

Chapter 5 - In the Kor-ul-gryf

As Tarzan fell among his enemies a man halted many miles away upon the outer verge of the morass that encircles Pal-ul-don. Naked he was except for a loin cloth and three belts of cartridges, two of which passed over his shoulders, crossing upon his chest and back, while the third encircled his waist. Slung to his back by its leathern sling-strap was an Enfield, and he carried too a long knife, a bow and a quiver of arrows. He had come far, through wild and savage lands, menaced by fierce beasts and fiercer men, yet intact to the last cartridge was the ammunition that had filled his belts the day that he set out.

The bow and the arrows and the long knife had brought him thus far safely, yet often in the face of great risks that could have been minimized by a single shot from the well-kept rifle at his back. What purpose might he have for conserving this precious ammunition? in risking his life to bring the last bright shining missile to his unknown goal? For what, for whom were these death-dealing bits of metal preserved? In all the world only he knew.

When Pan-at-lee stepped over the edge of the cliff above Kor-ul-lul she expected to be dashed to instant death upon the rocks below; but she had chosen this in preference to the rending fangs of ja. Instead, chance had ordained that she make the frightful plunge at a point where the tumbling river swung close beneath the overhanging cliff to eddy for a slow moment in a deep pool before plunging madly downward again in a cataract of boiling foam, and water thundering against rocks.

Into this icy pool the girl shot, and down and down beneath the watery surface until, half choked, yet fighting bravely, she battled her way once more to air. Swimming strongly she made the opposite shore and there dragged herself out upon the bank to lie panting and spent until the approaching dawn warned her to seek concealment, for she was in the country of her people's enemies.

Rising, she moved into the concealment of the rank vegetation that grows so riotously in the well-watered kors[1] of Pal-ul-don.

Hidden amidst the plant life from the sight of any who might chance to pass along the well-beaten trail that skirted the river Pan-at-lee sought rest and food, the latter growing in abundance all about her in the form of fruits and berries and succulent tubers which she scooped from the earth with the knife of the dead Es-sat.

Ah! if she had but known that he was dead! What trials and risks and terrors she might have been saved; but she thought that he still lived and so she dared not return to Kor-ul-ja. At least not yet while his rage was at white heat. Later, perhaps, her father and brothers returned to their cave, she might risk it; but not now--not now. Nor could she for long remain here in the neighborhood of the hostile Kor-ul-lul and somewhere she must find safety from beasts before the night set in.

As she sat upon the bole of a fallen tree seeking some solution of the problem of existence that confronted her, there broke upon her ears from up the gorge the voices of shouting men--a sound that she recognized all too well. It was the war cry of the Kor-ul-lul. Closer and closer it approached her hiding place. Then, through the veil of foliage she caught glimpses of three figures fleeing along the trail, and behind them the shouting of the pursuers rose louder and louder as they neared her. Again she caught sight of the fugitives crossing the river below the cataract and again they were lost to sight. And now the pursuers came into view--shouting Kor-ul-lul warriors, fierce and implacable. Forty, perhaps fifty of them. She waited breathless; but they did not swerve from the trail and passed her, unguessing that an enemy she lay hid within a few yards of them.

Once again she caught sight of the pursued--three Waz-don warriors clambering the cliff face at a point where portions of the summit had fallen away presenting a steep slope that might be ascended by such as these. Suddenly her attention was riveted upon the three. Could it be? O Jad-ben-Otho! had she but known a moment before. When they passed she might have joined them, for they were her father and two brothers. Now it was too late. With bated breath and tense muscles she watched the race. Would they reach the summit? Would the Kor-ul-lul overhaul them? They climbed well, but, oh, so slowly. Now one lost his footing in the loose shale and slipped back! The Kor-ul-lul were ascending--one hurled his club at the nearest fugitive. The Great God was pleased with the brother of Pan-at-lee, for he caused the club to fall short of its target, and to fall, rolling and bounding, back upon its owner carrying him from his feet and precipitating him to the bottom of the gorge.

Standing now, her hands pressed tight above her golden breastplates, Pan-at-lee watched the race for life. Now one, her older brother, reached the summit and clinging there to something that she could not see he lowered his body and his long tail to the father beneath him. The latter, seizing this support, extended his own tail to the son below--the one who had slipped back--and thus, upon a living ladder of their own making, the three reached the summit and disappeared from view before the Kor-ul-lul overtook them. But the latter did not abandon the

chase. On they went until they too had disappeared from sight and only a faint shouting came down to Pan-at-lee to tell her that the pursuit continued.

The girl knew that she must move on. At any moment now might come a hunting party, combing the gorge for the smaller animals that fed or bedded there.

Behind her were Es-sat and the returning party of Kor-ul-lul that had pursued her kin; before her, across the next ridge, was the Kor-ul-gryf, the lair of the terrifying monsters that brought the chill of fear to every inhabitant of Pal-ul-don; below her, in the valley, was the country of the Ho-don, where she could look for only slavery, or death; here were the Kor-ul-lul, the ancient enemies of her people and everywhere were the wild beasts that eat the flesh of man.

For but a moment she debated and then turning her face toward the southeast she set out across the gorge of water toward the Kor-ul-gryf--at least there were no men there. As it is now, so it was in the beginning, back to the primitive progenitor of man which is typified by Pan-at-lee and her kind today, of all the hunters that woman fears, man is the most relentless, the most terrible. To the dangers of man she preferred the dangers of the gryf.

Moving cautiously she reached the foot of the cliff at the far side of Kor-ul-lul and here, toward noon, she found a comparatively easy ascent. Crossing the ridge she stood at last upon the brink of Kor-ul-gryf--the horror place of the folklore of her race. Dank and mysterious grew the vegetation below; giant trees waved their plumed tops almost level with the summit of the cliff; and over all brooded an ominous silence.

Pan-at-lee lay upon her belly and stretching over the edge scanned the cliff face below her. She could see caves there and the stone pegs which the ancients had fashioned so laboriously by hand. She had heard of these in the firelight tales of her childhood and of how the gryfs had come from the morasses across the mountains and of how at last the people had fled after many had been seized and devoured by the hideous creatures, leaving their caves untenanted for no man living knew how long. Some said that Jad-ben-Otho, who has lived forever, was still a little boy. Pan-at-lee shuddered; but there were caves and in them she would be safe even from the gryfs.

She found a place where the stone pegs reached to the very summit of the cliff, left there no doubt in the final exodus of the tribe when there was no longer need of safeguarding the deserted caves against invasion. Pan-at-lee clambered slowly down toward the uppermost cave. She found the recess in front of the doorway almost identical with those of her own tribe. The floor of it, though, was littered with twigs and old nests and the droppings of birds, until it was half choked. She

moved along to another recess and still another, but all were alike in the accumulated filth. Evidently there was no need in looking further. This one seemed large and commodious. With her knife she fell to work cleaning away the debris by the simple expedient of pushing it over the edge, and always her eyes turned constantly toward the silent gorge where lurked the fearsome creatures of Pal-ul-don. And other eyes there were, eyes she did not see, but that saw her and watched her every move--fierce eyes, greedy eyes, cunning and cruel. They watched her, and a red tongue licked flabby, pendulous lips. They watched her, and a half-human brain laboriously evolved a brutish design.

As in her own Kor-ul-ja, the natural springs in the cliff had been developed by the long-dead builders of the caves so that fresh, pure water trickled now, as it had for ages, within easy access to the cave entrances. Her only difficulty would be in procuring food and for that she must take the risk at least once in two days, for she was sure that she could find fruits and tubers and perhaps small animals, birds, and eggs near the foot of the cliff, the last two, possibly, in the caves themselves. Thus might she live on here indefinitely. She felt now a certain sense of security imparted doubtless by the impregnability of her high-flung sanctuary that she knew to be safe from all the more dangerous beasts, and this one from men, too, since it lay in the abjured Kor-ul-gryf.

Now she determined to inspect the interior of her new home. The sun still in the south, lighted the interior of the first apartment. It was similar to those of her experience--the same beasts and men were depicted in the same crude fashion in the carvings on the walls--evidently there had been little progress in the race of Waz-don during the generations that had come and departed since Kor-ul-gryf had been abandoned by men. Of course Pan-at-lee thought no such thoughts, for evolution and progress existed not for her, or her kind. Things were as they had always been and would always be as they were.

That these strange creatures have existed thus for incalculable ages it can scarce be doubted, so marked are the indications of antiquity about their dwellings--deep furrows worn by naked feet in living rock; the hollow in the jamb of a stone doorway where many arms have touched in passing; the endless carvings that cover, oftentimes, the entire face of a great cliff and all the walls and ceilings of every cave and each carving wrought by a different hand, for each is the coat of arms, one might say, of the adult male who traced it.

And so Pan-at-lee found this ancient cave homelike and familiar. There was less litter within than she had found without and what there was was mostly an accumulation of dust. Beside the doorway was the niche in which wood and tinder were kept, but there remained nothing now other than mere dust. She had however saved a little pile of twigs from the debris on the porch. In a short time

she had made a light by firing a bundle of twigs and lighting others from this fire she explored some of the inner rooms. Nor here did she find aught that was new or strange nor any relic of the departed owners other than a few broken stone dishes. She had been looking for something soft to sleep upon, but was doomed to disappointment as the former owners had evidently made a leisurely departure, carrying all their belongings with them. Below, in the gorge were leaves and grasses and fragrant branches, but Pan-at-lee felt no stomach for descending into that horrid abyss for the gratification of mere creature comfort--only the necessity for food would drive her there.

And so, as the shadows lengthened and night approached she prepared to make as comfortable a bed as she could by gathering the dust of ages into a little pile and spreading it between her soft body and the hard floor--at best it was only better than nothing. But Pan-at-lee was very tired. She had not slept since two nights before and in the interval she had experienced many dangers and hardships. What wonder then that despite the hard bed, she was asleep almost immediately she had composed herself for rest.

She slept and the moon rose, casting its silver light upon the cliff's white face and lessening the gloom of the dark forest and the dismal gorge. In the distance a lion roared. There was a long silence. From the upper reaches of the gorge came a deep bellow. There was a movement in the trees at the cliff's foot. Again the bellow, low and ominous. It was answered from below the deserted village. Something dropped from the foliage of a tree directly below the cave in which Pan-at-lee slept--it dropped to the ground among the dense shadows. Now it moved, cautiously. It moved toward the foot of the cliff, taking form and shape in the moonlight. It moved like the creature of a bad dream--slowly, sluggishly. It might have been a huge sloth--it might have been a man, with so grotesque a brush does the moon paint--master cubist.

Slowly it moved up the face of the cliff--like a great grubworm it moved, but now the moon-brush touched it again and it had hands and feet and with them it clung to the stone pegs and raised itself laboriously aloft toward the cave where Pan-at-lee slept. From the lower reaches of the gorge came again the sound of bellowing, and it was answered from above the village.

Tarzan of the Apes opened his eyes. He was conscious of a pain in his head, and at first that was about all. A moment later grotesque shadows, rising and falling, focused his arousing perceptions. Presently he saw that he was in a cave. A dozen Waz-don warriors squatted about, talking. A rude stone cresset containing burning oil lighted the interior and as the flame rose and fell the exaggerated shadows of the warriors danced upon the walls behind them.

"We brought him to you alive, Gund," he heard one of them saying, "because never before was Ho-don like him seen. He has no tail--he was born without one, for there is no scar to mark where a tail had been cut off. The thumbs upon his hands and feet are unlike those of the races of Pal-ul-don. He is more powerful than many men put together and he attacks with the fearlessness of ja. We brought him alive, that you might see him before he is slain."

The chief rose and approached the ape-man, who closed his eyes and feigned unconsciousness. He felt hairy hands upon him as he was turned over, none too gently. The gund examined him from head to foot, making comments, especially upon the shape and size of his thumbs and great toes.

"With these and with no tail," he said, "it cannot climb."

"No," agreed one of the warriors, "it would surely fall even from the cliff pegs."

"I have never seen a thing like it," said the chief. "It is neither Waz-don nor Ho-don. I wonder from whence it came and what it is called."

"The Kor-ul-ja shouted aloud, 'Tarzan-jad-guru!' and we thought that they might be calling this one," said a warrior. "Shall we kill it now?"

"No," replied the chief, "we will wait until it's life returns into its head that I may question it. Remain here, In-tan, and watch it. When it can again hear and speak call me."

He turned and departed from the cave, the others, except In-tan, following him. As they moved past him and out of the chamber Tarzan caught snatches of their conversation which indicated that the Kor-ul-ja reinforcements had fallen upon their little party in great numbers and driven them away. Evidently the swift feet of Id-an had saved the day for the warriors of Om-at. The ape-man smiled, then he partially opened an eye and cast it upon In-tan. The warrior stood at the entrance to the cave looking out--his back was toward his prisoner. Tarzan tested the bonds that secured his wrists. They seemed none too stout and they had tied his hands in front of him! Evidence indeed that the Waz-don took few prisoners--if any.

Cautiously he raised his wrists until he could examine the thongs that confined them. A grim smile lighted his features. Instantly he was at work upon the bonds with his strong teeth, but ever a wary eye was upon In-tan, the warrior of Kor-ul-lul. The last knot had been loosened and Tarzan's hands were free when In-tan turned to cast an appraising eye upon his ward. He saw that the prisoner's position was changed--he no longer lay upon his back as they had left him, but upon his side and his hands were drawn up against his face. In-tan came closer

and bent down. The bonds seemed very loose upon the prisoner's wrists. He extended his hand to examine them with his fingers and instantly the two hands leaped from their bonds--one to seize his own wrist, the other his throat. So unexpected the catlike attack that In-tan had not even time to cry out before steel fingers silenced him. The creature pulled him suddenly forward so that he lost his balance and rolled over upon the prisoner and to the floor beyond to stop with Tarzan upon his breast. In-tan struggled to release himself--struggled to draw his knife; but Tarzan found it before him. The Waz-don's tail leaped to the other's throat, encircling it--he too could choke; but his own knife, in the hands of his antagonist, severed the beloved member close to its root.

The Waz-don's struggles became weaker--a film was obscuring his vision. He knew that he was dying and he was right. A moment later he was dead. Tarzan rose to his feet and placed one foot upon the breast of his dead foe. How the urge seized him to roar forth the victory cry of his kind! But he dared not. He discovered that they had not removed his rope from his shoulders and that they had replaced his knife in its sheath. It had been in his hand when he was felled. Strange creatures! He did not know that they held a superstitious fear of the weapons of a dead enemy, believing that if buried without them he would forever haunt his slayers in search of them and that when he found them he would kill the man who killed him. Against the wall leaned his bow and quiver of arrows.

Tarzan stepped toward the doorway of the cave and looked out. Night had just fallen. He could hear voices from the nearer caves and there floated to his nostrils the odor of cooking food. He looked down and experienced a sensation of relief. The cave in which he had been held was in the lowest tier--scarce thirty feet from the base of the cliff. He was about to chance an immediate descent when there occurred to him a thought that brought a grin to his savage lips--a thought that was born of the name the Waz-don had given him Tarzan-jad-guru--Tarzan the Terrible--and a recollection of the days when he had delighted in baiting the blacks of the distant jungle of his birth. He turned back into the cave where lay the dead body of In-tan. With his knife he severed the warrior's head and carrying it to the outer edge of the recess tossed it to the ground below, then he dropped swiftly and silently down the ladder of pegs in a way that would have surprised the Kor-ul-lul who had been so sure that he could not climb.

At the bottom he picked up the head of In-tan and disappeared among the shadows of the trees carrying the grisly trophy by its shock of shaggy hair. Horrible? But you are judging a wild beast by the standards of civilization. You may teach a lion tricks, but he is still a lion. Tarzan looked well in a Tuxedo, but he was still a Tarmangani and beneath his pleated shirt beat a wild and savage heart.

Nor was his madness lacking in method. He knew that the hearts of the Kor-ul-lul would be filled with rage when they discovered the thing that he had done and he knew too, that mixed with the rage would be a leaven of fear and it was fear of him that had made Tarzan master of many jungles--one does not win the respect of the killers with bonbons.

Below the village Tarzan returned to the foot of the cliff searching for a point where he could make the ascent to the ridge and thus back to the village of Om-at, the Kor-ul-ja. He came at last to a place where the river ran so close to the rocky wall that he was forced to swim it in search of a trail upon the opposite side and here it was that his keen nostrils detected a familiar spoor. It was the scent of Pan-at-lee at the spot where she had emerged from the pool and taken to the safety of the jungle.

Immediately the ape-man's plans were changed. Pan-at-lee lived, or at least she had lived after the leap from the cliff's summit. He had started in search of her for Om-at, his friend, and for Om-at he would continue upon the trail he had picked up thus fortuitously by accident. It led him into the jungle and across the gorge and then to the point at which Pan-at-lee had commenced the ascent of the opposite cliffs. Here Tarzan abandoned the head of In-tan, tying it to the lower branch of a tree, for he knew that it would handicap him in his ascent of the steep escarpment. Apelike he ascended, following easily the scent spoor of Pan-at-lee. Over the summit and across the ridge the trail lay, plain as a printed page to the delicate senses of the jungle-bred tracker.

Tarzan knew naught of the Kor-ul-gryf. He had seen, dimly in the shadows of the night, strange, monstrous forms and Ta-den and Om-at had spoken of great creatures that all men feared; but always, everywhere, by night and by day, there were dangers. From infancy death had stalked, grim and terrible, at his heels. He knew little of any other existence. To cope with danger was his life and he lived his life as simply and as naturally as you live yours amidst the dangers of the crowded city streets. The black man who goes abroad in the jungle by night is afraid, for he has spent his life since infancy surrounded by numbers of his own kind and safeguarded, especially at night, by such crude means as lie within his powers. But Tarzan had lived as the lion lives and the panther and the elephant and the ape--a true jungle creature dependent solely upon his prowess and his wits, playing a lone hand against creation. Therefore he was surprised at nothing and feared nothing and so he walked through the strange night as undisturbed and unapprehensive as the farmer to the cow lot in the darkness before the dawn.

Once more Pan-at-lee's trail ended at the verge of a cliff; but this time there was no indication that she had leaped over the edge and a moment's search revealed to Tarzan the stone pegs upon which she had made her descent. As he lay upon

his belly leaning over the top of the cliff examining the pegs his attention was suddenly attracted by something at the foot of the cliff. He could not distinguish its identity, but he saw that it moved and presently that it was ascending slowly, apparently by means of pegs similar to those directly below him. He watched it intently as it rose higher and higher until he was able to distinguish its form more clearly, with the result that he became convinced that it more nearly resembled some form of great ape than a lower order. It had a tail, though, and in other respects it did not seem a true ape.

Slowly it ascended to the upper tier of caves, into one of which it disappeared. Then Tarzan took up again the trail of Pan-at-lee. He followed it down the stone pegs to the nearest cave and then further along the upper tier. The ape-man raised his eyebrows when he saw the direction in which it led, and quickened his pace. He had almost reached the third cave when the echoes of Kor-ul-gryf were awakened by a shrill scream of terror.

[1] I have used the Pal-ul-don word for gorge with the English plural, which is not the correct native plural form. The latter, it seems to me, is awkward for us and so I have generally ignored it throughout my manuscript, permitting, for example, Kor-ul-ja to answer for both singular and plural. However, for the benefit of those who may be interested in such things I may say that the plurals are formed simply for all words in the Pal-ul-don language by doubling the initial letter of the word, as k'kor, gorges, pronounced as though written kakor, the a having the sound of a in sofa. Lions, d' don.