

Chapter 3 - Pan-at-lee

Night had fallen upon unchartered Pal-ul-don. A slender moon, low in the west, bathed the white faces of the chalk cliffs presented to her, in a mellow, unearthly glow. Black were the shadows in Kor-ul-ja, Gorge-of-lions, where dwelt the tribe of the same name under Es-sat, their chief. From an aperture near the summit of the lofty escarpment a hairy figure emerged--the head and shoulders first--and fierce eyes scanned the cliff side in every direction.

It was Es-sat, the chief. To right and left and below he looked as though to assure himself that he was unobserved, but no other figure moved upon the cliff face, nor did another hairy body protrude from any of the numerous cave mouths from the high-flung abode of the chief to the habitations of the more lowly members of the tribe nearer the cliff's base. Then he moved outward upon the sheer face of the white chalk wall. In the half-light of the baby moon it appeared that the heavy, shaggy black figure moved across the face of the perpendicular wall in some miraculous manner, but closer examination would have revealed stout pegs, as large around as a man's wrist protruding from holes in the cliff into which they were driven. Es-sat's four handlike members and his long, sinuous tail permitted him to move with consummate ease whither he chose--a gigantic rat upon a mighty wall. As he progressed upon his way he avoided the cave mouths, passing either above or below those that lay in his path.

The outward appearance of these caves was similar. An opening from eight to as much as twenty feet long by eight high and four to six feet deep was cut into the chalklike rock of the cliff, in the back of this large opening, which formed what might be described as the front veranda of the home, was an opening about three feet wide and six feet high, evidently forming the doorway to the interior apartment or apartments. On either side of this doorway were smaller openings which it were easy to assume were windows through which light and air might find their way to the inhabitants. Similar windows were also dotted over the cliff face between the entrance porches, suggesting that the entire face of the cliff was honeycombed with apartments. From many of these smaller apertures small streams of water trickled down the escarpment, and the walls above others was blackened as by smoke. Where the water ran the wall was eroded to a depth of from a few inches to as much as a foot, suggesting that some of the tiny streams had been trickling downward to the green carpet of vegetation below for ages.

In this primeval setting the great pithecanthropus aroused no jarring discord for he was as much a part of it as the trees that grew upon the summit of the cliff or those that hid their feet among the dank ferns in the bottom of the gorge.

Now he paused before an entrance-way and listened and then, noiselessly as the moonlight upon the trickling waters, he merged with the shadows of the outer porch. At the doorway leading into the interior he paused again, listening, and then quietly pushing aside the heavy skin that covered the aperture he passed within a large chamber hewn from the living rock. From the far end, through another doorway, shone a light, dimly. Toward this he crept with utmost stealth, his naked feet giving forth no sound. The knotted club that had been hanging at his back from a thong about his neck he now removed and carried in his left hand.

Beyond the second doorway was a corridor running parallel with the cliff face. In this corridor were three more doorways, one at each end and a third almost opposite that in which Es-sat stood. The light was coming from an apartment at the end of the corridor at his left. A sputtering flame rose and fell in a small stone receptacle that stood upon a table or bench of the same material, a monolithic bench fashioned at the time the room was excavated, rising massively from the floor, of which it was a part.

In one corner of the room beyond the table had been left a dais of stone about four feet wide and eight feet long. Upon this were piled a foot or so of softly tanned pelts from which the fur had not been removed. Upon the edge of this dais sat a young female Waz-don. In one hand she held a thin piece of metal, apparently of hammered gold, with serrated edges, and in the other a short, stiff brush. With these she was occupied in going over her smooth, glossy coat which bore a remarkable resemblance to plucked sealskin. Her loin cloth of yellow and black striped jato-skin lay on the couch beside her with the circular breastplates of beaten gold, revealing the symmetrical lines of her nude figure in all its beauty and harmony of contour, for even though the creature was jet black and entirely covered with hair yet she was undeniably beautiful.

That she was beautiful in the eyes of Es-sat, the chief, was evidenced by the gloating expression upon his fierce countenance and the increased rapidity of his breathing. Moving quickly forward he entered the room and as he did so the young she looked up. Instantly her eyes filled with terror and as quickly she seized the loin cloth and with a few deft movements adjusted it about her. As she gathered up her breastplates Es-sat rounded the table and moved quickly toward her.

"What do you want?" she whispered, though she knew full well.

"Pan-at-lee," he said, "your chief has come for you."

"It was for this that you sent away my father and my brothers to spy upon the Kor-ul-lul? I will not have you. Leave the cave of my ancestors!"

Es-sat smiled. It was the smile of a strong and wicked man who knows his power--not a pleasant smile at all. "I will leave, Pan-at-lee," he said; "but you shall go with me--to the cave of Es-sat, the chief, to be the envied of the shes of Kor-ul-ja. Come!"

"Never!" cried Pan-at-lee. "I hate you. Sooner would I mate with a Ho-don than with you, beater of women, murderer of babes."

A frightful scowl distorted the features of the chief. "She-jato!" he cried. "I will tame you! I will break you! Es-sat, the chief, takes what he will and who dares question his right, or combat his least purpose, will first serve that purpose and then be broken as I break this," and he picked a stone platter from the table and broke it in his powerful hands. "You might have been first and most favored in the cave of the ancestors of Es-sat; but now shall you be last and least and when I am done with you you shall belong to all of the men of Es-sat's cave. Thus for those who spurn the love of their chief!"

He advanced quickly to seize her and as he laid a rough hand upon her she struck him heavily upon the side of his head with her golden breastplates. Without a sound Es-sat, the chief, sank to the floor of the apartment. For a moment Pan-at-lee bent over him, her improvised weapon raised to strike again should he show signs of returning consciousness, her glossy breasts rising and falling with her quickened breathing. Suddenly she stooped and removed Es-sat's knife with its scabbard and shoulder belt. Slipping it over her own shoulder she quickly adjusted her breastplates and keeping a watchful glance upon the figure of the fallen chief, backed from the room.

In a niche in the outer room, just beside the doorway leading to the balcony, were neatly piled a number of rounded pegs from eighteen to twenty inches in length. Selecting five of these she made them into a little bundle about which she twined the lower extremity of her sinuous tail and thus carrying them made her way to the outer edge of the balcony. Assuring herself that there was none about to see, or hinder her, she took quickly to the pegs already set in the face of the cliff and with the celerity of a monkey clambered swiftly aloft to the highest row of pegs which she followed in the direction of the lower end of the gorge for a matter of some hundred yards. Here, above her head, were a series of small round holes placed one above another in three parallel rows. Clinging only with her toes she removed two of the pegs from the bundle carried in her tail and taking one in either hand she inserted them in two opposite holes of the outer rows as far above her as she could reach. Hanging by these new holds she now took one of

the three remaining pegs in each of her feet, leaving the fifth grasped securely in her tail. Reaching above her with this member she inserted the fifth peg in one of the holes of the center row and then, alternately hanging by her tail, her feet, or her hands, she moved the pegs upward to new holes, thus carrying her stairway with her as she ascended.

At the summit of the cliff a gnarled tree exposed its time-worn roots above the topmost holes forming the last step from the sheer face of the precipice to level footing. This was the last avenue of escape for members of the tribe hard pressed by enemies from below. There were three such emergency exits from the village and it were death to use them in other than an emergency. This Pan-at-lee well knew; but she knew, too, that it were worse than death to remain where the angered Es-sat might lay hands upon her.

When she had gained the summit, the girl moved quickly through the darkness in the direction of the next gorge which cut the mountain-side a mile beyond Kor-ul-ja. It was the Gorge-of-water, Kor-ul-lul, to which her father and two brothers had been sent by Es-sat ostensibly to spy upon the neighboring tribe. There was a chance, a slender chance, that she might find them; if not there was the deserted Kor-ul-gryf several miles beyond, where she might hide indefinitely from man if she could elude the frightful monster from which the gorge derived its name and whose presence there had rendered its caves uninhabitable for generations.

Pan-at-lee crept stealthily along the rim of the Kor-ul-lul. Just where her father and brothers would watch she did not know. Sometimes their spies remained upon the rim, sometimes they watched from the gorge's bottom. Pan-at-lee was at a loss to know what to do or where to go. She felt very small and helpless alone in the vast darkness of the night. Strange noises fell upon her ears. They came from the lonely reaches of the towering mountains above her, from far away in the invisible valley and from the nearer foothills and once, in the distance, she heard what she thought was the bellow of a bull gryf. It came from the direction of the Kor-ul-gryf. She shuddered.

Presently there came to her keen ears another sound. Something approached her along the rim of the gorge. It was coming from above. She halted, listening. Perhaps it was her father, or a brother. It was coming closer. She strained her eyes through the darkness. She did not move--she scarcely breathed. And then, of a sudden, quite close it seemed, there blazed through the black night two yellow-green spots of fire.

Pan-at-lee was brave, but as always with the primitive, the darkness held infinite terrors for her. Not alone the terrors of the known but more frightful ones as well--those of the unknown. She had passed through much this night and her nerves

were keyed to the highest pitch--raw, taut nerves, they were, ready to react in an exaggerated form to the slightest shock.

But this was no slight shock. To hope for a father and a brother and to see death instead glaring out of the darkness! Yes, Pan-at-lee was brave, but she was not of iron. With a shriek that reverberated among the hills she turned and fled along the rim of Kor-ul-lul and behind her, swiftly, came the devil-eyed lion of the mountains of Pal-ul-don.

Pan-at-lee was lost. Death was inevitable. Of this there could be no doubt, but to die beneath the rending fangs of the carnivore, congenital terror of her kind--it was unthinkable. But there was an alternative. The lion was almost upon her--another instant and he would seize her. Pan-at-lee turned sharply to her left. Just a few steps she took in the new direction before she disappeared over the rim of Kor-ul-lul. The baffled lion, planting all four feet, barely stopped upon the verge of the abyss. Glaring down into the black shadows beneath he mounted an angry roar.

Through the darkness at the bottom of Kor-ul-ja, Om-at led the way toward the caves of his people. Behind him came Tarzan and Ta-den. Presently they halted beneath a great tree that grew close to the cliff.

"First," whispered Om-at, "I will go to the cave of Pan-at-lee. Then will I seek the cave of my ancestors to have speech with my own blood. It will not take long. Wait here--I shall return soon. Afterward shall we go together to Ta-den's people."

He moved silently toward the foot of the cliff up which Tarzan could presently see him ascending like a great fly on a wall. In the dim light the ape-man could not see the pegs set in the face of the cliff. Om-at moved warily. In the lower tier of caves there should be a sentry. His knowledge of his people and their customs told him, however, that in all probability the sentry was asleep. In this he was not mistaken, yet he did not in any way abate his wariness. Smoothly and swiftly he ascended toward the cave of Pan-at-lee while from below Tarzan and Ta-den watched him.

"How does he do it?" asked Tarzan. "I can see no foothold upon that vertical surface and yet he appears to be climbing with the utmost ease."

Ta-den explained the stairway of pegs. "You could ascend easily," he said, "although a tail would be of great assistance."

They watched until Om-at was about to enter the cave of Pan-at-lee without seeing any indication that he had been observed and then, simultaneously, both saw a head appear in the mouth of one of the lower caves. It was quickly evident

that its owner had discovered Om-at for immediately he started upward in pursuit. Without a word Tarzan and Ta-den sprang forward toward the foot of the cliff. The pithecanthropus was the first to reach it and the ape-man saw him spring upward for a handhold on the lowest peg above him. Now Tarzan saw other pegs roughly paralleling each other in zigzag rows up the cliff face. He sprang and caught one of these, pulled himself upward by one hand until he could reach a second with his other hand; and when he had ascended far enough to use his feet, discovered that he could make rapid progress. Ta-den was outstripping him, however, for these precarious ladders were no novelty to him and, further, he had an advantage in possessing a tail.

Nevertheless, the ape-man gave a good account of himself, being presently urged to redoubled efforts by the fact that the Waz-don above Ta-den glanced down and discovered his pursuers just before the Ho-don overtook him. Instantly a wild cry shattered the silence of the gorge--a cry that was immediately answered by hundreds of savage throats as warrior after warrior emerged from the entrance to his cave.

The creature who had raised the alarm had now reached the recess before Pan-at-lee's cave and here he halted and turned to give battle to Ta-den. Unslinging his club which had hung down his back from a thong about his neck he stood upon the level floor of the entrance-way effectually blocking Ta-den's ascent. From all directions the warriors of Kor-ul-ja were swarming toward the interlopers. Tarzan, who had reached a point on the same level with Ta-den but a little to the latter's left, saw that nothing short of a miracle could save them. Just at the ape-man's left was the entrance to a cave that either was deserted or whose occupants had not as yet been aroused, for the level recess remained unoccupied. Resourceful was the alert mind of Tarzan of the Apes and quick to respond were the trained muscles. In the time that you or I might give to debating an action he would accomplish it and now, though only seconds separated his nearest antagonist from him, in the brief span of time at his disposal he had stepped into the recess, unslung his long rope and leaning far out shot the sinuous noose, with the precision of long habitude, toward the menacing figure wielding its heavy club above Ta-den. There was a momentary pause of the rope-hand as the noose sped toward its goal, a quick movement of the right wrist that closed it upon its victim as it settled over his head and then a surging tug as, seizing the rope in both hands, Tarzan threw back upon it all the weight of his great frame.

Voicing a terrified shriek, the Waz-don lunged headforemost from the recess above Ta-den. Tarzan braced himself for the coming shock when the creature's body should have fallen the full length of the rope and as it did there was a snap of the vertebrae that rose sickeningly in the momentary silence that had followed

the doomed man's departing scream. Unshaken by the stress of the suddenly arrested weight at the end of the rope, Tarzan quickly pulled the body to his side that he might remove the noose from about its neck, for he could not afford to lose so priceless a weapon.

During the several seconds that had elapsed since he cast the rope the Waz-don warriors had remained inert as though paralyzed by wonder or by terror. Now, again, one of them found his voice and his head and straightway, shrieking invectives at the strange intruder, started upward for the ape-man, urging his fellows to attack. This man was the closest to Tarzan. But for him the ape-man could easily have reached Ta-den's side as the latter was urging him to do. Tarzan raised the body of the dead Waz-don above his head, held it poised there for a moment as with face raised to the heavens he screamed forth the horrid challenge of the bull apes of the tribe of Kerchak, and with all the strength of his giant sinews he hurled the corpse heavily upon the ascending warrior. So great was the force of the impact that not only was the Waz-don torn from his hold but two of the pegs to which he clung were broken short in their sockets.

As the two bodies, the living and the dead, hurtled downward toward the foot of the cliff a great cry arose from the Waz-don. "Jad-guru-don! Jad-guru-don!" they screamed, and then: "Kill him! Kill him!"

And now Tarzan stood in the recess beside Ta-den. "Jad-guru-don!" repeated the latter, smiling--"The terrible man! Tarzan the Terrible! They may kill you, but they will never forget you."

"They shall not ki--What have we here?" Tarzan's statement as to what "they" should not do was interrupted by a sudden ejaculation as two figures, locked in deathlike embrace, stumbled through the doorway of the cave to the outer porch. One was Om-at, the other a creature of his own kind but with a rough coat, the hairs of which seemed to grow straight outward from the skin, stiffly, unlike Om-at's sleek covering. The two were quite evidently well matched and equally evident was the fact that each was bent upon murder. They fought almost in silence except for an occasional low growl as one or the other acknowledged thus some new hurt.

Tarzan, following a natural impulse to aid his ally, leaped forward to enter the dispute only to be checked by a grunted admonition from Om-at. "Back!" he said. "This fight is mine, alone."

The ape-man understood and stepped aside.

"It is a gund-bar," explained Ta-den, "a chief-battle. This fellow must be Es-sat, the chief. If Om-at kills him without assistance Om-at may become chief."

Tarzan smiled. It was the law of his own jungle--the law of the tribe of Kerchak, the bull ape--the ancient law of primitive man that needed but the refining influences of civilization to introduce the hired dagger and the poison cup. Then his attention was drawn to the outer edge of the vestibule. Above it appeared the shaggy face of one of Es-sat's warriors. Tarzan sprang to intercept the man; but Ta-den was there ahead of him. "Back!" cried the Ho-don to the newcomer. "It is gund-bar." The fellow looked scrutinizingly at the two fighters, then turned his face downward toward his fellows. "Back!" he cried, "it is gund-bar between Es-sat and Om-at." Then he looked back at Ta-den and Tarzan. "Who are you?" he asked.

"We are Om-at's friends," replied Ta-den.

The fellow nodded. "We will attend to you later," he said and disappeared below the edge of the recess.

The battle upon the ledge continued with unabated ferocity, Tarzan and Ta-den having difficulty in keeping out of the way of the contestants who tore and beat at each other with hands and feet and lashing tails. Es-sat was unarmed--Pan-at-lee had seen to that--but at Om-at's side swung a sheathed knife which he made no effort to draw. That would have been contrary to their savage and primitive code for the chief--battle must be fought with nature's weapons.

Sometimes they separated for an instant only to rush upon each other again with all the ferocity and nearly the strength of mad bulls. Presently one of them tripped the other but in that viselike embrace one could not fall alone--Es-sat dragged Om-at with him, toppling upon the brink of the niche. Even Tarzan held his breath. There they surged to and fro perilously for a moment and then the inevitable happened--the two, locked in murderous embrace, rolled over the edge and disappeared from the ape-man's view.

Tarzan voiced a suppressed sigh for he had liked Om-at and then, with Ta-den, approached the edge and looked over. Far below, in the dim light of the coming dawn, two inert forms should be lying stark in death; but, to Tarzan's amazement, such was far from the sight that met his eyes. Instead, there were the two figures still vibrant with life and still battling only a few feet below him. Clinging always to the pegs with two holds--a hand and a foot, or a foot and a tail, they seemed as much at home upon the perpendicular wall as upon the level surface of the vestibule; but now their tactics were slightly altered, for each seemed particularly bent upon dislodging his antagonist from his holds and precipitating him to certain death below. It was soon evident that Om-at, younger and with greater powers of endurance than Es-sat, was gaining an advantage. Now was the chief almost wholly on the defensive. Holding him by the cross belt

with one mighty hand Om-at was forcing his foeman straight out from the cliff, and with the other hand and one foot was rapidly breaking first one of Es-sat's holds and then another, alternating his efforts, or rather punctuating them, with vicious blows to the pit of his adversary's stomach. Rapidly was Es-sat weakening and with the knowledge of impending death there came, as there comes to every coward and bully under similar circumstances, a crumbling of the veneer of bravado which had long masqueraded as courage and with it crumbled his code of ethics. Now was Es-sat no longer chief of Kor-ul-ja--instead he was a whimpering craven battling for life. Clutching at Om-at, clutching at the nearest pegs he sought any support that would save him from that awful fall, and as he strove to push aside the hand of death, whose cold fingers he already felt upon his heart, his tail sought Om-at's side and the handle of the knife that hung there.

Tarzan saw and even as Es-sat drew the blade from its sheath he dropped catlike to the pegs beside the battling men. Es-sat's tail had drawn back for the cowardly fatal thrust. Now many others saw the perfidious act and a great cry of rage and disgust arose from savage throats; but as the blade sped toward its goal, the ape-man seized the hairy member that wielded it, and at the same instant Om-at thrust the body of Es-sat from him with such force that its weakened holds were broken and it hurtled downward, a brief meteor of screaming fear, to death.