

Chapter 6 - The Tor-o-don

Pan-at-lee slept--the troubled sleep, of physical and nervous exhaustion, filled with weird dreamings. She dreamed that she slept beneath a great tree in the bottom of the Kor-ul-gryf and that one of the fearsome beasts was creeping upon her but she could not open her eyes nor move. She tried to scream but no sound issued from her lips. She felt the thing touch her throat, her breast, her arm, and there it closed and seemed to be dragging her toward it. With a super-human effort of will she opened her eyes. In the instant she knew that she was dreaming and that quickly the hallucination of the dream would fade--it had happened to her many times before. But it persisted. In the dim light that filtered into the dark chamber she saw a form beside her, she felt hairy fingers upon her and a hairy breast against which she was being drawn. Jad-ben-Otho! this was no dream. And then she screamed and tried to fight the thing from her; but her scream was answered by a low growl and another hairy hand seized her by the hair of the head. The beast rose now upon its hind legs and dragged her from the cave to the moonlit recess without and at the same instant she saw the figure of what she took to be a Ho-don rise above the outer edge of the niche.

The beast that held her saw it too and growled ominously but it did not relinquish its hold upon her hair. It crouched as though waiting an attack, and it increased the volume and frequency of its growls until the horrid sounds reverberated through the gorge, drowning even the deep bellowings of the beasts below, whose mighty thunderings had broken out anew with the sudden commotion from the high-flung cave. The beast that held her crouched and the creature that faced it crouched also, and growled--as hideously as the other. Pan-at-lee trembled. This was no Ho-don and though she feared the Ho-don she feared this thing more, with its catlike crouch and its beastly growls. She was lost--that Pan-at-lee knew. The two things might fight for her, but whichever won she was lost. Perhaps, during the battle, if it came to that, she might find the opportunity to throw herself over into the Kor-ul-gryf.

The thing that held her she had recognized now as a Tor-o-don, but the other thing she could not place, though in the moonlight she could see it very distinctly. It had no tail. She could see its hands and its feet, and they were not the hands and feet of the races of Pal-ul-don. It was slowly closing upon the Tor-o-don and in one hand it held a gleaming knife. Now it spoke and to Pan-at-lee's terror was added an equal weight of consternation.

"When it leaves go of you," it said, "as it will presently to defend itself, run quickly behind me, Pan-at-lee, and go to the cave nearest the pegs you descended from

the cliff top. Watch from there. If I am defeated you will have time to escape this slow thing; if I am not I will come to you there. I am Om-at's friend and yours."

The last words took the keen edge from Pan-at-lee's terror; but she did not understand. How did this strange creature know her name? How did it know that she had descended the pegs by a certain cave? It must, then, have been here when she came. Pan-at-lee was puzzled.

"Who are you?" she asked, "and from whence do you come?"

"I am Tarzan," he replied, "and just now I came from Om-at, of Kor-ul-ja, in search of you."

Om-at, gund of Kor-ul-ja! What wild talk was this? She would have questioned him further, but now he was approaching the Tor-o-don and the latter was screaming and growling so loudly as to drown the sound of her voice. And then it did what the strange creature had said that it would do--it released its hold upon her hair as it prepared to charge. Charge it did and in those close quarters there was no room to fence for openings. Instantly the two beasts locked in deadly embrace, each seeking the other's throat. Pan-at-lee watched, taking no advantage of the opportunity to escape which their preoccupation gave her. She watched and waited, for into her savage little brain had come the resolve to pin her faith to this strange creature who had unlocked her heart with those four words--"I am Om-at's friend!" And so she waited, with drawn knife, the opportunity to do her bit in the vanquishing of the Tor-o-don. That the newcomer could do it unaided she well knew to be beyond the realms of possibility, for she knew well the prowess of the beastlike man with whom it fought. There were not many of them in Pal-ul-don, but what few there were were a terror to the women of the Waz-don and the Ho-don, for the old Tor-o-don bulls roamed the mountains and the valleys of Pal-ul-don between rutting seasons and woe betide the women who fell in their paths.

With his tail the Tor-o-don sought one of Tarzan's ankles, and finding it, tripped him. The two fell heavily, but so agile was the ape-man and so quick his powerful muscles that even in falling he twisted the beast beneath him, so that Tarzan fell on top and now the tail that had tripped him sought his throat as had the tail of In-tan, the Kor-ul-lul. In the effort of turning his antagonist's body during the fall Tarzan had had to relinquish his knife that he might seize the shaggy body with both hands and now the weapon lay out of reach at the very edge of the recess. Both hands were occupied for the moment in fending off the clutching fingers that sought to seize him and drag his throat within reach of his foe's formidable fangs and now the tail was seeking its deadly hold with a formidable persistence that would not be denied.

Pan-at-lee hovered about, breathless, her dagger ready, but there was no opening that did not also endanger Tarzan, so constantly were the two duelists changing their positions. Tarzan felt the tail slowly but surely insinuating itself about his neck though he had drawn his head down between the muscles of his shoulders in an effort to protect this vulnerable part. The battle seemed to be going against him for the giant beast against which he strove would have been a fair match in weight and strength for Bolgani, the gorilla. And knowing this he suddenly exerted a single super-human effort, thrust far apart the giant hands and with the swiftness of a striking snake buried his fangs in the jugular of the Tor-o-don. At the same instant the creature's tail coiled about his own throat and then commenced a battle royal of turning and twisting bodies as each sought to dislodge the fatal hold of the other, but the acts of the ape-man were guided by a human brain and thus it was that the rolling bodies rolled in the direction that Tarzan wished--toward the edge of the recess.

The choking tail had shut the air from his lungs, he knew that his gasping lips were parted and his tongue protruding; and now his brain reeled and his sight grew dim; but not before he reached his goal and a quick hand shot out to seize the knife that now lay within reach as the two bodies tottered perilously upon the brink of the chasm.

With all his remaining strength the ape-man drove home the blade--once, twice, thrice, and then all went black before him as he felt himself, still in the clutches of the Tor-o-don, topple from the recess.

Fortunate it was for Tarzan that Pan-at-lee had not obeyed his injunction to make good her escape while he engaged the Tor-o-don, for it was to this fact that he owed his life. Close beside the struggling forms during the brief moments of the terrific climax she had realized every detail of the danger to Tarzan with which the emergency was fraught and as she saw the two rolling over the outer edge of the niche she seized the ape-man by an ankle at the same time throwing herself prone upon the rocky floor. The muscles of the Tor-o-don relaxed in death with the last thrust of Tarzan's knife and with its hold upon the ape-man released it shot from sight into the gorge below.

It was with infinite difficulty that Pan-at-lee retained her hold upon the ankle of her protector, but she did so and then, slowly, she sought to drag the dead weight back to the safety of the niche. This, however, was beyond her strength and she could but hold on tightly, hoping that some plan would suggest itself before her powers of endurance failed. She wondered if, after all, the creature was already dead, but that she could not bring herself to believe--and if not dead how long it would be before he regained consciousness. If he did not regain it soon he never would regain it, that she knew, for she felt her fingers numbing to the strain upon

them and slipping, slowly, slowly, from their hold. It was then that Tarzan regained consciousness. He could not know what power upheld him, but he felt that whatever it was it was slowly releasing its hold upon his ankle. Within easy reach of his hands were two pegs and these he seized upon just as Pan-at-lee's fingers slipped from their hold.

As it was he came near to being precipitated into the gorge--only his great strength saved him. He was upright now and his feet found other pegs. His first thought was of his foe. Where was he? Waiting above there to finish him? Tarzan looked up just as the frightened face of Pan-at-lee appeared over the threshold of the recess.

"You live?" she cried.

"Yes," replied Tarzan. "Where is the shaggy one?"

Pan-at-lee pointed downward. "There," she said, "dead."

"Good!" exclaimed the ape-man, clambering to her side. "You are unharmed?" he asked.

"You came just in time," replied Pan-at-lee; "but who are you and how did you know that I was here and what do you know of Om-at and where did you come from and what did you mean by calling Om-at, gund?"

"Wait, wait," cried Tarzan; "one at a time. My, but you are all alike--the shes of the tribe of Kerchak, the ladies of England, and their sisters of Pal-ul-don. Have patience and I will try to tell you all that you wish to know. Four of us set out with Om-at from Kor-ul-ja to search for you. We were attacked by the Kor-ul-lul and separated. I was taken prisoner, but escaped. Again I stumbled upon your trail and followed it, reaching the summit of this cliff just as the hairy one was climbing up after you. I was coming to investigate when I heard your scream--the rest you know."

"But you called Om-at, gund of Kor-ul-ja," she insisted. "Es-sat is gund."

"Es-sat is dead," explained the ape-man. "Om-at slew him and now Om-at is gund. Om-at came back seeking you. He found Es-sat in your cave and killed him."

"Yes," said the girl, "Es-sat came to my cave and I struck him down with my golden breastplates and escaped."

"And a lion pursued you," continued Tarzan, "and you leaped from the cliff into Kor-ul-lul, but why you were not killed is beyond me."

"Is there anything beyond you?" exclaimed Pan-at-lee. "How could you know that a lion pursued me and that I leaped from the cliff and not know that it was the pool of deep water below that saved me?"

"I would have known that, too, had not the Kor-ul-lul come then and prevented me continuing upon your trail. But now I would ask you a question--by what name do you call the thing with which I just fought?"

"It was a Tor-o-don," she replied. "I have seen but one before. They are terrible creatures with the cunning of man and the ferocity of a beast. Great indeed must be the warrior who slays one single-handed." She gazed at him in open admiration.

"And now," said Tarzan, "you must sleep, for tomorrow we shall return to Kor-ul-ja and Om-at, and I doubt that you have had much rest these two nights."

Pan-at-lee, lulled by a feeling of security, slept peacefully into the morning while Tarzan stretched himself upon the hard floor of the recess just outside her cave.

The sun was high in the heavens when he awoke; for two hours it had looked down upon another heroic figure miles away--the figure of a godlike man fighting his way through the hideous morass that lies like a filthy moat defending Pal-ul-don from the creatures of the outer world. Now waist deep in the sucking ooze, now menaced by loathsome reptiles, the man advanced only by virtue of Herculean efforts gaining laboriously by inches along the devious way that he was forced to choose in selecting the least precarious footing. Near the center of the morass was open water--slimy, green-hued water. He reached it at last after more than two hours of such effort as would have left an ordinary man spent and dying in the sticky mud, yet he was less than halfway across the marsh. Greasy with slime and mud was his smooth, brown hide, and greasy with slime and mud was his beloved Enfield that had shone so brightly in the first rays of the rising sun.

He paused a moment upon the edge of the open water and then throwing himself forward struck out to swim across. He swam with long, easy, powerful strokes calculated less for speed than for endurance, for his was, primarily, a test of the latter, since beyond the open water was another two hours or more of gruelling effort between it and solid ground. He was, perhaps, halfway across and congratulating himself upon the ease of the achievement of this portion of his task when there arose from the depths directly in his path a hideous reptile, which, with wide-distended jaws, bore down upon him, hissing shrilly.

Tarzan arose and stretched, expanded his great chest and drank in deep draughts of the fresh morning air. His clear eyes scanned the wondrous beauties of the landscape spread out before them. Directly below lay Kor-ul-gryf, a dense,

somber green of gently moving tree tops. To Tarzan it was neither grim, nor forbidding--it was jungle, beloved jungle. To his right there spread a panorama of the lower reaches of the Valley of Jad-ben-Otho, with its winding streams and its blue lakes. Gleaming whitely in the sunlight were scattered groups of dwellings--the feudal strongholds of the lesser chiefs of the Ho-don. A-lur, the City of Light, he could not see as it was hidden by the shoulder of the cliff in which the deserted village lay.

For a moment Tarzan gave himself over to that spiritual enjoyment of beauty that only the man-mind may attain and then Nature asserted herself and the belly of the beast called aloud that it was hungry. Again Tarzan looked down at Kor-ul-gryf. There was the jungle! Grew there a jungle that would not feed Tarzan? The ape-man smiled and commenced the descent to the gorge. Was there danger there? Of course. Who knew it better than Tarzan? In all jungles lies death, for life and death go hand in hand and where life teems death reaps his fullest harvest. Never had Tarzan met a creature of the jungle with which he could not cope--sometimes by virtue of brute strength alone, again by a combination of brute strength and the cunning of the man-mind; but Tarzan had never met a gryf.

He had heard the bellowings in the gorge the night before after he had lain down to sleep and he had meant to ask Pan-at-lee this morning what manner of beast so disturbed the slumbers of its betters. He reached the foot of the cliff and strode into the jungle and here he halted, his keen eyes and ears watchful and alert, his sensitive nostrils searching each shifting air current for the scent spoor of game. Again he advanced deeper into the wood, his light step giving forth no sound, his bow and arrows in readiness. A light morning breeze was blowing from up the gorge and in this direction he bent his steps. Many odors impinged upon his organs of scent. Some of these he classified without effort, but others were strange--the odors of beasts and of birds, of trees and shrubs and flowers with which he was unfamiliar. He sensed faintly the reptilian odor that he had learned to connect with the strange, nocturnal forms that had loomed dim and bulky on several occasions since his introduction to Pal-ul-don.

And then, suddenly he caught plainly the strong, sweet odor of Bara, the deer. Were the belly vocal, Tarzan's would have given a little cry of joy, for it loved the flesh of Bara. The ape-man moved rapidly, but cautiously forward. The prey was not far distant and as the hunter approached it, he took silently to the trees and still in his nostrils was the faint reptilian odor that spoke of a great creature which he had never yet seen except as a denser shadow among the dense shadows of the night; but the odor was of such a faintness as suggests to the jungle bred the distance of absolute safety.

And now, moving noiselessly, Tarzan came within sight of Bara drinking at a pool where the stream that waters Kor-ul-gryf crosses an open place in the jungle. The deer was too far from the nearest tree to risk a charge, so the ape-man must depend upon the accuracy and force of his first arrow, which must drop the deer in its tracks or forfeit both deer and shaft. Far back came the right hand and the bow, that you or I might not move, bent easily beneath the muscles of the forest god. There was a singing twang and Bara, leaping high in air, collapsed upon the ground, an arrow through his heart. Tarzan dropped to earth and ran to his kill, lest the animal might even yet rise and escape; but Bara was safely dead. As Tarzan stooped to lift it to his shoulder there fell upon his ears a thunderous bellow that seemed almost at his right elbow, and as his eyes shot in the direction of the sound, there broke upon his vision such a creature as paleontologists have dreamed as having possibly existed in the dimmest vistas of Earth's infancy--a gigantic creature, vibrant with mad rage, that charged, bellowing, upon him.

When Pan-at-lee awoke she looked out upon the niche in search of Tarzan. He was not there. She sprang to her feet and rushed out, looking down into Kor-ul-gryf guessing that he had gone down in search of food and there she caught a glimpse of him disappearing into the forest. For an instant she was panic-stricken. She knew that he was a stranger in Pal-ul-don and that, so, he might not realize the dangers that lay in that gorge of terror. Why did she not call to him to return? You or I might have done so, but no Pal-ul-don, for they know the ways of the gryf--they know the weak eyes and the keen ears, and that at the sound of a human voice they come. To have called to Tarzan, then, would but have been to invite disaster and so she did not call. Instead, afraid though she was, she descended into the gorge for the purpose of overhauling Tarzan and warning him in whispers of his danger. It was a brave act, since it was performed in the face of countless ages of inherited fear of the creatures that she might be called upon to face. Men have been decorated for less.

Pan-at-lee, descended from a long line of hunters, assumed that Tarzan would move up wind and in this direction she sought his tracks, which she soon found well marked, since he had made no effort to conceal them. She moved rapidly until she reached the point at which Tarzan had taken to the trees. Of course she knew what had happened; since her own people were semi-arboreal; but she could not track him through the trees, having no such well-developed sense of scent as he.

She could but hope that he had continued on up wind and in this direction she moved, her heart pounding in terror against her ribs, her eyes glancing first in one direction and then another. She had reached the edge of a clearing when two things happened--she caught sight of Tarzan bending over a dead deer and at the

same instant a deafening roar sounded almost beside her. It terrified her beyond description, but it brought no paralysis of fear. Instead it galvanized her into instant action with the result that Pan-at-lee swarmed up the nearest tree to the very loftiest branch that would sustain her weight. Then she looked down.

The thing that Tarzan saw charging him when the warning bellow attracted his surprised eyes loomed terrifically monstrous before him--monstrous and awe-inspiring; but it did not terrify Tarzan, it only angered him, for he saw that it was beyond even his powers to combat and that meant that it might cause him to lose his kill, and Tarzan was hungry. There was but a single alternative to remaining for annihilation and that was flight--swift and immediate. And Tarzan fled, but he carried the carcass of Bara, the deer, with him. He had not more than a dozen paces start, but on the other hand the nearest tree was almost as close. His greatest danger lay, he imagined, in the great, towering height of the creature pursuing him, for even though he reached the tree he would have to climb high in an incredibly short time as, unless appearances were deceiving, the thing could reach up and pluck him down from any branch under thirty feet above the ground, and possibly from those up to fifty feet, if it reared up on its hind legs.

But Tarzan was no sluggard and though the gryf was incredibly fast despite its great bulk, it was no match for Tarzan, and when it comes to climbing, the little monkeys gaze with envy upon the feats of the ape-man. And so it was that the bellowing gryf came to a baffled stop at the foot of the tree and even though he reared up and sought to seize his prey among the branches, as Tarzan had guessed he might, he failed in this also. And then, well out of reach, Tarzan came to a stop and there, just above him, he saw Pan-at-lee sitting, wide-eyed and trembling.

"How came you here?" he asked.

She told him. "You came to warn me!" he said. "It was very brave and unselfish of you. I am chagrined that I should have been thus surprised. The creature was up wind from me and yet I did not sense its near presence until it charged. I cannot understand it."

"It is not strange," said Pan-at-lee. "That is one of the peculiarities of the gryf--it is said that man never knows of its presence until it is upon him--so silently does it move despite its great size."

"But I should have smelled it," cried Tarzan, disgustedly.

"Smelled it!" ejaculated Pan-at-lee. "Smelled it?"

"Certainly. How do you suppose I found this deer so quickly? And I sensed the gryf, too, but faintly as at a great distance." Tarzan suddenly ceased speaking and looked down at the bellowing creature below them--his nostrils quivered as though searching for a scent. "Ah!" he exclaimed. "I have it!"

"What?" asked Pan-at-lee.

"I was deceived because the creature gives off practically no odor," explained the ape-man. "What I smelled was the faint aroma that doubtless permeates the entire jungle because of the long presence of many of the creatures--it is the sort of odor that would remain for a long time, faint as it is.

"Pan-at-lee, did you ever hear of a triceratops? No? Well this thing that you call a gryf is a triceratops and it has been extinct for hundreds of thousands of years. I have seen its skeleton in the museum in London and a figure of one restored. I always thought that the scientists who did such work depended principally upon an overwrought imagination, but I see that I was wrong. This living thing is not an exact counterpart of the restoration that I saw; but it is so similar as to be easily recognizable, and then, too, we must remember that during the ages that have elapsed since the paleontologist's specimen lived many changes might have been wrought by evolution in the living line that has quite evidently persisted in Pal-ul-don."

"Triceratops, London, paleo--I don't know what you are talking about," cried Pan-at-lee.

Tarzan smiled and threw a piece of dead wood at the face of the angry creature below them. Instantly the great bony hood over the neck was erected and a mad bellow rolled upward from the gigantic body. Full twenty feet at the shoulder the thing stood, a dirty slate-blue in color except for its yellow face with the blue bands encircling the eyes, the red hood with the yellow lining and the yellow belly. The three parallel lines of bony protuberances down the back gave a further touch of color to the body, those following the line of the spine being red, while those on either side are yellow. The five- and three-toed hoofs of the ancient horned dinosaurs had become talons in the gryf, but the three horns, two large ones above the eyes and a median horn on the nose, had persisted through all the ages. Weird and terrible as was its appearance Tarzan could not but admire the mighty creature looming big below him, its seventy-five feet of length majestically typifying those things which all his life the ape-man had admired--courage and strength. In that massive tail alone was the strength of an elephant.

The wicked little eyes looked up at him and the horny beak opened to disclose a full set of powerful teeth.

"Herbivorous!" murmured the ape-man. "Your ancestors may have been, but not you," and then to Pan-at-lee: "Let us go now. At the cave we will have deer meat and then--back to Kor-ul-ja and Om-at."

The girl shuddered. "Go?" she repeated. "We will never go from here."

"Why not?" asked Tarzan.

For answer she but pointed to the gryf.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed the man. "It cannot climb. We can reach the cliff through the trees and be back in the cave before it knows what has become of us."

"You do not know the gryf," replied Pan-at-lee gloomily.

"Wherever we go it will follow and always it will be ready at the foot of each tree when we would descend. It will never give us up."

"We can live in the trees for a long time if necessary," replied Tarzan, "and sometime the thing will leave."

The girl shook her head. "Never," she said, "and then there are the Tor-o-don. They will come and kill us and after eating a little will throw the balance to the gryf--the gryf and Tor-o-don are friends, because the Tor-o-don shares his food with the gryf."

"You may be right," said Tarzan; "but even so I don't intend waiting here for someone to come along and eat part of me and then feed the balance to that beast below. If I don't get out of this place whole it won't be my fault. Come along now and we'll make a try at it," and so saying he moved off through the tree tops with Pan-at-lee close behind. Below them, on the ground, moved the horned dinosaur and when they reached the edge of the forest where there lay fifty yards of open ground to cross to the foot of the cliff he was there with them, at the bottom of the tree, waiting.

Tarzan looked ruefully down and scratched his head.