

## Chapter 10 - The Forbidden Garden

Lu-don paled. "It is sacrilege," he cried; "for countless ages have the priests of the Great God offered each night a life to the spirit of Jad-ben-Otho as it returned below the western horizon to its master, and never has the Great God given sign that he was displeased."

"Stop!" commanded Tarzan. "It is the blindness of the priesthood that has failed to read the messages of their god. Your warriors die beneath the knives and clubs of the Wazdon; your hunters are taken by ja and jato; no day goes by but witnesses the deaths of few or many in the villages of the Ho-don, and one death each day of those that die are the toll which Jad-ben-Otho has exacted for the lives you take upon the eastern altar. What greater sign of his displeasure could you require, O stupid priest?"

Lu-don was silent. There was raging within him a great conflict between his fear that this indeed might be the son of god and his hope that it was not, but at last his fear won and he bowed his head. "The son of Jad-ben-Otho has spoken," he said, and turning to one of the lesser priests: "Remove the bars and return these people from whence they came."

He thus addressed did as he was bid and as the bars came down the prisoners, now all fully aware of the miracle that had saved them, crowded forward and throwing themselves upon their knees before Tarzan raised their voices in thanksgiving.

Ko-tan was almost as staggered as the high priest by this ruthless overturning of an age-old religious rite. "But what," he cried, "may we do that will be pleasing in the eyes of Jad-ben-Otho?" turning a look of puzzled apprehension toward the ape-man.

"If you seek to please your god," he replied, "place upon your altars such gifts of food and apparel as are most welcome in the city of your people. These things will Jad-ben-Otho bless, when you may distribute them among those of the city who need them most. With such things are your storerooms filled as I have seen with mine own eyes, and other gifts will be brought when the priests tell the people that in this way they find favor before their god," and Tarzan turned and signified that he would leave the temple.

As they were leaving the precincts devoted to the worship of their deity, the ape-man noticed a small but rather ornate building that stood entirely detached from the others as though it had been cut from a little pinnacle of limestone which had

stood out from its fellows. As his interested glance passed over it he noticed that its door and windows were barred.

"To what purpose is that building dedicated?" he asked of Lu-don. "Who do you keep imprisoned there?"

"It is nothing," replied the high priest nervously, "there is no one there. The place is vacant. Once it was used but not now for many years," and he moved on toward the gateway which led back into the palace. Here he and the priests halted while Tarzan with Ko-tan and his warriors passed out from the sacred precincts of the temple grounds.

The one question which Tarzan would have asked he had feared to ask for he knew that in the hearts of many lay a suspicion as to his genuineness, but he determined that before he slept he would put the question to Ko-tan, either directly or indirectly--as to whether there was, or had been recently within the city of A-lur a female of the same race as his.

As their evening meal was being served to them in the banquet hall of Ko-tan's palace by a part of the army of black slaves upon whose shoulders fell the burden of all the heavy and menial tasks of the city, Tarzan noticed that there came to the eyes of one of the slaves what was apparently an expression of startled recognition, as he looked upon the ape-man for the first time in the banquet hall of Ko-tan. And again later he saw the fellow whisper to another slave and nod his head in his direction. The ape-man did not recall ever having seen this Waz-don before and he was at a loss to account for an explanation of the fellow's interest in him, and presently the incident was all but forgotten.

Ko-tan was surprised and inwardly disgusted to discover that his godly guest had no desire to gorge himself upon rich foods and that he would not even so much as taste the villainous brew of the Ho-don. To Tarzan the banquet was a dismal and tiresome affair, since so great was the interest of the guests in gorging themselves with food and drink that they had no time for conversation, the only vocal sounds being confined to a continuous grunting which, together with their table manners reminded Tarzan of a visit he had once made to the famous Berkshire herd of His Grace, the Duke of Westminster at Woodhouse, Chester.

One by one the diners succumbed to the stupefying effects of the liquor with the result that the grunting gave place to snores, so presently Tarzan and the slaves were the only conscious creatures in the banquet hall.

Rising, the ape-man turned to a tall black who stood behind him. "I would sleep," he said, "show me to my apartment."

As the fellow conducted him from the chamber the slave who had shown surprise earlier in the evening at sight of him, spoke again at length to one of his fellows. The latter cast a half-frightened look in the direction of the departing ape-man. "If you are right," he said, "they should reward us with our liberty, but if you are wrong, O Jad-ben-Otho, what will be our fate?"

"But I am not wrong!" cried the other.

"Then there is but one to tell this to, for I have heard that he looked sour when this Dor-ul-Otho was brought to the temple and that while the so-called son of Jad-ben-Otho was there he gave this one every cause to fear and hate him. I mean Lu-don, the high priest."

"You know him?" asked the other slave.

"I have worked in the temple," replied his companion.

"Then go to him at once and tell him, but be sure to exact the promise of our freedom for the proof."

And so a black Waz-don came to the temple gate and asked to see Lu-don, the high priest, on a matter of great importance, and though the hour was late Lu-don saw him, and when he had heard his story he promised him and his friend not only their freedom but many gifts if they could prove the correctness of their claims.

And as the slave talked with the high priest in the temple at A-lur the figure of a man groped its way around the shoulder of Pastar-ul-ved and the moonlight glistened from the shiny barrel of an Enfield that was strapped to the naked back, and brass cartridges shed tiny rays of reflected light from their polished cases where they hung in the bandoliers across the broad brown shoulders and the lean waist.

Tarzan's guide conducted him to a chamber overlooking the blue lake where he found a bed similar to that which he had seen in the villages of the Waz-don, merely a raised dais of stone upon which was piled great quantities of furry pelts. And so he lay down to sleep, the question that he most wished to put still unasked and unanswered.

With the coming of a new day he was awake and wandering about the palace and the palace grounds before there was sign of any of the inmates of the palace other than slaves, or at least he saw no others at first, though presently he stumbled upon an enclosure which lay almost within the center of the palace grounds surrounded by a wall that piqued the ape-man's curiosity, since he had

determined to investigate as fully as possible every part of the palace and its environs.

This place, whatever it might be, was apparently without doors or windows but that it was at least partially roofless was evidenced by the sight of the waving branches of a tree which spread above the top of the wall near him. Finding no other method of access, the ape-man uncoiled his rope and throwing it over the branch of the tree where it projected beyond the wall, was soon climbing with the ease of a monkey to the summit.

There he found that the wall surrounded an enclosed garden in which grew trees and shrubs and flowers in riotous profusion. Without waiting to ascertain whether the garden was empty or contained Ho-don, Waz-don, or wild beasts, Tarzan dropped lightly to the sward on the inside and without further loss of time commenced a systematic investigation of the enclosure.

His curiosity was aroused by the very evident fact that the place was not for general use, even by those who had free access to other parts of the palace grounds and so there was added to its natural beauties an absence of mortals which rendered its exploration all the more alluring to Tarzan since it suggested that in such a place might he hope to come upon the object of his long and difficult search.

In the garden were tiny artificial streams and little pools of water, flanked by flowering bushes, as though it all had been designed by the cunning hand of some master gardener, so faithfully did it carry out the beauties and contours of nature upon a miniature scale.

The interior surface of the wall was fashioned to represent the white cliffs of Pal-ul-don, broken occasionally by small replicas of the verdure-filled gorges of the original.

Filled with admiration and thoroughly enjoying each new surprise which the scene offered, Tarzan moved slowly around the garden, and as always he moved silently. Passing through a miniature forest he came presently upon a tiny area of flowerstudded sward and at the same time beheld before him the first Ho-don female he had seen since entering the palace. A young and beautiful woman stood in the center of the little open space, stroking the head of a bird which she held against her golden breastplate with one hand. Her profile was presented to the ape-man and he saw that by the standards of any land she would have been accounted more than lovely.

Seated in the grass at her feet, with her back toward him, was a female Waz-don slave. Seeing that she he sought was not there and apprehensive that an alarm

be raised were he discovered by the two women, Tarzan moved back to hide himself in the foliage, but before he had succeeded the Ho-don girl turned quickly toward him as though apprised of his presence by that unnamed sense, the manifestations of which are more or less familiar to us all.

At sight of him her eyes registered only her surprise though there was no expression of terror reflected in them, nor did she scream or even raise her well-modulated voice as she addressed him.

"Who are you," she asked, "who enters thus boldly the Forbidden Garden?"

At sound of her mistress' voice the slave maiden turned quickly, rising to her feet. "Tarzan-jad-guru!" she exclaimed in tones of mingled astonishment and relief.

"You know him?" cried her mistress turning toward the slave and affording Tarzan an opportunity to raise a cautioning finger to his lips lest Pan-at-lee further betray him, for it was Pan-at-lee indeed who stood before him, no less a source of surprise to him than had his presence been to her.

Thus questioned by her mistress and simultaneously admonished to silence by Tarzan, Pan-at-lee was momentarily silenced and then haltingly she groped for a way to extricate herself from her dilemma. "I thought--" she faltered, "but no, I am mistaken--I thought that he was one whom I had seen before near the Kor-ul-gryf."

The Ho-don looked first at one and then at the other an expression of doubt and questioning in her eyes. "But you have not answered me," she continued presently; "who are you?"

"You have not heard then," asked Tarzan, "of the visitor who arrived at your king's court yesterday?"

"You mean," she exclaimed, "that you are the Dor-ul-Otho?" And now the erstwhile doubting eyes reflected naught but awe.

"I am he," replied Tarzan; "and you?"

"I am O-lo-a, daughter of Ko-tan, the king," she replied.

So this was O-lo-a, for love of whom Ta-den had chosen exile rather than priesthood. Tarzan had approached more closely the dainty barbarian princess. "Daughter of Ko-tan," he said, "Jad-ben-Otho is pleased with you and as a mark of his favor he has preserved for you through many dangers him whom you love."

"I do not understand," replied the girl but the flush that mounted to her cheek belied her words. "Bu-lat is a guest in the palace of Ko-tan, my father. I do not know that he has faced any danger. It is to Bu-lat that I am betrothed."

"But it is not Bu-lat whom you love," said Tarzan.

Again the flush and the girl half turned her face away. "Have I then displeased the Great God?" she asked.

"No," replied Tarzan; "as I told you he is well satisfied and for your sake he has saved Ta-den for you."

"Jad-ben-Otho knows all," whispered the girl, "and his son shares his great knowledge."

"No," Tarzan hastened to correct her lest a reputation for omniscience might prove embarrassing. "I know only what Jad-ben-Otho wishes me to know."

"But tell me," she said, "I shall be reunited with Ta-den? Surely the son of god can read the future."

The ape-man was glad that he had left himself an avenue of escape. "I know nothing of the future," he replied, "other than what Jad-ben-Otho tells me. But I think you need have no fear for the future if you remain faithful to Ta-den and Ta-den's friends."

"You have seen him?" asked O-lo-a. "Tell me, where is he?"

"Yes," replied Tarzan, "I have seen him. He was with Om-at, the gund of Kor-ul-ja."

"A prisoner of the Waz-don?" interrupted the girl.

"Not a prisoner but an honored guest," replied the ape-man.

"Wait," he exclaimed, raising his face toward the heavens; "do not speak. I am receiving a message from Jad-ben-Otho, my father."

The two women dropped to their knees, covering their faces with their hands, stricken with awe at the thought of the awful nearness of the Great God. Presently Tarzan touched O-lo-a on the shoulder.

"Rise," he said. "Jad-ben-Otho has spoken. He has told me that this slave girl is from the tribe of Kor-ul-ja, where Ta-den is, and that she is betrothed to Om-at, their chief. Her name is Pan-at-lee."

O-lo-a turned questioningly toward Pan-at-lee. The latter nodded, her simple mind unable to determine whether or not she and her mistress were the victims of a colossal hoax. "It is even as he says," she whispered.

O-lo-a fell upon her knees and touched her forehead to Tarzan's feet. "Great is the honor that Jad-ben-Otho has done his poor servant," she cried. "Carry to him my poor thanks for the happiness that he has brought to O-lo-a."

"It would please my father," said Tarzan, "if you were to cause Pan-at-lee to be returned in safety to the village of her people."

"What cares Jad-ben-Otho for such as she?" asked O-lo-a, a slight trace of hauteur in her tone.

"There is but one god," replied Tarzan, "and he is the god of the Waz-don as well as of the Ho-don; of the birds and the beasts and the flowers and of everything that grows upon the earth or beneath the waters. If Pan-at-lee does right she is greater in the eyes of Jad-ben-Otho than would be the daughter of Ko-tan should she do wrong."

It was evident that O-lo-a did not quite understand this interpretation of divine favor, so contrary was it to the teachings of the priesthood of her people. In one respect only did Tarzan's teachings coincide with her belief--that there was but one god. For the rest she had always been taught that he was solely the god of the Ho-don in every sense, other than that other creatures were created by Jad-ben-Otho to serve some useful purpose for the benefit of the Ho-don race. And now to be told by the son of god that she stood no higher in divine esteem than the black handmaiden at her side was indeed a shock to her pride, her vanity, and her faith. But who could question the word of Dor-ul-Otho, especially when she had with her own eyes seen him in actual communion with god in heaven?

"The will of Jad-ben-Otho be done," said O-lo-a meekly, "if it lies within my power. But it would be best, O Dor-ul-Otho, to communicate your father's wish directly to the king."

"Then keep her with you," said Tarzan, "and see that no harm befalls her."

O-lo-a looked ruefully at Pan-at-lee. "She was brought to me but yesterday," she said, "and never have I had slave woman who pleased me better. I shall hate to part with her."

"But there are others," said Tarzan.

"Yes," replied O-lo-a, "there are others, but there is only one Pan-at-lee."

"Many slaves are brought to the city?" asked Tarzan.

"Yes," she replied.

"And many strangers come from other lands?" he asked.

She shook her head negatively. "Only the Ho-don from the other side of the Valley of Jad-ben-Otho," she replied, "and they are not strangers."

"Am I then the first stranger to enter the gates of A-lur?" he asked.

"Can it be," she parried, "that the son of Jad-ben-Otho need question a poor ignorant mortal like O-lo-a?"

"As I told you before," replied Tarzan, "Jad-ben-Otho alone is all-knowing."

"Then if he wished you to know this thing," retorted O-lo-a quickly, "you would know it."

Inwardly the ape-man smiled that this little heathen's astuteness should beat him at his own game, yet in a measure her evasion of the question might be an answer to it. "There have been other strangers here then recently?" he persisted.

"I cannot tell you what I do not know," she replied. "Always is the palace of Ko-tan filled with rumors, but how much fact and how much fancy how may a woman of the palace know?"

"There has been such a rumor then?" he asked.

"It was only rumor that reached the Forbidden Garden," she replied.

"It described, perhaps, a woman of another race?" As he put the question and awaited her answer he thought that his heart ceased to beat, so grave to him was the issue at stake.

The girl hesitated before replying, and then. "No," she said, "I cannot speak of this thing, for if it be of sufficient importance to elicit the interest of the gods then indeed would I be subject to the wrath of my father should I discuss it."

"In the name of Jad-ben-Otho I command you to speak," said Tarzan. "In the name of Jad-ben-Otho in whose hands lies the fate of Ta-den!"

The girl paled. "Have mercy!" she cried, "and for the sake of Ta-den I will tell you all that I know."

"Tell what?" demanded a stern voice from the shrubbery behind them. The three turned to see the figure of Ko-tan emerging from the foliage. An angry scowl



distorted his kingly features but at sight of Tarzan it gave place to an expression of surprise not unmixed with fear. "Dor-ul-Otho!" he exclaimed, "I did not know that it was you," and then, raising his head and squaring his shoulders he said, "but there are places where even the son of the Great God may not walk and this, the Forbidden Garden of Ko-tan, is one."

It was a challenge but despite the king's bold front there was a note of apology in it, indicating that in his superstitious mind there flourished the inherent fear of man for his Maker. "Come, Dor-ul-Otho," he continued, "I do not know all this foolish child has said to you but whatever you would know Ko-tan, the king, will tell you. O-lo-a, go to your quarters immediately," and he pointed with stern finger toward the opposite end of the garden.

The princess, followed by Pan-at-lee, turned at once and left them.

"We will go this way," said Ko-tan and preceding, led Tarzan in another direction. Close to that part of the wall which they approached Tarzan perceived a grotto in the miniature cliff into the interior of which Ko-tan led him, and down a rocky stairway to a gloomy corridor the opposite end of which opened into the palace proper. Two armed warriors stood at this entrance to the Forbidden Garden, evidencing how jealously were the sacred precincts of the place guarded.

In silence Ko-tan led the way back to his own quarters in the palace. A large chamber just outside the room toward which Ko-tan was leading his guest was filled with chiefs and warriors awaiting the pleasure of their ruler. As the two entered, an aisle was formed for them the length of the chamber, down which they passed in silence.

Close to the farther door and half hidden by the warriors who stood before him was Lu-don, the high priest. Tarzan glimpsed him but briefly but in that short period he was aware of a cunning and malevolent expression upon the cruel countenance that he was subconsciously aware boded him no good, and then with Ko-tan he passed into the adjoining room and the hangings dropped.

At the same moment the hideous headdress of an under priest appeared in the entrance of the outer chamber. Its owner, pausing for a moment, glanced quickly around the interior and then having located him whom he sought moved rapidly in the direction of Lu-don. There was a whispered conversation which was terminated by the high priest.

"Return immediately to the quarters of the princess," he said, "and see that the slave is sent to me at the temple at once." The under priest turned and departed upon his mission while Lu-don also left the apartment and directed his footsteps toward the sacred enclosure over which he ruled.

A half-hour later a warrior was ushered into the presence of Ko-tan. "Lu-don, the high priest, desires the presence of Ko-tan, the king, in the temple," he announced, "and it is his wish that he come alone."

Ko-tan nodded to indicate that he accepted the command which even the king must obey. "I will return presently, Dor-ul-Otho," he said to Tarzan, "and in the meantime my warriors and my slaves are yours to command."