

## Chapter 16 - The Secret Way

It was a baffled gryf that bellowed in angry rage as Tarzan's sleek brown body cutting the moonlit waters shot through the aperture in the wall of the gryf pool and out into the lake beyond. The ape-man smiled as he thought of the comparative ease with which he had defeated the purpose of the high priest but his face clouded again at the ensuing remembrance of the grave danger that threatened his mate. His sole object now must be to return as quickly as he might to the chamber where he had last seen her on the third floor of the Temple of the Gryf, but how he was to find his way again into the temple grounds was a question not easy of solution.

In the moonlight he could see the sheer cliff rising from the water for a great distance along the shore--far beyond the precincts of the temple and the palace--towering high above him, a seemingly impregnable barrier against his return. Swimming close in, he skirted the wall searching diligently for some foothold, however slight, upon its smooth, forbidding surface. Above him and quite out of reach were numerous apertures, but there were no means at hand by which he could reach them. Presently, however, his hopes were raised by the sight of an opening level with the surface of the water. It lay just ahead and a few strokes brought him to it--cautious strokes that brought forth no sound from the yielding waters. At the nearer side of the opening he stopped and reconnoitered. There was no one in sight. Carefully he raised his body to the threshold of the entrance-way, his smooth brown hide glistening in the moonlight as it shed the water in tiny sparkling rivulets.

Before him stretched a gloomy corridor, unlighted save for the faint illumination of the diffused moonlight that penetrated it for but a short distance from the opening. Moving as rapidly as reasonable caution warranted, Tarzan followed the corridor into the bowels of the cave. There was an abrupt turn and then a flight of steps at the top of which lay another corridor running parallel with the face of the cliff. This passage was dimly lighted by flickering cressets set in niches in the walls at considerable distances apart. A quick survey showed the ape-man numerous openings upon each side of the corridor and his quick ears caught sounds that indicated that there were other beings not far distant--priests, he concluded, in some of the apartments letting upon the passageway.

To pass undetected through this hive of enemies appeared quite beyond the range of possibility. He must again seek disguise and knowing from experience how best to secure such he crept stealthily along the corridor toward the nearest doorway. Like Numa, the lion, stalking a wary prey he crept with quivering nostrils to the

hangings that shut off his view from the interior of the apartment beyond. A moment later his head disappeared within; then his shoulders, and his lithe body, and the hangings dropped quietly into place again. A moment later there filtered to the vacant corridor without a brief, gasping gurgle and again silence. A minute passed; a second, and a third, and then the hangings were thrust aside and a grimly masked priest of the temple of Jad-ben-Otho strode into the passageway.

With bold steps he moved along and was about to turn into a diverging gallery when his attention was aroused by voices coming from a room upon his left. Instantly the figure halted and crossing the corridor stood with an ear close to the skins that concealed the occupants of the room from him, and him from them. Presently he leaped back into the concealing shadows of the diverging gallery and immediately thereafter the hangings by which he had been listening parted and a priest emerged to turn quickly down the main corridor. The eavesdropper waited until the other had gained a little distance and then stepping from his place of concealment followed silently behind.

The way led along the corridor which ran parallel with the face of the cliff for some little distance and then Pan-sat, taking a cresset from one of the wall niches, turned abruptly into a small apartment at his left. The tracker followed cautiously in time to see the rays of the flickering light dimly visible from an aperture in the floor before him. Here he found a series of steps, similar to those used by the Waz-don in scaling the cliff to their caves, leading to a lower level.

First satisfying himself that his guide was continuing upon his way unsuspecting, the other descended after him and continued his stealthy stalking. The passageway was now both narrow and low, giving but bare headroom to a tall man, and it was broken often by flights of steps leading always downward. The steps in each unit seldom numbered more than six and sometimes there was only one or two but in the aggregate the tracker imagined that they had descended between fifty and seventy-five feet from the level of the upper corridor when the passageway terminated in a small apartment at one side of which was a little pile of rubble.

Setting his cresset upon the ground, Pan-sat commenced hurriedly to toss the bits of broken stone aside, presently revealing a small aperture at the base of the wall upon the opposite side of which there appeared to be a further accumulation of rubble. This he also removed until he had a hole of sufficient size to permit the passage of his body, and leaving the cresset still burning upon the floor the priest crawled through the opening he had made and disappeared from the sight of the watcher hiding in the shadows of the narrow passageway behind him.

No sooner, however, was he safely gone than the other followed, finding himself, after passing through the hole, on a little ledge about halfway between the surface of the lake and the top of the cliff above. The ledge inclined steeply upward, ending at the rear of a building which stood upon the edge of the cliff and which the second priest entered just in time to see Pan-sat pass out into the city beyond.

As the latter turned a nearby corner the other emerged from the doorway and quickly surveyed his surroundings. He was satisfied the priest who had led him hither had served his purpose in so far as the tracker was concerned. Above him, and perhaps a hundred yards away, the white walls of the palace gleamed against the northern sky. The time that it had taken him to acquire definite knowledge concerning the secret passageway between the temple and the city he did not count as lost, though he begrudged every instant that kept him from the prosecution of his main objective. It had seemed to him, however, necessary to the success of a bold plan that he had formulated upon overhearing the conversation between Lu-don and Pan-sat as he stood without the hangings of the apartment of the high priest.

Alone against a nation of suspicious and half-savage enemies he could scarce hope for a successful outcome to the one great issue upon which hung the life and happiness of the creature he loved best. For her sake he must win allies and it was for this purpose that he had sacrificed these precious moments, but now he lost no further time in seeking to regain entrance to the palace grounds that he might search out whatever new prison they had found in which to incarcerate his lost love.

He found no difficulty in passing the guards at the entrance to the palace for, as he had guessed, his priestly disguise disarmed all suspicion. As he approached the warriors he kept his hands behind him and trusted to fate that the sickly light of the single torch which stood beside the doorway would not reveal his un-Pal-ul-donian feet. As a matter of fact so accustomed were they to the comings and goings of the priesthood that they paid scant attention to him and he passed on into the palace grounds without even a moment's delay.

His goal now was the Forbidden Garden and this he had little difficulty in reaching though he elected to enter it over the wall rather than to chance arousing any suspicion on the part of the guards at the inner entrance, since he could imagine no reason why a priest should seek entrance there thus late at night.

He found the garden deserted, nor any sign of her he sought. That she had been brought hither he had learned from the conversation he had overheard between

Lu-don and Pan-sat, and he was sure that there had been no time or opportunity for the high priest to remove her from the palace grounds. The garden he knew to be devoted exclusively to the uses of the princess and her women and it was only reasonable to assume therefore that if Jane had been brought to the garden it could only have been upon an order from Ko-tan. This being the case the natural assumption would follow that he would find her in some other portion of O-lo-a's quarters.

Just where these lay he could only conjecture, but it seemed reasonable to believe that they must be adjacent to the garden, so once more he scaled the wall and passing around its end directed his steps toward an entrance-way which he judged must lead to that portion of the palace nearest the Forbidden Garden.

To his surprise he found the place unguarded and then there fell upon his ear from an interior apartment the sound of voices raised in anger and excitement. Guided by the sound he quickly traversed several corridors and chambers until he stood before the hangings which separated him from the chamber from which issued the sounds of altercation. Raising the skins slightly he looked within. There were two women battling with a Ho-don warrior. One was the daughter of Ko-tan and the other Pan-at-lee, the Kor-ul-ja.

At the moment that Tarzan lifted the hangings, the warrior threw O-lo-a viciously to the ground and seizing Pan-at-lee by the hair drew his knife and raised it above her head. Casting the encumbering headdress of the dead priest from his shoulders the ape-man leaped across the intervening space and seizing the brute from behind struck him a single terrible blow.

As the man fell forward dead, the two women recognized Tarzan simultaneously. Pan-at-lee fell upon her knees and would have bowed her head upon his feet had he not, with an impatient gesture, commanded her to rise. He had no time to listen to their protestations of gratitude or answer the numerous questions which he knew would soon be flowing from those two feminine tongues.

"Tell me," he cried, "where is the woman of my own race whom Ja-don brought here from the temple?"

"She is but this moment gone," cried O-lo-a. "Mo-sar, the father of this thing here," and she indicated the body of Bu-lot with a scornful finger, "seized her and carried her away."

"Which way?" he cried. "Tell me quickly, in what direction he took her."

"That way," cried Pan-at-lee, pointing to the doorway through which Mo-sar had passed. "They would have taken the princess and the stranger woman to Tu-lur, Mo-sar's city by the Dark Lake."

"I go to find her," he said to Pan-at-lee, "she is my mate. And if I survive I shall find means to liberate you too and return you to Om-at."

Before the girl could reply he had disappeared behind the hangings of the door near the foot of the dais. The corridor through which he ran was illy lighted and like nearly all its kind in the Ho-don city wound in and out and up and down, but at last it terminated at a sudden turn which brought him into a courtyard filled with warriors, a portion of the palace guard that had just been summoned by one of the lesser palace chiefs to join the warriors of Ko-tan in the battle that was raging in the banquet hall.

At sight of Tarzan, who in his haste had forgotten to recover his disguising headdress, a great shout arose. "Blasphemer!" "Defiler of the temple!" burst hoarsely from savage throats, and mingling with these were a few who cried, "Dor-ul-Otho!" evidencing the fact that there were among them still some who clung to their belief in his divinity.

To cross the courtyard armed only with a knife, in the face of this great throng of savage fighting men seemed even to the giant ape-man a thing impossible of achievement. He must use his wits now and quickly too, for they were closing upon him. He might have turned and fled back through the corridor but flight now even in the face of dire necessity would but delay him in his pursuit of Mo-sar and his mate.

"Stop!" he cried, raising his palm against them. "I am the Dor-ul-Otho and I come to you with a word from Ja-don, who it is my father's will shall be your king now that Ko-tan is slain. Lu-don, the high priest, has planned to seize the palace and destroy the loyal warriors that Mo-sar may be made king--Mo-sar who will be the tool and creature of Lu-don. Follow me. There is no time to lose if you would prevent the traitors whom Lu-don has organized in the city from entering the palace by a secret way and overpowering Ja-don and the faithful band within."

For a moment they hesitated. At last one spoke. "What guarantee have we," he demanded, "that it is not you who would betray us and by leading us now away from the fighting in the banquet hall cause those who fight at Ja-don's side to be defeated?"

"My life will be your guarantee," replied Tarzan. "If you find that I have not spoken the truth you are sufficient in numbers to execute whatever penalty you choose. But come, there is not time to lose. Already are the lesser priests gathering their

warriors in the city below," and without waiting for any further parley he strode directly toward them in the direction of the gate upon the opposite side of the courtyard which led toward the principal entrance to the palace ground.

Slower in wit than he, they were swept away by his greater initiative and that compelling power which is inherent to all natural leaders. And so they followed him, the giant ape-man with a dead tail dragging the ground behind him--a demi-god where another would have been ridiculous. Out into the city he led them and down toward the unpretentious building that hid Lu-don's secret passageway from the city to the temple, and as they rounded the last turn they saw before them a gathering of warriors which was being rapidly augmented from all directions as the traitors of A-lur mobilized at the call of the priesthood.

"You spoke the truth, stranger," said the chief who marched at Tarzan's side, "for there are the warriors with the priests among them, even as you told us."

"And now," replied the ape-man, "that I have fulfilled my promise I will go my way after Mo-sar, who has done me a great wrong. Tell Ja-don that Jad-ben-Otho is upon his side, nor do you forget to tell him also that it was the Dor-ul-Otho who thwarted Lu-don's plan to seize the palace."

"I will not forget," replied the chief. "Go your way. We are enough to overpower the traitors."

"Tell me," asked Tarzan, "how I may know this city of Tu-lur?"

"It lies upon the south shore of the second lake below A-lur," replied the chief, "the lake that is called Jad-in-lul."

They were now approaching the band of traitors, who evidently thought that this was another contingent of their own party since they made no effort either toward defense or retreat. Suddenly the chief raised his voice in a savage war cry that was immediately taken up by his followers, and simultaneously, as though the cry were a command, the entire party broke into a mad charge upon the surprised rebels.

Satisfied with the outcome of his suddenly conceived plan and sure that it would work to the disadvantage of Lu-don, Tarzan turned into a side street and pointed his steps toward the outskirts of the city in search of the trail that led southward toward Tu-lur.