

Tarzan of the Apes



by Edgar Rice Burroughs

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PROLOGUE.

Not like any other story you ever read before is "Tarzan of the Apes." While you are reading it you would like to pause to ask yourself "Is it possible?" but you can't, because the story is so fascinating that pausing is impossible. It's a yarn of the you-can't-stop-until-you-finish-it kind.

It may have happened in the wilds of Africa just as the author relates it, or it may not—we do not know whether or not he has a basis of fact for his story—but you are not a scientist while you are reading it. You are just an ordinary human being, with a love for a story that is absorbing in its interest and swiftness.

CHAPTER I.

In the Wilds.

I HAD this story from one who had no business to tell it to me or to any other. I may credit the seductive influence of an old vine-tape upon the narrator for the beginning of it and my own skeptical incredulity during the days that followed for the balance of the strange tale.

I do not say the story is true, for I did not witness the happenings which it portrays.

The yellow, mildewed pages of the diary of a man long dead and the records of the colonial office dovetail perfectly with the narrative of my convivial host, and so I give you the story as I pieced it out from these several various agencies.

If you do not find it credible, you will at least be as one with me in acknowledging that it is unique, remarkable and interesting.

From the records of the colonial office and from the dead man's diary we learn that a certain young English nobleman, whom we shall call John Clayton, Lord Greystoke, was commissioned to undertake a peculiarly delicate investigation of conditions in a British west coast African colony from whose natives another European power was known to be recruiting soldiers for its army, which latter it used, solely for the forcible collection of rubber and ivory from the savage tribes along the Kougo and the Aruwimi.

We learn also that on a bright May morning in 1888 John, Lord Greystoke, and his bride, Lady Alice, sailed from Dover on their way to Africa.

A month later they arrived at Freetown, where they chartered a small sailing vessel, the Fuwala, which was to bear them to their final destination. And here John, Lord Greystoke, and Lady Alice, his wife, vanished from the eyes and from the knowledge of men.

Two months after they weighed anchor and cleared from the port of Freetown, a halcyon British war vessel was scouring the south Atlantic for trace of them or their little vessel, and it was almost immediately that the wreckage was found upon the shores of St. Helena which convinced the world that the Fuwala had gone down with all on board, and thus the search was stopped ere it had scarce begun.

We know now that the crew of the Fuwala mutinied, slew her officers and spared John Clayton and his wife because of a favor done to the leader of the mutineers by Clayton. Later the crew, fearing discovery, set John Clayton and his wife ashore on the wild west coast of Africa, giving them sufficient arms and tools to enable them to maintain life with work.

The walls. Odd vases made by his own hands from the clay of the region held beautiful tropical flowers. Curtains of grass and bamboo covered the windows, and, most arduous task of all with his meager assortment of tools, he had fashioned lumber to neatly seal the walls and ceiling and lay a smooth floor within the cabin.

During the year that followed Clayton was several times attacked by the great apes, which now seemed to infest the vicinity of the cabin, but as he never ventured out except with both rifle and revolver he had little fear of the huge beasts.

He had strengthened the window protections and fitted a unique wooden lock to the cabin door, so that when he hunted for game and fruits he had no fear that any animal could break into the little home.

At first much of the game he shot from the cabin windows, but toward the end the animals learned to fear the strange air whence issued the terrifying thunder of his rifle.

In his leisure Clayton read, often aloud to his wife, from the store of books he had brought for their new home. Among these were many for children—picture books, primers, readers—for they had known that their little child would be old enough for such before they had hoped to return to England.

At other times Clayton wrote in his diary, which he had always been accustomed to keep in French and in which he recorded the details of their strange life. This book he kept locked in a little metal box.

A year from the day her little son was born Lady Alice passed quietly away in the night. So peaceful was her end that it was hours before Clayton could realize that his wife was dead.

The last entry in his diary was made the morning following her death. In it he recites the sad details in a matter of fact way that adds to the pathos of it, for it breathes an apathy born of long sorrow and hopelessness, which even this cruel blow could scarcely awake to further suffering.

"My little son is crying for nourishment. Oh, Alice, Alice, what shall I do?" And as John Clayton wrote the last words his hand was ever destined to pen he dropped his head wearily upon his outstretched arms, where they rested upon the table he had built for her who lay still and cold in the bed beside him.

For a long time no sound broke the deathlike stillness of the jungle midday save the wailing of the tiny man-child.

In the forest of the tableland a mile back from the ocean old Kerchak, the ape, was on a rampage of rage among his people.

The younger and lighter members of his tribe scampered to the higher branches of the great trees to escape his wrath, risking their lives upon branches that scarce supported their weight rather than face old Kerchak in one of his fits of uncontrolled anger.

The other males scattered in all directions, but not before the infuriated brute had felt the vertebrae of one snap between his fanning jaws.

Then he spat Kala, who, returning from a search for food with her young babe, was ignorant of the state of the mighty male's temper until the shrill warnings of her fellows caused her to scamper madly for safety.

But Kerchak was close upon her, so close that he had almost grasped her ankle had she not made a furious leap far into space from one tree to another—a perilous chance which apes seldom take, unless so closely pursued by danger that there is no other alternative.

She made the leap successfully, but as she grasped the limb of the further tree the sudden jar loosened the hold of the tiny babe where it clung frantically to her neck, and she saw the little thing hurled, turning and twisting, to the ground thirty feet below.

With a low cry of dismay Kala rushed headlong to its side, thoughtless now of the danger from Kerchak, but when she gathered the wee mangled form to her bosom life had left it.

With low moans she sat crouching by the body to her, nor did Kerchak attempt to molest her. With the death of the little babe the demoniac rage passed so suddenly as it had seized him.

Kerchak was a huge king ape, weighing perhaps 350 pounds. His forehead was extremely low and receding, his eyes bloodshot, small and close set to his coarse, flat nose; his ears large and thin, but smaller than most of his kind.

His awful temper and his mighty strength made him supreme among the little tribe into which he had been born some twenty years before.

Now that he was in his prime, there was no simian in all the mighty forest through which he roved that dared contest his right to rule, nor did the other and larger animals molest him.

trees of the second terrace. The tribe of anthropoids, over which Kerchak ruled with an iron hand and bared fangs, numbered some six or eight families, each family consisting of an adult male with his wives and children—some sixty or seventy apes, all told.

Kala was the youngest wife of a male called Tublat, meaning "Broken Nose," and the child she had seen dashed to death was her first, for she was but nine or ten years old.

Notwithstanding her youth, she was large and powerful—a splendid, clean limbed animal, with a round, high forehead, which denoted more intelligence than most of her kind possessed. So also she had a greater capacity for mother love and mother sorrow.

But she was still an ape, a huge, fierce, terrible beast of a species closely allied to the gorilla, yet with more intelligence, which, with the strength of their cousins, made her king the most fearsome of those awe inspiring progenitors of man.

When the tribe saw that Kerchak's rage had ceased they came slowly down from their arboreal retreats and pursued again the various occupations which he had interrupted. The young played and frolicked about among the trees and bushes.

They had passed an hour or so thus when Kerchak called them together and, with a word of command to them to follow him, set off toward the sea.

They traveled for the most part upon the ground, where it was open, following the path of the great elephants

white ape lying half across a table, his head buried in his arms, and on the bed lay a figure covered by a salicloth while from a tiny rustic cradle came the plaintive wailing of a babe.

Noislessly Kerchak entered, crouching for the charge, and then John Clayton rose with a sudden start and faced them.

The sight that met his eyes must have frozen him with horror, for there within the door, stood three great but apes, while behind them crowded many more; how many he never knew, for his revolver was hanging on the far wall beside his rifle and Kerchak was charging.

When Kerchak released the limp form which had been John Clayton, Lord Greystoke, he turned his attention toward the little cradle, but Kala was there before him, and when he would have grasped the child she snatched it herself, and before he could intercept her she had bolted through the door and taken refuge in a high tree.

As she took up the little live baby of Alice Clayton she dropped the dead body of her own into the empty cradle.

The wail of the living had answered the call of universal motherhood within her wild breast which the dead could not still.

High up among the branches of a mighty tree she hugged the shrieking infant to her bosom, and soon the instinct that was dominant in this fierce female as it had been in the breast of his tender and beautiful mother—the instinct of mother love—reached out to the tiny man-child's half formed understanding, and he became quiet.

Then hunger closed the gap between them, and the son of an English lord and an English lady nursed at the breast of Kala, the great ape.

Once satisfied that Clayton was dead Kerchak turned his attention to the thing which lay upon the bed, covered by a piece of salicloth.

A moment he let his fingers sink deep into the cold flesh, and then, realizing that she was already dead, he turned from her to examine the contents of the room, nor did he again molest the body of either Lady Alice or Sir John.

The rifle hanging upon the wall caught his first attention. It was for this strange, death dealing thunder stick that he had yearned for months; but, now that it was within his grasp, he scarcely had the temerity to seize it.

Finally the rifle was torn from his hook and lay in the grasp of the great brute. Finding that it harmed him not, Kerchak began to examine it closely.

During all these operations the apes who had entered sat huddled near the door watching their chief, while those outside strained and crowded to catch a glimpse of what transpired within.

Suddenly Kerchak's finger closed upon the trigger, there was a deafening roar in the little room, and the apes at and beyond the door fell over one another in their wild anxiety to escape.

Kerchak was equally frightened—so frightened, in fact, that he quite forgot to throw aside the author of that fearful noise, but bolted for the door with it tightly clutched in one hand.

As he passed through the opening the front sight of the rifle caught upon the edge of the inswinging door with sufficient force to close it tightly after the fleeing ape.

When Kerchak came to a halt a short distance from the cabin and discovered that he still held the rifle he dropped it as though it had burned him, nor did he again essay to recover it.

The noise had been too much for his brute nerves, but he was now quite convinced that the terrible stick was quite harmless by itself if left alone.

The cleverly constructed latch which Clayton had made for the door had sprung as Kerchak passed out, nor could the apes find means of ingress through the heavily barred windows.

Kala had not once come to earth with her little adopted babe, but now Kerchak called to her to descend with the rest, and as there was no note of anger in his voice she dropped lightly from branch to branch and joined the others on their homeward march.

Those of the apes who attempted to examine Kala's strange baby were repulsed with bared fangs and menacing growls, accompanied by words of warning from Kala.

When they assured her that they meant the child no harm she permitted them to come close, but would not allow them to touch her charge.

It was as though she knew that her baby was frail and delicate and feared lest the rough hands of her fellows might injure the little thing.

CHAPTER II.

The White Apes.

TENDERLY Kala nursed her little wail, wondering silently why it did not gain strength and agility as did the little apes of other mothers. It was nearly a year from the time the little fellow came into her possession before he would walk alone, and as for climbing—my, but how stupid he was!

Kala sometimes talked with the older females about her young hopeful, but none of them could understand how a child could be so slow and backward in learning to care for itself. Why, it could not even find food alone, and more than twelve moons had passed since Kala had come upon it.

Had they known that the child had seen thirteen moons before it had come into Kala's possession they would have considered its case as absolutely hopeless.

Tublat, Kala's husband, was sorely vexed and but for the female's careful watching would have put the child out of the way.

"He will never be a great ape," he argued. "Always will you have to carry him and protect him. What good will he be to the tribe? None. Only a burden."

"Let us leave him quietly sleeping among the tall grasses, that you may bear other and stronger apes to guard us in our old age."

"Never, Broken Nose," replied Kala.

"If I must carry him forever, so be it." Tublat went to Kerchak to urge him to use his authority with Kala and force her to give up little Tarzan, which was the name they had given to the tiny Lord Greystoke and which meant "white skin."

But when Kerchak spoke to her about it Kala threatened to run away from the tribe if they did not leave her in peace with the child, and as this is one of the unalienable rights of the jungle folk, if they be dissatisfied among their own people, they bothered her no more, for Kala was a fine, clean limbed young female, and they did not wish to lose her.

As Tarzan grew he made more rapid strides, so that by the time he was ten years old he was an excellent climber and on the ground could do many wonderful things which were beyond the powers of his little brothers and sisters.

In many ways did he differ from them, and they often marveled at his superior cunning, but in strength and size he was deficient, for at ten the great anthropoids were fully grown, some of them towering over six feet in height, while little Tarzan was still but a half grown boy.

Yet such a boy! From early infancy he had used his hands to swing from branch to branch after the manner of his giant mother, and as he grew older he spent hour upon hour daily speeding through the treetops with his brothers and sisters.

He could spring twenty feet across space at the dizzy heights of the forest top and grasp with unerring precision and without apparent jar a limb waving wildly in the path of an approaching tornado.

He could drop twenty feet at a stretch from limb to limb in rapid descent to the ground, or he could gain the utmost pinnacle of the loftiest tropical giant with the ease and swiftness of a squirrel. Though but ten years old, he was fully as strong as the average man of thirty and far more agile than the most practiced athlete ever becomes. And day by day his strength was increasing.

His life among the fierce apes had been happy, for his recollection held no other life, nor did he know that there existed within the universe aught else than his little forest and the wild jungle animals with which he was familiar.

He was nearly ten before he commenced to realize that a great difference existed between himself and his fellows. His little body, burned almost black by exposure, suddenly caused him feelings of intense shame, for he realized that it was entirely hairless, like some old snake or reptile.

In the higher land which his tribe frequented was a little lake, and it was here that Tarzan first saw his face in the clear, still waters of its bosom.

It was on a sultry day of the dry season that he and one of his cousins had gone down to the bank to drink. As they leaned over both little faces were mirrored on the placid pool, the fierce and terrible features of the ape beside those of the aristocratic son of an old English house.

Tarzan was appalled. It had been bad enough to be hairless, but to own such a countenance! He wondered that the other apes could look at him at all.

So intent was he upon his personal appraisal of his features that he did not hear the parting of the tall grass behind him as a great body pushed itself stealthily through the jungle, nor did his companion, the ape, hear either, for he was drinking, and the noise of his sucking lips drowned the quiet approach of the intruder.

Not thirty paces behind the two he crouched—Sabor, the tiger—lashing his tail. Cautiously he moved a great padded paw forward, noiselessly placing it before he lifted the next. Thus he advanced, his belly low, almost touching the surface of the ground—a great cat preparing to spring upon its prey.

Now he was within ten feet of the two unsuspecting little playfellows. Carefully he drew his hind feet well up beneath his body, the great muscles, rolling under the beautiful skin of black and yellow. So low he was crouching that he seemed flattened to the earth except for the upward bend of the glossy back as it gathered for the spring.

"No longer the tall lashed. Quiet and straight behind him it lay. An instant he paused thus as though turned to stone, and then, with an awful scream, he sprang.

Sabor, the tiger, was a wise hunter. To one less wise the wild alarm of his fierce cry as he sprang would have seemed a foolish thing, for could he not more surely have fallen upon his victims had he but quietly leaped without that loud shriek?

But Sabor knew well the wondrous quickness of the jungle folk and their almost unbelievable powers of hearing. To them the sudden scraping of one blade of grass across another was as effectual a warning as his loudest cry, and Sabor knew that he could not make that leap without a little noise.

His wild scream was not a warning, but instead was meant to freeze his poor victims in a paralysis of terror for the tiny fraction of an instant, which would suffice for his mighty claws to sink into their soft flesh and hold them beyond peradventure of escape.

In so far as the ape was concerned, Sabor responded correctly. The little fellow crouched trembling just an instant, but that instant was quite long enough to prove his undoing.

Not so, however, with Tarzan, the man-child. Before him lay the deep waters of the little lake, behind him certain death—a cruel death beneath tearing claws and rending fangs.

Tarzan had always hated water, except as a medium for quenching his thirst. He hated it because he connected it with the chill and discomfort of the torrential rains, and he feared it for the thunder and lightning and wind which accompanied it.

But of the two evils his quick mind chose the lesser, and before the great beast had covered half his leap Tarzan felt the chill waters close above his head.

He could not swim, and the water was very deep. But still he lost no particle of that self reliance and resourcefulness which were the badges of his superior being.

Rapidly he moved his hands and feet in an attempt to scramble upward, and, possibly more by chance than design, he fell into the stroke that a dog uses when swimming, so that within a few seconds his nose was above water, and he found that he could keep it there by continuing his strokes and also make progress through the water.

He was much surprised and pleased with this new acquirement which had been so suddenly thrust upon him, but he had no time for thinking much upon it.

He was now swimming parallel to the bank, and there he saw the cruel beast that would have seized him crouching upon the still form of his playmate.



And Then, With an Awful Scream, He Sprang.

The tiger was intently watching Tarzan, evidently expecting him to return to shore, but this the boy had no intention of doing.

Instead he raised his voice in the call of distress common to his tribe, adding to it the warning which would prevent would be rescuers from running into the clutches of Sabour.

Almost immediately there came an answer from the distance, and presently forty or fifty great apes swung rapidly and majestically through the trees toward the scene of tragedy.

In the van was Kala, for she had recognized the tones of her best beloved, and with her was the mother of the little ape who lay dead beneath cruel Sabour.

Though more powerful and better equipped for fighting than the apes, the tiger had no desire to meet these enraged adults, and with a snarl of hatred he sprang quickly into the brush and disappeared.

Tarzan now swam to shore and clambered quickly upon dry land. The feeling of freshness and exhilaration which the cool waters had imparted to him filled his being with grateful surprise, and ever after he lost no opportunity to take a daily plunge in lake or stream or ocean when it was possible to do so.

For a long time Kala could not custom herself to the sight, for though her people could swim when forced to it, they did not like to enter water and never did so voluntarily.

That the huge fierce brute loved her child of another race is beyond question, and he, too, gave to the great hairy beast all the affection that would have belonged to his fair young mother had she lived.

When he was disobedient she cuffed him, it is true, but she was never cruel to him and was more often caressing than chastising him.

Tublat, her husband, always hated Tarzan and on several occasions had come near ending his youthful career.

Tarzan's superior intelligence and cunning permitted him to invent a thousand diabolical tricks to add to the burdens of Tublat's life.

Early in his boyhood he had learned to form ropes by twisting and tying long grasses together, and with these he was forever tripping Tublat or attempting to hang him from some overhanging branch.

By constant playing and experimenting with these he learned to the rude knots and make sliding nooses, and with these he and the younger apes amused themselves. What Tarzan did they tried to do also, but he alone originated and became proficient.

One day while playing thus Tarzan had thrown his rope at one of his being companions, retaining the other end in his grasp. By accident the noose fell squarely about the running ape's neck, bringing him to a sudden and surprising halt.

Ah, here was a new game, a fine game, thought Tarzan, and immediately he attempted to repeat the trick. And thus, by painstaking and continued practice, he learned the art of roping.

Now, indeed, was the life of Tublat a living nightmare. In sleep, upon the march, night or day, he never knew when that quiet noose would slip about his neck and nearly choke the life out of him. Kala punished Tublat with dire vengeance, and old Kerchak took notice and warned and threatened, but all to no avail.

In Tarzan's clever little mind many thoughts revolved, and back of these was his divine power of reason.

(To Be Continued.)

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