man. "My home is upon the west coast. I will continue my journey in that direction."

She cast appealing eyes toward him. "You will go back into that terrible jungle?" she asked. "We shall never see you again?"

He looked at her a moment in silence. "Never," he said, and without another word turned and walked away.

In the morning Colonel Capell came from the base camp in one of the planes that was to carry Smith-Oldwick and the girl to the east. Tarzan was standing some distance away as the ship landed and the officer descended to the ground. He saw the colonel greet his junior in command of the advance detachment, and then he saw him turn toward Bertha Kircher who was standing a few paces behind the captain. Tarzan wondered how the German spy felt in this situation, especially when she must know that there was one there who knew her real status. He saw Colonel Capell walk toward her with outstretched hands and smiling face and, although he could not hear the words of his greeting, he saw that it was friendly and cordial to a degree.

Tarzan turned away scowling, and if any had been close by they might have heard a low growl rumble from his chest. He knew that his country was at war with Germany and that not only his duty to the land of his fathers, but also his personal grievance against the enemy people and his hatred of them, demanded that he expose the girl's perfidy, and yet he hesitated, and because he hesitated he growled--not at the German spy but at himself for his weakness.

He did not see her again before she entered a plane and was borne away toward the east. He bid farewell to Smith-Oldwick and received again the oft-repeated thanks of the young Englishman. And then he saw him too borne aloft in the high circling plane and watched until the ship became a speck far above the eastern horizon to disappear at last high in air.

The Tommies, their packs and accouterments slung, were waiting the summons to continue their return march. Colonel Capell had, through a desire to personally observe the stretch of country between the camp of the advance detachment and the base, decided to march back his troops. Now that all was in readiness for departure he turned to Tarzan. "I wish you would come back with us, Greystoke," he said, "and if my appeal carries no inducement possibly that of Smith-Oldwick 'and the young lady who just left us may. They asked me to urge you to return to civilization."

"No;" said Tarzan, "I shall go my own way. Miss Kircher and Lieutenant Smith-Oldwick were only prompted by a sense of gratitude in considering my welfare."

"Miss Kircher?" exclaimed Capell and then he laughed, "You know her then as Bertha Kircher, the German spy?"

Tarzan looked at the other a moment in silence. It was beyond him to conceive that a British officer should thus laconically speak of an enemy spy whom he had had within his power and permitted to escape. "Yes," he replied, "I knew that she was Bertha Kircher, the German spy?"

"Is that all you knew?" asked Capell.

"That is all," said the ape-man.

"She is the Honorable Patricia Canby," said Capell, "one of the most valuable members of the British Intelligence Service attached to the East African forces. Her father and I served in India together and I have known her ever since she was born.

"Why, here's a packet of papers she took from a German officer and has been carrying it through all her vicissitudes--single-minded in the performance of her duty. Look! I haven't yet had time to examine them but as you see here is a military sketch map, a bundle of reports, and the diary of one Hauptmann Fritz Schneider."

"The diary of Hauptmann Fritz Schneider!" repeated Tarzan in a constrained voice. "May I see it, Capell? He is the man who murdered Lady Greystoke."

The Englishman handed the little volume over to the other without a word. Tarzan ran through the pages quickly looking for a certain date--the date that the horror had been committed--and when he found it he read rapidly. Suddenly a gasp of incredulity burst from his lips. Capell looked at him questioningly.

"God!" exclaimed the ape-man. "Can this be true? Listen!" and he read an excerpt from the closely written page:

"Played a little joke on the English pig. When he comes home he will find the burned body of his wife in her boudoir--but he will only think it is his wife. Had von Goss substitute the body of a dead Negress and char it after putting Lady Greystoke's rings on it--Lady G will be of more value to the High Command alive than dead."

"She lives!" cried Tarzan.

"Thank God!" exclaimed Capell. "And now?"

"I will return with you, of course. How terribly I have wronged Miss Canby, but how could I know? I even told Smith-Oldwick, who loves her, that she was a German spy.

"Not only must I return to find my wife but I must right this wrong."

"Don't worry about that," said Capell, "she must have convinced him that she is no enemy spy, for just before they left this morning he told me she had promised to marry him."