

TARZAN OF THE APES

(Continued From Page Eight.)

But ere she could go on a sudden turn in the road brought them into the midst of a little hamlet.

Before them stood Clayton's car, surrounded by the party he had brought from the cottage.

At the sight of Jane cries of relief and delight broke from every lip, and as Tarzan's car stopped beside the other Professor Porter caught his daughter in his arms.

For a moment no one noticed Tarzan sitting silently in his seat.

Clayton was the first to remember and, turning, held out his hand.

"How can we ever thank you?" he exclaimed. "You have saved us all. You called me by name at the cottage, but I do not seem to recall yours, though there is something very familiar about you."

"It is as though I had known you well under very different conditions a long time ago."

Tarzan smiled as he took the proffered hand.

"You are quite right, M. Clayton," he said in French. "You will pardon me if I do not speak to you in English. I am just learning it, and, while I understand it fairly well, I speak it very poorly."

"But who are you?" insisted Clayton, speaking in French this time himself.

"Tarzan of the apes."

Clayton started back in surprise.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. "It is true."

Professor Porter and Mr. Philander pressed forward to add their thanks to Clayton's and to voice their surprise and pleasure at seeing this jungle friend so far from his savage home.

The party now entered the modest little hamlet, where Clayton soon made arrangements for their entertainment.

They were sitting in the little, stuffy parlor when the distant chugging of an approaching automobile caught their attention.

Mr. Philander, who was sitting near the window, looked out as the machine drew in sight, finally stopping beside the other cars.

"Bless me!" said Mr. Philander, a shade of annoyance in his tone. "It is Mr. Canler. I had hoped—er—I had thought or—er—how very happy we should be that he was not caught in the fire." He ended lamely. "But who is the clerical looking gentleman with him?"

Jane Porter blanched.

Clayton moved uneasily in his chair. Professor Porter moved his spectacles nervously and breathed upon them, but replaced them on his nose without wiping.

The ubiquitous Esmeralda grunted. Only Tarzan did not comprehend.

Presently Robert Canler burst into the room.

"Thank heaven!" he cried. "I feared the worst until I saw your car, Clayton. I was cut off on the south road and had to go away back to town and then strike east to this road. I thought we'd never reach the cottage."

No one seemed very enthusiastic. Tarzan eyed Robert Canler as Sabor eyed his prey.

Jane Porter glanced at him and coughed nervously.

"Mr. Canler," she said, "this is M. Tarzan, an old friend."

Canler turned and extended his hand. Tarzan rose and bowed as only D'Arnot could have taught a gentleman to do it, but he did not seem to see Canler's hand.

Nor did Canler appear to notice the oversight.

"This is the Rev. Mr. Tonsley, Jane," said Canler, turning to the clerical party behind him. "Mr. Tonsley, Miss Porter."

Mr. Tonsley bowed and beamed. Canler introduced him to the others.

"We can have the ceremony at once, Jane," said Canler. "Then you and I can catch the midnight train in town."

The girl hesitated. The room was tense with the silence of taut nerves.

All eyes turned toward Jane Porter, awaiting her reply.

"Can't we wait a few days?" she asked. "I am all unstrung. I have been through so much today."

Canler felt the hostility that emanated from each member of the party. It made him angry.

"We have waited as long as I intend to wait," he said roughly. "You have promised to marry me. I shall be played with no longer. I have the license, and here is the clergyman."

"Come, Mr. Tonsley; come, Jane. There are witnesses a-plenty—more than enough," he added with a disagreeable infection, and, taking Jane by the arm, he started to lead her toward the waiting minister.

But scarcely had he taken a single step ere a heavy hand closed upon his arm with a grip of steel.

Another hand shot to his throat, and in a moment he was being shaken high above the floor as a cat might shake a mouse.

CHAPTER XXII.

Lord Apeman.

JANE PORTER turned in horrified surprise toward Tarzan.

And as she looked into his face she saw the crimson band upon his forehead that she had seen that other day in far distant Africa when Tarzan of the apes had closed in mortal combat with the great anthropoid, Terkon.

She knew that murder lay in that savage heart, and with a little cry of horror she sprang forward to plead with the ape man. But her fears were more for Tarzan than for Canler. She realized the stern retribution which justice metes to the murderer. She laid a firm white hand upon Tarzan's wrist and looked up into his eyes.

"For my sake," she said.

The grasp upon Canler's throat relaxed.

Tarzan looked into the face before him.

"Do you wish this to live?" he asked in surprise.

"I do not wish him to die at your hands, my friend," she replied. "I do not wish you to become a murderer."

Tarzan removed his hand from Canler's throat.

"Do you release her from her promise?" he asked. "It is the price of your life."

Canler, gasping for breath, nodded.

"Will you go away and never molest her further?"

Again the man nodded his head, his face distorted by fear of the death that had been so close.

Tarzan released him, and Canler staggered toward the door. In another moment he was gone and the terror stricken preacher with him.

Tarzan turned toward Jane Porter.

"May I speak with you for a moment alone?" he asked.

The girl nodded and started toward the door leading to the narrow veranda of the little hotel.

She passed out to await Tarzan and so did not hear the conversation which followed.

"Wait!" cried Professor Porter as Tarzan was about to follow.

The professor had been stricken dumb with surprise by the rapid developments of the past few minutes.

"Before we go further, sir, I should like an explanation of the events which have just transpired."

"By what right, sir, did you interfere between my daughter and Mr. Canler? I had promised him her hand, sir, and regard of our personal likes or dislikes, sir, that promise must be kept."

"I interfered, Professor Porter," replied Tarzan, "because your daughter does not love Mr. Canler. She does not wish to marry him. That is enough for me to know."

"You do not know what you have done," said Professor Porter. "Now he will doubtless refuse to marry her."

"He most certainly will," said Tarzan emphatically.

"And further," added Tarzan, "you need not fear that your pride will suffer, Professor Porter, for you will be able to pay Canler what you owe him the moment you reach home."

"Tut, tut, sir!" exclaimed Professor Porter. "What do you mean?"

"Your treasure has been found," said Tarzan.

"What—what is that you are saying?" cried the professor. "You are mad. It cannot be."

"It is, though. It was I who stole it, not knowing either its value or to whom it belonged. I saw the sailors bury it, and as I had to dig it up and bury it again elsewhere."

"When D'Arnot told me what it was and what it meant to you I returned to the jungle and recovered it. It had caused so much crime and suffering and sorrow that D'Arnot thought it best not to attempt to bring the treasure itself on here, as had been my intention, so I have brought a letter of credit instead."

"Here it is, Professor Porter." Tarzan drew an envelope from his pocket and handed it to the astonished professor. "Two hundred and forty-one thousand dollars."

"To the already great burden of the obligations we owe you, sir," said Professor Porter with trembling voice, "is now added this greatest of all services. You have given me the means to save my honor."

Clayton, who had left the room after Canler, now returned.

"Pardon me," he said. "I think we had better try to reach town before dark and take the first train out of this forest. A native just rode by from the north, who reports that the fire is moving slowly in this direction."

This announcement broke up further conversation, and the entire party went out to the waiting machines.

Clayton, with Jane Porter, the professor and Esmeralda, occupied Clayton's car, while Tarzan took Mr. Philander with him.

"Mr. Philander, do you recall the details of the finding and burying of three skeletons found in my cabin beside that African jungle?" asked Tarzan.

"Very distinctly, sir; very distinctly," replied Mr. Philander.

"Was there anything peculiar about any of those skeletons? It means a great deal to me to know," said Tarzan.

"Your answer may clear up a mystery. It can do no worse, at any rate, than to leave it still a mystery. I have been entertaining a theory concerning those skeletons for the past two months, and I want you to answer my question to the best of your knowledge—were the three skeletons you buried all human skeletons?"

Mr. Philander eyed Tarzan narrowly.

"No," said he, "the smallest one, the one found in the cave, was the skeleton of an anthropoid ape."

"Thank you," said Tarzan.

In the car ahead Jane Porter was thinking fast and furiously. She had felt the purpose for which Tarzan had asked a few words with her, and she knew that she must be prepared to give him an answer in the very near future.

He was not the sort of person one could put off, and somehow that very thought made her wonder if she did not really fear him.

Could she love where she feared? She realized the spell that had been upon her in the depths of that faroff jungle, but there was no spell of enchantment now in prosaic Wisconsin.

Nor did the immaculate young Frenchman appeal to the primal woman in her, as had the stalwart forest god.

Did she love him? She did not know—now.

She glanced at Clayton out of the corner of her eye. Was not here a man trained in the same school of environment in which she had been trained, with position and culture such as she had been taught to consider as the essentials to congenial association?

Did not her best judgment point to this young English nobleman whose love she knew to be of the sort a civilized woman should crave as the logical mate for such as she?

Could she love Clayton? She could see no reason why she could not. She was not calculating by nature, but training, environment and heredity had all combined to teach her to reason even in matters of the heart.

That she had been carried off her feet by the strength of the young giant when his great arms were about her in the distant African forest and again today, in the Wisconsin woods, seemed to her only attributable to a temporary mental reversion to type on her part, to the appeal of the primal man to the primal woman in her nature.

If he should never touch her again, she reasoned, she would never feel attracted toward him. She had not loved him, then. It had been nothing more than a hallucination induced by excitement and by personal contact.

Excitement would not always mark their future relations should she marry him, and the power of personal contact would be dulled by familiarity.

Again she glanced at Clayton. He was very handsome and every inch a gentleman. She should be very proud of such a husband.

And then she spoke—a minute sooner or a minute later might have made all the difference in the world to three lives. But chance stepped in and pointed out to Clayton the psychological moment.

"You are free now, Jane," he said. "Won't you say 'Yes? I will devote my life to making you very happy.'"

"Yes," she whispered.

That evening, in the little waiting room at the station, Tarzan caught Jane Porter alone for a moment.

"You are free now, Jane," he said, "and I have come across the ages out of the past from the lair of the primal man to claim you. For your sake I have become civilized—for your sake I have crossed oceans and continents—for your sake I will be whatever you will me to be. I can make you happy, Jane, in the life you know and love best. Will you marry me?"

For the first time she realized the depths of the man's love—all that he had accomplished in so short a time solely for love of her.

Turning her head, she buried her face in her arms.

What had she done? Because she had been afraid she might succumb to the pleas of this giant she had burned her bridges behind her. In her groundless apprehension that she might make a terrible mistake she had made a worse one.

And then she told him the truth, word by word, without attempting to shield herself or condole her error.

"What can we do?" he asked. "You have admitted that you love me. You know that I love you, but I do not know the ethics of society by which you are governed. I shall leave the decision to you, for you know best what will be for your eventual welfare."

"I cannot tell him, Tarzan," she said. "He, too, loves me, and he is a good man. I could never face you nor any other honest person if I repudiated my promise."

"I shall have to keep it. And you must help me bear the burden, though we may not see each other again after tonight."

The others were entering the room, and Tarzan turned toward the little window. With the others came the station agent, who entered, asking if there was a gentleman of the name of Tarzan in the party.

"I am Tarzan," said the ape man.

"Here is a message for you, forwarded from Baltimore. It is a cablegram from Paris."

Tarzan took the envelope and tore it open. The message was from D'Arnot. It read:

Finger prints prove you Greystoke. Congratulations. D'ARNOT.

As Tarzan finished reading Clayton entered and came toward him with extended hand.

Here was the man who had Tarzan's title and Tarzan's estates and was going to marry the woman whom Tarzan loved—the woman who loved Tarzan.

A single word would make a great difference in this man's life.

It would take away his title and his lands and his castles, and—it would take them away from Jane Porter also.

"I say, old man," cried Clayton, "I haven't had a chance to thank you for all you've done for us. It seems as though you had your hands full saving our lives in Africa and here."

"I'm awfully glad you came on. We must get better acquainted. I often thought about you, you know, and the remarkable circumstances of your environment. If it's any of my business, how did you ever get into that jungle?"

"I don't know," said Tarzan quietly.

"I was born there. My mother was an ape, and, of course, she couldn't tell me anything about it. I never knew who my father was."

THE END.

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